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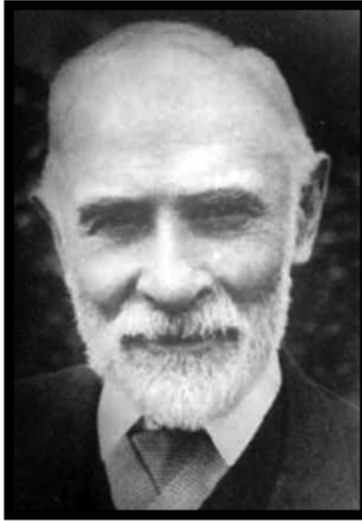
V05 Outline of the Book of
Deuteronomy

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PREFATORY NOTE

Being assured that “every scripture is divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3: 16); and also bearing in mind that “as many things as have been written before have been written for our instruction, that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15: 4), it was sought in the readings — of which this “Outline” is largely the substance to have help from God as to the present bearing of this important part of the Holy Scriptures. If this volume should lead, by the grace of the Lord, to increased prayerful consideration of the last book of the Pentateuch, the prayer with which it is sent forth will be answered. Quotations from Scripture are generally, throughout this book, from the New Translation by J. N. Darby.
C.A.C.

DEUTERONOMY 1

Deuteronomy 1

The Old Testament is a great help to us because it presents things in a form which, according to the wisdom of God, is divinely suited to convey the truth to us, while presenting it in a way that exercises our spiritual understanding. I have no doubt that Deuteronomy was written primarily for us and not for Israel. When I say primarily I mean that we who are God's people at the present time are the first to get the good of this book. No doubt Israel will get the good of it later on in great measure, but, we take precedence of them in getting the spiritual gain of it. It is the word of God to us. "For as many things as have been written before have been written for our instruction" (Romans 15: 4).

This book contains "the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on this side the Jordan, in the wilderness ... in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month". How striking, then, that it should be prefaced by the statement, "There are eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea"! God would impress upon us, at the outset of this book, that there was no necessity on His part for forty years to intervene between Horeb and the land. It was but "eleven days' journey"! Horeb, according to this chapter, was the place where Jehovah spoke to His people of what He had in His heart to give them. What answers to it for us is that God has made known the purpose of His love to give us a wondrous inheritance in Christ. Remission of sins and inheritance are linked together in the glad tidings, as we see in Acts 26: 18. Our first consciousness of the love of God is when that love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). But God's object in shedding abroad His love in our hearts is that we may love Him, and if we love Him we shall be interested in the things which He has prepared for them that love Him, and those things are the inheritance. There is no great distance, morally speaking, between Romans 5:5 and Romans 8 which answers to "the land of Moab" of Deuteronomy 1:5. The love of God would bless His people infinitely, and in a way worthy of Himself, but man is marked naturally by unbelief, and its workings appear even in those who are the subjects of God's mercy and grace. The way was clear on the divine side, and the journey short, but unbelief extended it to forty years. What a warning there is in this!

These opening statements give character to the whole book. It is a book in which the government of God appears from first to last. The blessings and benefits proposed are to be enjoyed conditionally on obedience and faithfulness. A turning away of heart from God will be followed by the most

serious consequences. Hence this book is of great importance in a day when the general tendency is not to think enough either of the blessedness or the seriousness of the government of God in relation to His people.

The early part of Deuteronomy is largely a review of the past history of the people — of God's ways with them, and of their behaviour in connection with those ways.

It suggests what is deeply interesting; namely, that a point is reached in soul-history when the people of God are prepared to review their past, and to take account of it under the instruction of Christ, of whom Moses was undoubtedly a type. We are not capable of taking a spiritual review of God's ways with us, or of our own behaviour relative to those ways, until we reach a position which answers to "the land of Moab". There must be spiritual capacity to receive the instruction of Christ, and that could only be found with those who have availed themselves of the brazen serpent aspect of the death of Christ, and seen in it God's condemnation of sin in the flesh. Israel in "the land of Moab" had also known what it was to sing to the well (Numbers 21: 16 - 18). They were, typically, "according to Spirit" (Romans 8: 5), and had been able to overcome Sihon and Og — two giant-kings who represent the flesh in its desire for self-display or for self-indulgence. It is by the power of the Spirit alone that these giants can be smitten, and those who have overcome them are prepared to sit down at the feet of Christ, and to receive of His words (Deuteronomy 33: 3). As knowing His love we come under His instruction. "In the land of Moab began Moses to unfold (or expound) this law". Moses is here typical of Christ, not as Lord, but as the Teacher or Instructor of His saints. "For one is your instructor, and all ye are brethren ... one is your instructor, the Christ" (Matthew 23: 8, 10). That indicates precisely the Deuteronomic position; the brethren are viewed as under the instruction of Christ. The saints at Ephesus are addressed by Paul as having known this blessed instruction. "But ye have not thus learnt the Christ, if ye have heard him and been instructed in him" (Ephesians 4: 20, 21).

It is a very blessed thing to have the thoughts of God brought before us by ONE who loves us, and who is able to give us spiritual understanding in regard to our past history, and to tell us what the mind of God has in view for us, and how His government will act in regard to us, whether as prospering us if faithful and obedient, or as visiting upon us the consequences of departure from Him. The people of God are viewed all through this book as loved by Him — "Yea, he loveth the peoples" (chapter 33: 3) — but it is love that acts governmentally according to the fidelity or the unfaithfulness of those loved. And at the end of the book we are shewn how He will ultimately bring to pass

the full blessing of His people according to His determinate counsel and foreknowledge.

We shall find in this book — if helped of God to do so — much instruction as to the inheritance, and the conditions on which we can enjoy all that the love of God proposes to bring us into. For this book does not contemplate what will be enjoyed in our heavenly future, but what may be enjoyed in a *heavenly present* when suitable and spiritual conditions are found amongst the people of God. It is important to bear in mind that — though it is the privilege of God's called ones to touch spiritually things which are outside responsibility — we ourselves, as long as we are down here, are never outside responsibility, with all the sobering exercise that attaches to it. Therefore the government of God goes on in relation to His people, and the way in which it acts is a prominent feature of this book. We see it plainly, too, in the epistles to Colossians and Ephesians, where the risen and heavenly position of the saints is developed.

But what is peculiarly precious in Deuteronomy is that all these things are presented as being learned under the personal instruction of Christ — the blessed One who loves us, and who knows perfectly all the thoughts of divine love in regard to us, and who delights to impart those thoughts to us. The consideration of this must, surely, awaken the most lively interest in this book on the part of all those who love God, and who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

God would have His people to enter upon the inheritance as imbued with the affections and intelligence of children and sons, and this would include a holy judgment of all that has been displeasing to Him in our past. Under the instruction of Christ we learn what God has proposed to us, and His ways with us consequent upon our unbelief. We learn how we have been hindered in our spiritual progress. This book is not the history of the circumstances we have passed through, and of our behaviour in them but it suggests all being reviewed under the instruction of Christ with a view to our being formed in the spiritual features which are proper to the children — the joint-heirs of Christ. We have all behaved badly, but we learn it in Deuteronomy in the presence of One who loves us, and who instructs us in order to bring every thought of our hearts into correspondence with Himself. It is most blessed.

The review begins by making mention of what Jehovah had spoken in Horeb. He would have had them take their journey, and go straight into the land which He had set before them, and this in its full extent, even "unto the great river, the river Euphrates". Jehovah would have had them to go straight from Horeb into possession of the land. Therefore the long delay had been occasioned entirely from their side.

The secret was that the covenant did not really fill and govern their affections: and this is why Moses later on in the book enlarges so much upon it, and on the favour God had shewn them in it. The secret of long delay as to the possession and enjoyment of the inheritance lies in the fact that the love of God, as known in the glad tidings, does not really govern our affections. This leaves room for the workings of unbelief, which disclose the true character of what we are naturally, even in presence of the most blessed actings of God in love. This turns, in the end, to our learning self more fully, and the unmendable character of our flesh. *That* generation, ever marked by unbelief and rebellion, cannot inherit with Christ.

In reviewing our past history with Christ we learn how we have missed things, and been delayed in reaching what was in God's mind for us. We have not kept in view the blessed proposals of the love of God. All manifestations of the flesh are the fruit of unbelief; they shew that God has not His place with us. So the Holy Spirit appeals to us not to harden our hearts, and speaks of a generation with whom God was wroth as always erring in heart. And we are exhorted to see that there be not in us "a wicked heart of unbelief, in turning away from the living God" (Hebrews 3: 7 - 12).

It came to light "at that time" (verse 9) how much there was in the people which was not in accord with the covenant; and which was, therefore, quite unsuited to the inheritance. Moses had to say, "I am not able to bear you myself alone How can I myself alone sustain your wear, and your burden, and your strife?" The blessing of God was there, truly, multiplying them as the stars of heaven, but what contrary and hindering elements were there also! On God's side Horeb and the land — the covenant and the inheritance! On their side wear, and burden, and strife! What a terrible contrast!

Is it not serious to reflect that the first item in this review of the past calls attention to the great proneness of the people of God to have difficulties and matters of strife with one another? Such things shew how little we are really governed either by the love of God or by the prospect of the inheritance.

But this condition of things is mentioned here to bring out the fact that divine provision is made for the adjustment of all differences amongst God's people. It is not God's way that differences should go on unsettled. We may be quite sure that the provision for dealing with such things is not less in the assembly than it was in Israel. There are "wise and understanding and known men" who can be set over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. The Lord's administration provides everything that is needed for the adjustment of differences, and — failing everything else — there is always the Lord Himself as the final court of appeal. The assembly at Corinth was not a very spiritual

one, but Paul speaks to them as having amongst them the ability to judge in matters which one might have against another. He even says, "If then ye have judgments as to things of this life, set those to judge who are little esteemed in the assembly. I speak to you to put you to shame. Thus there is not a wise person among you, not even one, who shall be able to decide between his brethren!" Paul would not allow that this was possible. If there was a "wise and understanding and known" man for every ten in Israel we may be sure that such are always within reach. The assembly is always furnished with such as have the confidence of their brethren; their uprightness and freedom from personal bias makes them "known men". "The judgment is God's", but when we are wrong we are very apt to go to unspiritual persons who will take our side, and fall in with our view of the matter. But is it not far better to have a judgment which will be in accord with God and with heaven? For this I must go to one who is spiritually "wise and understanding", and I must submit my case to him.

Nothing could be of greater practical importance than to see that the divine principle on which all differences between the people of God are to be settled is that of *subjection*. On no other principle would this divine arrangement work. Whether it were thousands, hundreds, fifties, or tens, the spirit of subjection was requisite throughout all Israel. "Submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of Christ" (Ephesians 5: 21); I understand that to mean that we recognise Christ in the brethren, and hence we respect their judgment. We have to beware of looking for vindication rather than for divine adjustment. The flesh always wants to be vindicated, but a truly upright soul looks for adjustment. It is well to recognise that ability for judgment is in the assembly, and it is my privilege — if I think I have a grievance — to assume that the brethren are likely to have a more spiritual judgment than mine, and to submit myself to their judgment, as acknowledging the goodness and wisdom of God in providing such a safeguard for me.

The spiritual review of such conditions as are here contemplated would surely lead us to see how much time has been lost through our being marked by self-consideration or self-assertion, and insisting on what is due to us. Even where real wrong has been done, the apostle says, "Why do ye not rather suffer wrong? why are ye not rather defrauded?" A heart governed by the love of God could afford to pass by many personal wrongs. Is it not sad to think of prolonged attention being given to petty differences, which attention might have been fixed on the inheritance? If there are "causes" between brethren which need to be heard, by all means let them be heard and settled. But how many things would silently drop if love worked in the heart!

When "causes" have to be heard what an exercise it is to "judge righteously", not to "respect persons", to "hear the small as well as the great", not to be "afraid of the face of man, for the judgment is God's"! Judgment is to be according to a divine standard; it is to be of the same character and impartiality as it will be when "the saints shall judge the world".

It is almost incredible how much distraction and preoccupation of mind is caused amongst the people of God by personal differences, often really of the most trivial nature. How much time has been lost spiritually in this way! How foolish we have been to hold things in our hearts, and allow them to eat up — like the palmer-worm, and the locust, and the canker-worm, and the caterpillar of Joel 1: 4 — our spiritual prosperity! Do we not feel how we have been hindered by such things? Probably ninety per cent of the differences amongst the people of God are caused by things not worth five minutes' consideration. But provision is made for "causes" that really need to be heard; it is for us to subject ourselves to the judgment of the saints, not to waste our time by going on with things unsettled. To do the latter is really an action of unbelief.

The "great and terrible wilderness" was "on the way to the mountain of the Amorites". No doubt it had its place in the ways of God. The more terrible the wilderness was the more desirous should they have been to reach the land. Probably many of the inscrutable ways of God with His people — peculiar trials, intense sorrow — are designed to lead their affections and hopes into the region of His love's purpose. This is the answer to the "tribulations" of Romans 5: 3, endured in the consciousness of the love of God, and intensifying hope that does not make ashamed. If we look at the household of faith we see very many who are under great pressure, but all is designed to produce a divine result. "And not only that, but we also boast in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works endurance; and endurance, experience; and experience, hope; and hope does not make ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which has been given to us" (Romans 5: 3 - 5). Wilderness pressures lead to experience; we prove what God can be to us in pressure.

"In the desert God will teach thee,
What the God that thou hast found". (76:6)

At Kadesh-barnea the land was set before them. "And I said unto you, Ye are come unto the mountain of the Amorites, which Jehovah our God giveth us. Behold, Jehovah thy God hath set the land before thee: go up, take possession, as Jehovah the God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not,

neither be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 1: 20 - 21). The details of the history are not repeated here, because the object is to call attention to what was the great and solemn cause of their being forty years in the wilderness. All other things had, we might say, a secondary place. The people were not governed by what "Jehovah the God of thy fathers hath said unto thee". They did not hearken to His word; they entered not in because of unbelief. It is this which the Holy Spirit dwells on in Hebrews 3, Hebrews 4 as a most salutary warning for us.

Unbelief took the form of sending men to examine the land. God and His word were not enough! It was to God and the word of His grace that Paul committed the Ephesian elders as being able to build them up and give them an inheritance among all the sanctified (Acts 20: 32). But these are not enough for the flesh. Flesh must have flesh to lean upon; it must have something of the natural. If we are faithful to our own hearts we must admit how often it has been so with ourselves. The divine and the spiritual have not been sufficient. The spirit of "We will send men before us" is often present with the people of God. It may be great human prudence, but it is setting God and His word aside. It assumes that the word of men is a safer thing to rely on than the word of God. "Go up, take possession" was what Jehovah said, but they said, "We will send men". It was a human expedient, but it was permitted of God in order that the state of their hearts might be brought out. It secured a further testimony of the goodness of the land, but in result it brought out the state of their hearts in relation to God. God permits much to happen that is the fruit of unbelief in view of the lessons that will be learned by it. "But ye would not go up, and rebelled against the word of Jehovah your God; and ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because Jehovah hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us" (verses 26, 27).

Does not this bring out what a terrible thing the flesh is? It never appreciates God, however good He may have been. All that He had done in Egypt and in the wilderness was of no account. "Jehovah hated us"! His wondrous deliverance, His paternal care, His daily and nightly guardianship and guidance only resulted in "ye did not believe Jehovah your God". All the difficulties which they saw were simply proof of their want of faith — the evidence that they were not characterised by a spirit of sonship. So Moses called their attention to the fact that "Jehovah thy God bore thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went until ye came to this place" (verse 31). They had proved the paternal love of God in all the way, but they believed Him not.

How often it has been like that with us! We have not been at all ready to go in heartily for the spiritual and the eternal. We have seen all kinds of difficulties in that direction, and when things have not fallen in with our thoughts we have been ready to think that God was against us. The most wonderful blessedness that God could bestow on a highly favoured creature is in Christ — every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies is there — but the flesh finds no attraction or delight in Christ, or in what God has given in Him. It takes no interest in the spiritual; it has no desires that way. Then for God and for faith it must be utterly set aside — disowned and disallowed. Hence the solemn sentence went forth, "And Jehovah heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and swore, saying, None among these men, this evil generation, shall in any wise see that good land, which I swore to give unto your fathers" (verses 34, 35). What a spiritual instruction is this! There has been in our history a generation like that; it is our own flesh. Now under the instruction of Christ we have to review it all, and learn to judge it spiritually as God has judged it. How many things in our history have happened because we had not God before us, and His word had not place in our hearts!

Caleb, on the other hand, comes in as representing a new generation — a generation marked by faith and the spirit of sonship. "Except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed Jehovah" (verse 36). Caleb had typically the earnest of the Spirit in his heart. He would see and possess the land. He represents the exercise of faith in contrast to the unbelief of the flesh. The instruction of this chapter is largely to teach us to distinguish between what is of flesh and what is of faith. To be on the faith line we must unsparingly judge the flesh line. Caleb had another spirit; he did not say, "Jehovah hated us", but "If Jehovah delight in us, he will bring us into the land, and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey" (Numbers 14: 8). The mind of the flesh is death and enmity against God. But the spirit of sonship would always preserve in our hearts the sense that God delights in us; and the activity of that spirit sets us free practically from the workings of the flesh. "The earnest of the Spirit" means that the inheritance is in a man's heart before he gets there. Caleb said to Joshua long afterwards, "Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of Jehovah sent me from Kadesh-barnea to search out the land; and I brought him word again *as it was in my heart*" (Joshua 14: 7). He carried the earnest in his heart all through the wilderness. How much better that is than the murmurs of the wilderness! Caleb is a typical overcomer; he was as strong for war at eighty-five as he was at forty; and he dispossessed some of the biggest of the Anakim. Faith, the power, of the Spirit, and the power of the Lord all go together. It is the Caleb generation —

the faith generation — that is sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. It would be impossible for the *Holy* Spirit to be connected in any way with the flesh. "In whom also (that is, in Christ), having believed, ye have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance to the redemption of the acquired possession to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1: 13, 14).

Then it is very touching that at this point Moses says, "Also Jehovah was angry with me on your account,

saying Thou also shalt not go in thither". It was not historically at that time that Jehovah was angry with Moses, but much later, but it is brought in at this point, I believe, with a spiritual reference to Christ as the One who has come under the anger of God vicariously on account of what has been found in the flesh of God's people. It is Christ reminding us that the flesh and its movements cost Him the suffering of the anger of God. That should have more effect in detaching us from the flesh than anything else. So we read in Romans 8: 3 "God, having sent his own Son, in likeness of flesh of sin, and for sin, has condemned sin in the flesh". It was in *God's own Son* that it was condemned. Israel has seen Jehovah angry with their Messiah; they did esteem Him "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted", but they will have to learn that it was *on their account*. And it was *on our account* that Christ came under the darkness and the forsaking of the cross. He bore the judgment due to sinful flesh, and God would bring us to recognise that it was the judgment of *our* sinful flesh that He bore. What a subdued and chastened feeling this would produce in our spirits! What a holy fear of all that is the outcome of the flesh! Then if I see some manifestation of the flesh in a brother or sister do I always remember that in precious and holy love Christ bore the full weight of what is due to it? Am I in sympathy with Christ about it? Or are there feelings of resentment and anger, or a thought that such things are not in me? The flesh has to be condemned; it is impossible that it should be tolerated; but let us judge it in the light of the way in which divine love has dealt with it in the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. How deeply should this affect our hearts! Could anything move us more in the direction of self judgment than to consider that Christ on our account has come under condemnation,

Christ after the flesh has gone in death on our account, bearing the judgment of sinful flesh, and bringing the man after the flesh to an end sacrificially before God. Joshua represents Christ as the risen, living One — the spiritual Leader of His people into the land — and the "little ones" are mentioned as shewing that God would not give up His purpose. If one generation is wholly excluded, He will have another generation to go in and possess the land under

the leadership of the risen Christ. The generation of flesh does not go in, but the faith generation does.

Then the review calls to mind another feature of rebellious flesh. When the solemn sentence had gone forth, immediately the flesh took another character. They would, by a superficial repentance, have set it all right. They refused the solemn government of God under the action of which they had come. They said, "We have sinned against Jehovah, we will go up and fight, according to all that Jehovah our God hath commanded us". But Jehovah had then sworn in His wrath; His governmental action was irreversible. The only divine path now was to accept it, and humbly bow under His mighty hand.

The levity and presumption of the flesh is equal to its unbelieving fears, and the same generation that despised the pleasant land when Jehovah presented it to them as His gift, now despised His solemn act of government. Such levity and presumption may be expected to appear when flesh is active. There is a saying lightly, "We have sinned", and an assuming to go on as if nothing serious had happened, but the result is disastrous. The Amorite became the rod of God for the destruction of the flesh. It was much like what is spoken of in the New Testament as being delivered to Satan (1 Corinthians 5: 5; 1 Timothy 1: 20). We may well pray with David, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me" (Psalm 19: 13).

The people have now the opportunity, nearly forty years after the circumstances occurred, of reviewing all this, and getting a spiritual judgment of it all under the instruction of Moses. One loves to think of the great gain of taking up such exercises from the Deuteronomic standpoint. God would have His people in perfect accord with Himself as to every wilderness exercise before they go over Jordan. Christ will expound it all to us in the plains of Moab; He will review it all to a people spiritually able to listen to Him. I suppose we rarely see how God is set on giving us the land, or how the flesh hinders us, at the time of the wilderness experiences. The truly spiritual estimate of things comes later when we review things under the instruction of Christ. Under His instruction we learn to judge every feature of flesh that may have come out in us — perhaps forty years before. He does not leave us unadjusted in respect of things which may have happened long ago. He would not be satisfied that we should be of a different mind from Him about something that may be long past. He says, as it were, I want you to come into the inheritance as my brethren, joint-heirs with me, having the same mind and judgment of things as I have. It is not that the flesh is adjusted, but we are adjusted in regard to its nature and movements, and brought into accord with

Christ. We have to learn to disentangle what is of the flesh from what is of faith and of the Spirit, and to disallow all that has been of the flesh, so that nothing has value or weight with us but what is of faith and of the Spirit. Under the instruction of Christ we become truly brethren — we acquire family character as children of God. That is what is largely in view in Deuteronomy; the official side is not prominent; the tabernacle system hardly appears. The people have now the opportunity, nearly forty years after the circumstances occurred, of reviewing all this, and getting a spiritual judgment of it all under the instruction of Moses. One loves to think of the great gain of taking up such exercises from the Deuteronomic standpoint. God would have His people in perfect accord with Himself as to every wilderness exercise before they go over Jordan. Christ will expound it all to us in the plains of Moab; He will review it all to a people spiritually able to listen to Him. I suppose we rarely see how God is set on giving us the land, or how the flesh hinders us, at the time of the wilderness experiences. The truly spiritual estimate of things comes later when we review things under the instruction of Christ. Under His instruction we learn to judge every feature of flesh that may have come out in us — perhaps forty years before. He does not leave us unadjusted in respect of things which may have happened long ago. He would not be satisfied that we should be of a different mind from Him about something that may be long past. He says, as it were, I want you to come into the inheritance as my brethren, joint-heirs with me, having the same mind and judgment of things as I have. It is not that the flesh is adjusted, but we are adjusted in regard to its nature and movements, and brought into accord with Christ. We have to learn to disentangle what is of the flesh from what is of faith and of the Spirit, and to disallow all that has been of the flesh, so that nothing has value or weight with us but what is of faith and of the Spirit. Under the instruction of Christ we become truly brethren — we acquire family character as children of God. That is what is largely in view in Deuteronomy; the official side is not prominent; the tabernacle system hardly appears; the subject is chiefly those family features in the people of God which are suited to the inheritance, and which qualify them to enjoy it.

DEUTERONOMY 2 AND 3

Deuteronomy 2; Deuteronomy 3

We are told in chapter 2: 14 that the days from Kadesh-barnea to the crossing of the torrent Zered were thirty-eight years, and that during that period "the whole generation of the men of war was consumed from the midst of the camp, as Jehovah had sworn unto them". The end of the generation of flesh and unbelief is thus briefly intimated, and then, in chapters 2 and 3, Moses review takes account of the unfailing goodness and blessing of Jehovah for forty years, and also of the victories and acquisition which had been secured by His power and favour on the eastward side of Jordan.

It is our privilege, in what answers to "the land of Moab", to review under the instruction of Christ, not only manifestations of flesh and unbelief, which may have marked our past, but also the unfailing goodness of our God, and the victories which His grace has vouchsafed in the Spirit. "For Jehovah thy God hath blessed thee in all the work of thy hand. He hath known thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years hath Jehovah thy God been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing" (chapter 2: 7). How blessed to review the wilderness as a place where the blessing and bounty of God have never failed, where His presence has been the sure pledge of the supply of every needed thing! Such an experience of God is surely the greatest possible encouragement to move boldly forward to the land of His purpose. Our Moses would lead us to take account, not only of the naughtiness and unbelief of our flesh, but of an infinite number of encouragements and blessings which have come to us through the faithfulness of our God, and which have evidenced His presence with us, and His care over us. Christ would remind us that we have not taken a step, or passed through a day of our wilderness history, that has not been marked by the care, bounty, and blessing of our God.

Then there were certain "brethren" who were not to be attacked — the children of Esau. They were not in the line of God's testimony, they had not known deliverance from Egypt as Israel had, nor what it was to have the tabernacle in their midst, nor the exercises of a people and priesthood identified with the movements of the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness. But they were to be regarded as "brethren" who had a portion assigned to them by God, and which they had occupied as a result of former conflicts in which Jehovah had destroyed certain enemies before them. This is deeply interesting and instructive, for there are those today who occupy precisely such a position. They are truly in family relationship with the people of God, and have promises of blessing — for "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob *and*

Esau concerning things to come" (Hebrews 11: 20) — and they hold territory which has been given to them by God, and gained through former conflicts and victories. But they have never really known deliverance from the world system, nor what it was to be identified with that divine system which was set forth typically in "the tabernacle of the testimony". The reformation was a great battle, and it resulted in certain territory being possessed. No spiritual person can doubt that the victory in that conflict was given by God, and the ground won from the enemy was an assigned portion given by God. We have to recognise this, and not to "attack" our brethren who hold that ground. "They will be afraid of you; and ye shall be very guarded: attack them not".

This is very instructive as shewing the kind of spirit God would have in His people whom He is preparing to enter into the full thought which is in the purpose of His love for them. He teaches us to regard as "brethren" many who have a portion which comes very far short of what is in His heart for His people. But they have *something*, and what they have is to be recognised as a God-given portion; they are not to be attacked or distressed. Some of the sects no doubt arose in the first place from a genuine desire to resist the enemy, and to hold something that was felt to be of God. There was conflict, and in result something was held, though it was far short of what was in God's mind concerning the inheritance of His people. Whatever can be recognised as God-given is to be respected; there is to be no attempt to dispossess those who hold it. We are to regard them as "brethren" though they may be afraid of us; our great desire, indeed, should be that they might possess and enjoy the full wealth of all that is in God's purpose for His people. It is very striking that such an instruction should come in at this point, just when the conflict for the possession of the land is to be entered on. It shews the kind of spirit God would have to be in His people towards "brethren" who are not walking with them, and who are not really in the line of the heavenly calling or of the divine testimony.

We may recall, however, that these very people who were to be regarded as "brethren", and not to be attacked, shewed a very naughty and hostile spirit towards Israel — see Numbers 20: 14 - 21. And later in the history they became active adversaries (2 Chronicles 20: 10, 11). When God brings His testimony into view,

or causes His land to be possessed in any measure by His Israel, it becomes a test for the brethren who hold a portion which may have been God-given, but which is not the true or full thought of God for His people. And what comes out in the subsequent history shews that neither the children of Esau nor the children of Lot were sympathetic with what Jehovah was doing in and for

Israel. Further movements of God, and especially the bringing out of His "whole counsel", test the "brethren", and, alas! they often awaken positive hostility. But if the "brethren" become hostile to what is of God they no longer have His support in holding what He may have given them in time past. Hence we find that the reformed Churches and the sects who, through past conflicts, did secure and hold something that was God-given, having now become hostile to the further spiritual movements of God, have lost their power to hold what was assigned to them by God in time past. They are being dispossessed by the enemy of all that they did hold from God, and in many cases hardly "so much as a foot-breadth" remains to them of what their fathers gained through conflict. Superstition and tradition on the one hand, and infidelity on the other, are rapidly stealing away from them all that they once had from God. It is the sad result, in the government of God, of an attitude of hostility to His truth and testimony as more fully developed by His Holy Spirit.

But we have to be "very guarded" not to "attack" any who are in possession of what is God-given, even though it may not be the full truth of the divine calling. God would not have us in a spirit of enmity against anything that is of Himself, wherever it may be. We do not want to forbid, or to minimize, anything that is of God. It is a comfort to know that our affections and prayers can go out to everything that is *of God*, even though it be not His full thought for His people. So that we regard as "brethren" the whole company of God's children; they are our spiritual kindred. But the consciousness that we can regard affectionately and sympathetically all that is *of God*, wherever it may be, only intensifies the purpose of spiritual persons to stand wholly apart from what is *of man*.

God would have a spirit in His people which would tend to disarm the hostility of their "brethren", and to make His Israel an attractive people. Our brethren may be afraid of us, but we are to manifest a brotherly spirit towards them. Christians generally are feeling that the brotherly spirit is greatly lacking; family affections and spiritual fellowship are fast dying out of the decadent Christian profession. In the midst of such conditions God would maintain the truth and the brotherly spirit as an attractive rallying point for all the "brethren".

"Ye shall buy of them food for money, that ye may eat; and water shall ye also buy of them for money, that ye may drink; for Jehovah thy God hath blessed thee in all the work of thy hand" (chapter 2: 6, 7). God's people are so wealthy through His blessing that they stand in no need of favours from any. They can move at their own charges; they come under no obligation either to the world, or to "brethren" who do not walk with them. It is sometimes

thought that the "box" has not a spiritual character, and that it is an inferior item in the privilege and service of the saints. But if it speaks, as it surely does, of the love of the Lord's people, and of their practical care for His interests, it is not an inferior item *to Him*. And even on the side of meeting necessary expenses for rent, light, etc., it speaks of the dignity, and independence of the world, which marks the assembly of God. That assembly moves through the present scene as a heavenly stranger, coming under no obligation to anyone, but providing for its own needs at its own cost, out of resources which are the fruit of the blessing of God. It is a sad thing when Christians give the impression, as they often do, that they need the contributions or charity of those around them. It is a poor testimony to the wealth of a people who profess to be blessed by God.

In what answers, spiritually, to "the land of Moab" the true Moses can recall past victories which have been gained by the people of God through His power and grace. Sihon the king of Heshbon and Og the king of Bashan had been overcome, and their land possessed. This was the beginning of the war of conquest; and it was the pledge of what Jehovah would do for His people (see chapter 2: 25; 3: 21,22). The "words of peace" sent to Sihon only brought out deep rooted hostility on his part; he would hold his land against Jehovah who alone had right to it. The flesh would hold territory which really belongs to God so that it shall not be divinely occupied. Sihon would seem to represent that energy of the flesh which would hold natural things and natural relationships for one's own honour and renown. Og would represent, I think, the tendency in the flesh to hold these things in self indulgence; "his bedstead" is the only thing about him specially mentioned; he represents the holding of what we are and have in an easy-going way for our own pleasure.

Our bodies, and all natural relationships — whether that of wives and husbands, children or parents, servants or masters — are really territory which belongs to God, and can only rightly be held for Him. It is territory which has to be taken out of the power of the flesh, and held in the power of the Spirit for God. Indeed all that we possess here is to be held for God. The cattle and the spoil of the cities would speak, perhaps, of material things, or that which in itself is "the mammon of unrighteousness", but which is now to be held under stewardship to God for our own future advantage. These things belong to the eastward side of Jordan; they are not in Canaan, but they indicate territory that has to be taken out of the power of the flesh and held for God. Such victories are a great and divine encouragement to move forward into that spiritual territory which lies on the other side of Jordan — the sphere which God's love and purpose have ever in view as the proper inheritance of His people. The power of the flesh would hold our bodies and all natural and

material things in some way for self, but we have had to get the victory over that power so that they might be held by the Spirit for God. Sihon would represent energetic flesh; the poets celebrated his exploits (Numbers 21: 26 - 30); Og typifies self indulgent flesh. All the cities and towns would speak of the kingdoms of those two giants in detail. But Moses, reviewing the past, could say, "There was not one city too strong for us: Jehovah our God delivered all before us" (chapter 2: 36). It corresponds with Romans 8 where we see a people characterised by the indwelling of the Spirit of God, and who have divine power to overcome and set aside the flesh.

In what answers to "the land of Moab" the Lord can review victories which have been gained over the flesh by His people. He loves to remind us of them, for they are the pledge of victory in conflicts which are yet to come. Have we really proved that "there was not one city too strong for us"? There is not one bit of the power of the flesh that is too strong to be overcome by the Christian walking in the Spirit. But how far have we *proved* it; so that our Moses can remind us of former triumphs as indicating how God has been with us and for us? There are times when the flesh seems to be specially active in its opposition, and this is often when there is a real desire to be pleasing to God. But it is encouraging to know that God intends to give us the victory in the power of His Spirit. "That he might give him into thy hand, as it is this day" (verse 30). Melancthon had to learn that "old Adam was too strong for young Melancthon", and I suppose most of us can understand his experience, but we could not say that "old Adam" was too strong to be overcome by one walking in the Spirit.

As these cities "fortified with high walls, gates, and bars", fell one after another, how the people would be encouraged to find that Jehovah was really for them. And as one form of the power of the flesh after another is overcome through the Spirit there is great encouragement with regard to conflicts that are still before us. Everything that has proved to us that God has been with us in the wilderness, and every victory that has enabled us to hold any ground for Him is so much encouragement to pass on into the spiritual sphere of purposed blessing in Christ. Surely there are some spiritual victories and conquests in our past history which the Lord can remind us of, and which He would have us to review with Him! The result of giving place to the Spirit is that the flesh is practically set aside, and the saints come out as sons and children of God. The responsible life is, so to speak, wrested out of the power of the flesh, and held by the Spirit for God. That is territory possessed on the eastward side of Jordan.

We learn from chapter 3: 12 - 22 that Jehovah gave that land to be possessed by the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh. There is no suggestion here that Reuben and Gad were wrong in desiring to have their possession in that land; we are not told here that they said, "Bring us not over the Jordan" (Numbers 32: 5). It is seen here as typical of territory which God would have to be possessed by His people, though not the resurrection or heavenly side. It is the region of natural things and relationships, the sphere of responsible life, and it is the will of God that it should be possessed and held by His people as from Him, and for Him.

The failure of Reuben and Gad did not lie in taking possession "on this side the Jordan eastward", but in being content to have their inheritance *on that side only*. They did not value that which it was the delight of God to give; they thought of what, suited them to receive rather than of what suited Him to give. God would have His people to occupy the ground covered by the epistle to the Romans, but not to be content with that only, but also to pass on to the ground covered by the epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians. How many are content to know the justifying grace of God, and to prove the favour and mercy of God in their circumstances here — in their families, in their businesses, in the whole sphere of natural relationships and things on the earth! God would, indeed, have us to occupy that ground as divinely given territory to be held for Him. He would have us to piously recognise His goodness and favour in that region. But He would have us, above all things, to desire to enter upon the present possession of that wondrous region of spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus which is typified by the land over Jordan. It is the purpose of His love to give us that land for our possession and enjoyment, and it is a very serious matter to stop short of it. We have often been told that those who said, "Bring us not over the Jordan" were the first to be carried into captivity.

At the end of chapter 3 Moses brings before the people how intensely his own desires were set on the "good land". "Let me go over, I pray thee, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon". Christ would impress us, as we come under His instruction, with what the "good land" was to Him. How *He* cherished every precious thought of the love of God! It is written that "they despised the pleasant land" (Psalm 106: 24), and this is true still of many of the people of God. But to Christ "the pleasant land" was ever in view. Coming into the world what He had before Him was the will of God, and God's precious thoughts man-ward. As Psalm 40 tells us prophetically, His language was, "Behold I come, in the volume of the book it, is written of me — To do thy good pleasure, my God, is my delight". He had before Him the innumerable thoughts of God manward, including all that was

typically set forth in "the pleasant land". All that would be secured in Himself as risen and glorified was ever before His heart, but His own sufferings and death intervened as a divine necessity. The "good land" was "beyond Jordan". He must pass through "the suffering of death" in order to reach "the joy lying before him", and to secure those who should be joint-heirs with Him. And this is intimated in Moses saying, "But Jehovah was wroth with me on your account, and did not hear me" (Chapter 3: 26). Moses does not speak here as one suffering the governmental consequences of his own failure, though we get that later in the book. It is here "on your account". That is, it is a typical reference to what, Christ suffered vicariously when as the holy Sin-bearer He was not heard (Psalm 22: 1, 2). Moses, as a type of Christ according to flesh, could not enter the land; He must come under wrath on account of the people. Oh! how much has our perversity cost Christ! He would remind us of it to deeply affect, and subdue our hearts.

But if Christ according to flesh has had to undergo "the suffering of death" on our account, He has come forth as the risen, living One to go over before His people, and to put them in possession of the "good land", and Joshua is a type of Him in this blessed character. (See chapter 3: 28.)

Moses being permitted to see the land from "the top of Pisgah" would intimate how the whole range of purposed blessing for man was in the view of Christ before His death. But His own death was a necessity ever present to His thoughts — the Jordan was between Him and the fruition of all the precious and holy purposes of divine love. We cannot read the Gospels without being made conscious of this, or without seeing how little His disciples entered into it. *They* thought that Christ according to flesh could introduce the kingdom and all its blessedness. But this ignored the whole moral state of Israel — their own state according to flesh. *On their account*, and on ours, His death was a necessity.

Hence in the Gospels all is prospective, and thus they answer in a remarkable way to Deuteronomy, where the "good land" is not actually possessed, but is immediately in prospect. The farthest point reached in Deuteronomy, except prophetically at the end of the book, is Moses' view from the top of Pisgah. In the Gospels we see the whole of the "good land" as in the view of Christ — the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God, the presence of the Holy Spirit the Comforter, eternal life, the assembly, the full blessing of men according to the thought and purpose of divine love — but for it to be entered upon by the people of God Moses must be succeeded by Joshua. Christ according to flesh — the holy One of God — must come under what was due to man as in sinful flesh, that as the risen, and even the ascended One, He

might "go over" and put His people "in possession of the land". The presence of the Son of God on earth brought the whole purposed blessing of God for men immediately into view, just as the whole good land came under view when Moses stood on Pisgah, but that blessing required the death and resurrection of Christ, and His glorification at God's right hand, to be accomplished that the Holy Spirit might be given. The death of Christ on man's account was a divine necessity if men were to enter into that blessing as led by Him the risen One.

According to flesh the Shepherd was smitten, and the sheep of the flock scattered abroad (Matthew 26: 31). Messiah was cut off and had nothing (Daniel 9: 26). The things concerning Him had an end (Luke 22: 37). But His surrender of everything here had its answer in all being secured by Him on the resurrection side as the true Joshua. The apprehension of this is of the utmost importance in view of a right understanding of God's ways, and of all that is set forth in "the good land that is beyond the Jordan".

DEUTERONOMY 4

Deuteronomy 4

We are seeking, by the Lord's help, to read this book as inspired of God, and as therefore having a profitable spiritual application to ourselves. The covenant declared to Israel, and written on two tables of stone, inaugurated a dispensation, and the Lord Jesus, as the true Moses, would recall to us that there has been in our case, as in theirs, divine speaking and divine writing. The covenant of which Christ would remind us is not the literal and legal covenant "gendering to bondage", but that which corresponds with it as inaugurating *our* dispensation. We have part in the new covenant which is in the value of the blood of Christ (Luke 22: 20), and the spirit of the new covenant has been ministered to us by the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 3: 6). But in addition to this the whole wealth of God's glad tidings concerning His Son has been made available for us. Jehovah's covenant declared in Horeb covered all that He proposed to do for Israel, and the conditions that would be requisite on their side if they were to be suitable for what He proposed. So that it may be regarded as suggesting typically the whole scope of what has resulted from the declaration of God by "the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18). Redemption has now been accomplished, and Christ has been glorified in heaven, and the Spirit given to those who believe. We must now take all the Divine speaking and acting into account if we wish to answer to the Divine pleasure.

The "statutes and ordinances" (verse 5) all stand in immediate connection with the covenant; they comprise the things which are suitable to the dispensation, and they are laid down in precise terms, to which nothing is to be added, and from which nothing is to be taken away (verse 2). It is only those who love God who can truly take up His "statutes and ordinances"; all must move on the principle of "If ye love me keep my commandments" (John 14: 15).

This chapter calls our attention to the inauguration of the dispensation by the declaration of God's covenant, and it is our privilege to learn under the instruction of Christ what answers to this in our case, "The ends of the ages are come" upon us (1 Corinthians 10: 11). However God moved in ages past He always had ends in view, and those ends have come upon His saints in the present day. What was outwardly a dispensation of law had Christ and new covenant conditions as its blessed end (2 Corinthians 3: 13).

But before passing on to this Moses calls attention to "What Jehovah did because of Baal-Peor". (See Numbers 25) This snare came in after the destruction of Sihon and Og. It is the snare of worldly associations leading to

what is idolatrous. The influence of natural relationships and friendships is often more deadly than the self-exaltation or self indulgence of the flesh. The wiles and beguilings of the Midianites are often more fatal than the opposition of Sihon or Og. "The doctrine of Balaam" (Revelation 2: 14) is the teaching that it is quite permissible to cultivate worldly associations. "The error of Balaam" was that he was governed by thoughts of worldly advantage. There is no life on that line — "All the men that followed Baal-Peor, Jehovah thy God hath destroyed them from among you; but ye that did cleave to Jehovah your God are alive every one of you this day" (verses 3 and 4). How many have missed the land that way! The "statutes and ordinances" never put us on that line; they help us on the line of cleaving to Jehovah; they preserve us from giving the creature a place which rightly belongs to God.

Wisdom and understanding lie in keeping and doing the divine "statutes and ordinances". They make God's people "a wise and understanding people"; they would fill us "with the full knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Colossians 1: 9); they would direct us so that we should "walk carefully, not as unwise but as wise" (Ephesians 5: 15). The "statutes and ordinances" shew us what is suitable to the dispensation in which we live, and it is great favour from God to know this. If we love Him it will be a matter of deep interest to us to know it. The Old Testament is an immense help to us in detail; Christians suffer great loss if they regard it only as the history of a past dispensation, they really forget that "Every scripture is divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, fully fitted to every good work" (2 Timothy 3: 16, 17). Then, what could be more precious and encouraging than to know that God is near to us, and available "in everything we call upon him for"? Christ would bring this before us as a divine certainty. I often have to remind myself that I have God, and I see that others need to be reminded of it also!

There is nothing in the world to compare with the "righteous statutes and ordinances" which God has given to His people (verse 8). The pleasure of divine love concerning us is truly wonderful; but in order to take it up rightly we must never forget how God has spoken to us. The motive and power of all obedience lies there. So that the Christ, as our Instructor, calls upon us to "take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things that thine eyes have seen ... the day that thou stoodest before Jehovah thy God in Horeb" (verses 9, 10). There is nothing more important than that we should keep in mind and heart the true character of God's speaking to us, and of His covenant. The Christ calls our attention to it afresh every first day of the week as we bless the cup of which He says, "This cup is the new covenant in

my blood" (1 Corinthians 11: 25). He reminds us, speaking typically, of how we have stood before God in Horeb. There has been something in the spiritual history of our souls which answers to that experience.

"And the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven ... And Jehovah spoke to you from the midst of the fire ... and he declared to you his covenant" (verses 11 - 13). Moses dwells on this as a mark of peculiar divine favour such as had never been shewn to man before. "For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man on the earth, and from one end of the heavens to the other end of the heavens, whether there hath been anything as this great thing is, or if anything hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking from the midst, of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?" (verses 32, 33). "From the heavens he made thee hear his voice, that he might instruct thee; and on the earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words from the midst of the fire. And *because he loved thy fathers*, and chose their seed after them, he brought thee out with his countenance, with his great power, out of Egypt" etc. (verses 36 - 40). It was, even literally, as presented here, a speaking of favour and love to a people chosen of God and redeemed by Him.

The remarkable expression, "burned with fire to the heart of heaven" — an expression not found in Exodus — has, I do not doubt, a typical reference to the love of God. It speaks of the unquenchable flame of that holy love. What else could reach to "the heart of heaven"? The fire intimates, indeed, the consuming of all that is unsuitable to God; it is a sin consuming flame; but from the midst of it God speaks in love to His chosen people.

The "darkness, clouds, and obscurity" suggest what was necessitated by the state of the natural and fallen man. Man in the flesh could never apprehend the blessedness of the love of God. Hence the new birth is a divine necessity (John 3: 3). Apart from it, all will be cloudy, dark, and obscure in the heart of man, however blessedly God may speak in love. The natural man can neither see nor hear in any spiritual sense (John 3: 3, 32); the sentence of death is upon him; he must go out in judgment. So that when the true speaking from "the heart of heaven" is heard in John 3 it tells us of the lifting up of the Son of Man. The "darkness, clouds and obscurity" were there in all their unmitigated dreadfulness when He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But it was by the action of the love of God that He was there. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal". That is a fire that burns "to the heart of heaven" — the unquenchable flame of divine love. And it is from the midst of that fire that God has declared Himself. How

wondrous that God should reveal Himself from heaven, by sending His own Son to bear the judgment of sin, consuming all that was abhorrent to Him, but in that very time and place making Himself known in love! We have to do now with a love which reaches the very "heart of heaven". God will burn up all that is unsuitable to Himself, but He will declare His love in the way of covenant, and secure thereby a people for Himself — "a people of inheritance, as it is this day" (verse 20).

Luke 15 makes known a love which meets the lost and the sinful, but which burns — I think we may say — to the heart of heaven. It tells us of "joy in heaven for one repenting sinner", of "joy before the angels of God"; it tells us of merrymaking and rejoicing which has its spring in the heart of the blessed God Himself. That is the character of the speaking now; the oracles are being uttered from heaven. Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant is now in "the heart of heaven", and all the love of God disclosed in His dying for sinful men is being uttered from the heaven of His glory. Sin has been unsparingly judged, but in the way of love to man, for God's "own Son" has borne the judgment, and is the eternal Witness of the love of God.

If we understood how God has spoken to us "from the midst of the fire" we should understand better the chastening of His love. We should understand that "our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12: 29) — a quotation from Deuteronomy 4: 24. He will not tolerate in His people whom He loves that which He has judged in His own Son. Hence His discipline comes in to consume what is of the flesh that we may be partakers of His holiness.

"Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, *lest thou forget*". The Christ would have us never to forget how God has spoken to us — we are never to forget our Horeb! God spoke to us in love through the death of His Son, and gave us His Spirit to pour out that love into our hearts. There is a blessed new covenant ministry of righteousness and the Spirit from Christ in heaven. Have we heard the speaking from heaven? Has it impressed our hearts with the character of the dispensation that has been inaugurated? The Lord would ever direct our hearts into the love of God; He would have us to drink into it afresh each time that we drink the cup of the Lord's supper.

I know nothing more important than that we should ever remember the manner of God's speaking to us, because it determines the full blessedness of our responsibility as His people. "And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to do, the ten words". The knowledge of God made known in love introduces an entirely new character and measure of creature responsibility. Our walk, our words, our spirits must now be worthy of Him whose love we know. "The ten words" indicate that the covenant is now the

measure of responsibility. It is not merely an authoritative voice requiring obedience in an arbitrary way. But the blessed God has come out in the revelation of Himself to bind us to Him as known in love, and He says, Now what you know Me to be is to govern you in everything; as My people you are to be worthy of Me. Nothing less than that is the true measure of the responsibility of God's people. "The ten words" and the covenant are identical. See Matthew 5: 44 - 48; Matthew 18: 32, 33; Ephesians 4: 32 - 5: 1; 1 Thessalonians 2: 12; 1 Peter 2: 9; 1 John 4: 11; 3 John 6; etc.

The words of the covenant were not only spoken but they were written. Divine speaking and divine writing are characteristic of the dispensation. God has spoken in the Person of the Son; His covenant has been declared. That is objective; it is altogether outside of ourselves. But writing brings in what is subjective; it speaks of a divine working in men. If men have "a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36: 26) it must be given of God. Otherwise there will be no "fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3: 3) for Him to write upon. But having made the heart impressionable, He writes upon it the knowledge of Himself as made known in new covenant grace, and the writing is in the indelible power of the Spirit of the living God. See 2 Corinthians 3. Christ is not only the great Speaker, but He is also the great Writer. Our dispensation takes character from the speaking and writing of Christ. The saints are "manifested to be Christ's epistle ... written not with ink, but the Spirit of the living God; not on stone tables, but on fleshy tables of the heart".

There is no demand now upon man in the flesh. There is a speaking in love on God's part, and a divine working in men so that they appreciate what has been spoken. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit", and nothing else is really responsive to God.

It is of the utmost importance to keep in mind the character of the period in which we are living. There has never been anything like it before; it is, as Galatians 4: 4 says, "the fulness of the time". All our ways and behaviour are to be regulated in the light of that knowledge of God which is acquired in the mount of the covenant. The "statutes and ordinances" are all in keeping with the covenant. There is a great tendency to slip away from the things we have heard (Hebrews 2: 1). In the last book of the Old Testament God called upon His people to "Remember the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, the statutes and ordinances" (Malachi 4: 4). And at the end of *our* dispensation God recalls to us the character of what He inaugurated at the beginning. We have *our* Horeb, and we are never to forget it. Christ would ever remind us that we are to walk together as brethren, and

to go in to possess the "good land", in the light of how God has spoken to us from heaven — a speaking of infinite grace and love.

The next section of the chapter reminds us that we are connected with a spiritual order of things. "Ye saw no form". "God is a Spirit", and our appreciation of Him, and our approaches to Him, must be spiritual in character. Natural thoughts of God may be degraded — as set forth in an image of a beast or even a creeping thing (verses 17, 18) — or they may be elevated — as set forth in the sun, moon, and stars (verse 19) — but they inevitably tend to obscure what has been revealed. God's people must beware of what is elevated as well as what is degraded. Some men can say most sublime and wonderful things of God; their thoughts seem so elevated as to have some correspondence with "the whole host of heaven"! But be not deceived! Bring everything to the test of the divine speaking in the Son — to the test of the death, the sin-bearing, the judgment-enduring of Christ on the cross!

It is with a view to this, perhaps, that Moses says again at this point what he had said twice before in other connections, "And Jehovah was angry with me on your account". It is a touching suggestion that everything that is spiritual and acceptable to God in relation to His worship and service, must have regard to the vicarious sufferings of Christ — must have those holy sufferings as its basis.

If we forget the covenant (verse 23) there is imminent danger of idolatry — something that is of the creature displacing God in the thoughts and affections of His people. We are to let that abide in us which we heard from the beginning, and then we shall abide in the Son and in the Father (1 John 2: 24). We shall then have no expectations from the flesh at all, either in ourselves or in others; our expectations will be from God and from what He works in His saints. If we make ourselves "a graven image" we shall find that it can do nothing for us. How many give time and attention to unnecessary things, only to find them burdensome like the idols of Isaiah 46! We may not make images of wood or stone, but it is not a needless word that John writes at the end of the epistle — "Children, keep yourselves from idols".

In verses 25 - 31 there is a prophetic announcement: the people would corrupt themselves and do evil, and would perish from off the land, and be taken up with things which have no vitality — "which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell". How this has been realised in the Christian profession! The true character of the dispensation has been forgotten, the divine speaking has been slipped away from, the spiritual nature of Christianity departed from. All kinds of things have been introduced that are human and natural, and the result has been that possession of the divinely given "land" has been lost.

But there is also here a prophetic intimation of repentance and recovery being granted in mercy. "And from thence ye shall seek Jehovah thy God, and thou shalt find him, if thou shalt seek him with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul. In thy tribulation, and when all these things shall come upon thee at the end of days, thou shalt return to Jehovah thy God, and shalt hearken to his voice, — for Jehovah thy God is a merciful God, — he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them" (verses 29 - 31). Restoration will be granted to Israel because God will not give up His thoughts in regard to them. See Jeremiah 31: 35 - 37; Jeremiah 32: 39, 40; etc. He will in sovereign mercy "at the end of days" cause them to seek Him, and to find Him, and to hearken to His voice. And what He will do for Israel He *is* doing now for His saints of the assembly.

1 Timothy gives us the character of the dispensation of God as inaugurated by Him at the beginning, but 2 Timothy gives us the character of things as rekindled in view of testimony in the "last days". This is when "all who are in Asia" — and the designation reminds us that it was the "assemblies which are in Asia" which were addressed by the Lord in Revelation 2 and 3 as representing *all* the assemblies — have turned away from Paul. God is now working on the line of His "promise of life, the life which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1: 1), and on the line of His "own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time" (2 Timothy 1: 9), and from that point of view He contemplates a rekindling of things "at the end of days" This recovery — which is undoubtedly going on at the present moment — is the fruit of God's sovereign mercy. He does not forget the covenant, and He is bringing His people back to the "land" which had been forfeited through the allowance of things which had no place in the dispensation as inaugurated by Him.

2 Timothy points out clearly the line on which divine recovery takes place. God's calling and election are recognised as distinct from the mass of profession. It is a question now of the elect obtaining "the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2: 10). "The firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, The Lord knows those that are his; and, Let everyone who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2: 19). The whole epistle should be most carefully and prayerfully considered by all who would participate in the divine and spiritual recovery which is going on. It is by pursuing the line laid down in 2 Timothy that the Philadelphian state can alone be reached, which really involves recovery to all that was in the mind of God from the outset. It involves restoration to the "land" of His love and purpose in Christ Jesus.

The covenant in all its blessedness is preserved and made plain in Christ Jesus; He is the Ark of the covenant. If we turn away from the man after the flesh and from all those things which he has introduced into the Christian profession, and come to Christ Jesus, the Man of divine purpose and pleasure, we shall come back to all that the dispensation started with. John's writings preserve the original and undecaying character of what is from the beginning. On the divine side there is unbroken continuity; there is no change in that which is in the Son of God, and there is no change morally in the saints viewed as begotten of God. What is of God does not change. If we have departed from it, there is a call to repent and return.

"Thou shalt find him, if thou shalt seek him with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul". But the whole movement of recovery is brought about from the divine side, as we may see in Jeremiah 32: 37 - 41. There we see how God acts with *His* whole heart and with *His* whole soul! There is a blessed harmony and correspondence between God's ways in restoring Israel in a coming day and His ways in recovering His people at the present time. It is wholly on the principle of sovereign mercy, and in the exercise of His own love. From the beginning to the end of His ways all is that we might know Him (Deuteronomy 4: 35) as acting in love. There has never been anything like His present speaking and acting. Think of how He has delivered us from the world, and of the greatness of His salvation in Christ! We do well to know and consider in our hearts "that Jehovah, he is God in the heavens above, and on the earth beneath, there is none else".

There is a deeply interesting parenthesis at this point. The course of instruction is arrested to let in the three verses 41 - 43 with regard to the three cities of refuge. There is no other incident introduced in a similar way throughout the book, so that it has evidently unique importance. It refers to the intensely solemn fact that, as foreknown of God, Israel would be the slayer of Christ. What complete forfeiture of title to live in the divine inheritance is implied in this! But what mercy that would take account of it as done "unawares"! It is, indeed, the full disclosure of how far man may go — nay, of how far he *has* gone. It intimates to Israel, and to us in principle, that we have incurred the guilt of slaying God's Anointed. How then can we live on divine territory? It can only be on the footing of mercy.

God has taken account of all that man is capable of doing. To be restored from forgetfulness and idolatry is great mercy, but what can be said of the deservings of those who slay the One who has been so truly a Neighbour, and who is the supreme object of God's love and delight? Such have forfeited all title to live, but in the prerogative of mercy God accounts the dark deed as

done "unawares", and He provides cities that the manslayer might flee and live. The manslayer is purely a vessel of mercy, and it is on this ground alone that he can "live" in the inheritance. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34). "And now, brethren, I know that ye did it in ignorance, as also your rulers" (Acts 3: 17). But even if mercy takes this account of it, it is a most dreadful thing that God's Anointed should be killed by those whom He came to bless. All the idolatry which stained the pages of Israel's history was less guilty than that. One can imagine with what horror the hearts of the convicted remnant were filled when they heard from Peter that "by the hand of lawless men" they had crucified and slain their Messiah. What grief and anguish, what true repentance, for what they had done "unawares"! But there was a city to flee to, and Peter opened the gate of that city when he said, "Repent, and be baptised, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God may call" (Acts 2: 38, 39).

It is as true for ourselves as it will be true for Israel in a coming day that the inheritance can only be possessed on the ground of pure mercy. Our title to live is forfeited. Hence the epistle to the Romans, which answers to "this side of the Jordan", describes both the called ones from amongst the Jews, and those from amongst the nations, as "vessels of mercy". And the epistle to the Ephesians, which answers to the land over Jordan, speaks touchingly of God as "being rich in mercy". To "live" on that ground alone is humbling to the pride of man. It means the surrender of all claim. What did it avail to be the most distinguished descendant of Abraham if a man killed his neighbour unawares? He must henceforth live in the city of refuge, or fall under the hand of the avenger of blood.

The "three cities" would suggest full testimony to the ground on which alone the inheritance can be occupied. And this has a voice for us also in a day when all title to live in the inheritance has been forfeited by the departure and utter failure of the people of God. Any movement of recovery, and restoration to forfeited privileges and blessings, is purely a matter of God's sovereign mercy. We have already referred to 2 Timothy as indicating the conditions on which spiritual vitality can be maintained in the last days of departure and corruption. The principles there laid down are a city of refuge, made available for us in sovereign mercy, and as we flee to them we "live", though conscious that we are part of a profession that has forfeited everything by its unfaithfulness. But infinite mercy has restored to us the possibility of living in the divine inheritance. We can occupy it now, not merely as conferred

originally on the saints, but as being recovered to it in pure mercy through divine faithfulness after all being forfeited on our side.

This chapter is a very comprehensive one, as setting forth, typically, the glory of the dispensation as inaugurated by divine speaking and writing; and then the terrible departure which has come in through man's unfaithfulness; and, finally, restoration brought about in divine faithfulness, so that there are those who "live" in the inheritance on the ground of mercy alone. All this is as definitely spiritual instruction and light for us, under the teaching of Christ, as it will be for Israel when their heart turns to the Lord, and they learn that He is the Spirit, not only of the new covenant, but also of the old.

DEUTERONOMY 5

Deuteronomy 5

The knowledge of the covenant must ever be a primary consideration, for it is God who has made it, and Christ, is the Mediator of it, and we see typically in the chapter now before us how the Lord Jesus would recall our hearts to it. Indeed He loves to do so repeatedly, and especially each first day of the week as we receive the cup, of which He said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out, for you" (Luke 22: 20). It is most important that we should not forget the covenant, for it gives character to the dispensation; and to all our relations not only with God but with His people.

"Jehovah our God made a covenant with us in Horeb" (verse 2). It was not what man had done, or failed to do, but what Jehovah had done. "And this is the covenant *from me to them*, when I shall have taken away their sins" (Romans 11: 27). God is entitled to lay down the terms on which He may be known, and according to which He will go on with His people, and they may go on with Him and serve Him. He says, "I will *consummate* a new covenant" (Hebrews 8: 8); that is, He establishes all the conditions of the covenant in completeness and finality. His people have simply to receive it as declared to them by the Mediator, and to take it up in faithful affections through that divine teaching which His gracious work effects in them. It is not left to us to determine the conditions of the covenant, we have simply to fall in with what God has ordained, and those who love Him are delighted that it should be so.

The covenant now is consummated by God speaking in infinite grace, making Himself known to His people as merciful to their unrighteousnesses, and as never remembering their sins and their lawlessnesses any more. And along with this there is a divine working in His people which corresponds with what will be wrought in Israel when the new covenant is consummated with them. "And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me all their days, for the good of them, and of their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not draw back from them, to do them good; and I will put my fear in their heart, that they may not turn aside from me. And I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land with my whole heart and with my whole soul" (Jeremiah 32: 38 - 41). So that the covenant now lies in the knowledge of God in the grace of forgiveness, and also as working in His people "both the willing and the working according to his good pleasure" (Philippians 2: 13).

Attention is called in verse 3 to the fact that the covenant was not made "with our fathers ... but with us, even us, those who are here alive all of us this day". The "fathers" were the generation of unbelief who had been "strewed in the desert", representing the man after the flesh, but "those who are here alive" represent the generation who are able to go in and possess the land. They represent those who are born of God — a people able to take up the covenant and answer to it because of the way in which they know God. Such have been quickened by the Lord as the Spirit, and therefore are "alive" in relation to God. They have the Spirit of the Lord, and that brings in liberty and power.

A blessed feature of the covenant is that it is mediatorial, and this feature is emphasised in the chapter before us. "I stood between Jehovah and you at that time, to declare to you the word of Jehovah" (verse 5). "Come thou near, and hear all that Jehovah our God will say; and speak thou to us all that Jehovah our God will speak to thee" (verse 27). Jehovah was pleased with what the people said when they felt the need for a mediator. "And Jehovah heard the voice of your words, when ye spoke to me; and Jehovah said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people that have spoken to thee; they have well spoken all that they have spoken" (verse 28). It very definitely suggests the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus; God would have His people to feel the necessity for Christ as the Mediator. He would have them to know that He is God, and that they are men, and that they cannot meet Him "face to face" without a Mediator.

Every right intuition in man cries out for a Mediator. Every one who realises the greatness and majesty of God, as Job did, must feel, as he did, the need for a Mediator. See Job 9. For man is not only a creature, but he is a fallen and sinful creature, and hence it is right for man to be "afraid". If one has never known this feeling of holy fear he can never have realised his creature condition, or his moral state, in the presence of the greatness and majesty of God, nor will he be at all capable of realising the immensity of the grace in which God makes known His covenant through the Mediator. There must be the learning of what we are, and it is a great pleasure to God when we realise the absolute necessity for the Mediator. The holy fear which leads to this conviction is the moral basis in our souls of all right knowledge or appreciation of the covenant. It is from this point of view that the fear of the people at Horeb is presented in Deuteronomy 5. It is presented as a feeling that is morally right and pleasing to God — such a feeling as could only be found truly with persons born anew.

It is the One who could say, "Jehovah was angry with me on your account", who also says, "I stood between Jehovah and you". The Sin-bearer is the One who alone can be the Mediator. The glory of the Lord as Mediator rests on the basis of His having borne the judgment of sin on behalf of men. God is now speaking to men in a Man, making known all that He is in grace on the ground that sin has been judged in that Man. It is right that we should fear, having regard to what we are, and having regard to the holiness of God; but then those who thus fear God learn how Christ has taken up on their account what was due to the sinful creature, so that all that God is can now shine forth in perfect grace to men. A glorious Person who knew no sin has been made sin sacrificially on our account, and He is now the Mediator of the new covenant. He has maintained divine glory in the fullest way as the Sin-bearer, so that now God can speak out all that is in His heart man-ward through the Mediator. God is not now obstructed by the sin of man; He has dealt with that according to His own majesty and holiness, and now He speaks by One who has "made by himself the purification of sins" (Hebrews 1: 3). We know God through the Mediator as One merciful to our unrighteousnesses, and who never remembers our sins and our lawlessnesses any more. Christ has been, in infinite grace, in our place before God as the Sin-bearer, and now as the Mediator He is on God's part to us-ward, to make known to us all that is in the heart of God. All that God is in grace and love is told out in a Man; the glory of God is in the face of Jesus; the glory of the Christ is that He is the Image of God. But certain exercises are needed on our part to prepare us to appreciate the Mediator and what is spoken through Him, and this chapter views the people as having such exercises. They express their consciousness of the need of a mediator, and Jehovah approved of what they said. God would have us to realise the necessity for Christ; if we want to please God we must have hearts to appreciate Christ as the Mediator.

What we see here, typically, is a people alive in the presence of Christ, being instructed by Him in the covenant of God, and being reminded by Him that all that lies in that covenant came to them mediatorially through Him. All has in view their entrance into the land and the prolongation of their days therein. The land can only be possessed or enjoyed in a spirit of fidelity to the covenant, and there is the possibility with us, as there was with Israel, of being unfaithful to the covenant bond. To know God according to His covenant, and to be His people according to His covenant, raises the question of faithfulness. The marriage relationship is used repeatedly as a figure of the covenant bond, but it is a relationship of which the conditions have to be faithfully maintained. Those conditions are set out in the terms of the covenant, and in the spirit of them. For we have not to do with the letter

merely, but with the spirit. If we read the old covenant in the letter of it, we shall find it a ministry of death and condemnation. The veil will remain unremoved from our hearts; we shall not fix our eyes on "the end" which it had in view. But if we see that *Christ* is the Spirit of what Moses wrote, and that He quickens so that the spirit of the covenant may be livingly in the people of God, we shall get clear spiritual vision. The spirit of the old covenant is secured in the people of God by their coming under the effective ministry of the spirit of the new covenant.

Take the first word of the covenant! "I am Jehovah thy God who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me". Does not this appeal to us in a very touching way? It is our Saviour-God, whom we know as having delivered us from this present evil world, and from every form of legal bondage, who brings Himself before our hearts. At what a cost did He bring us out! The gift and death of His beloved Son, the mighty operations of His Spirit, the making manifest that He was "for us" — the Source for us of infinite and everlasting good! What a gracious word that He should say, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me"! He would not have anything to displace Him in our thoughts or hearts. He would always be to us the blessed God whom we have learned to know in delivering grace.

There is no command to love God in the "ten words", (though there is in verse 5 of the next chapter) but there is an intimation that He has "thousands" who do so. Such are undoubtedly begotten of God, and they come out in marked contrast to the seed of the serpent who "hate" Him. His children are to have no other thought of Him than what He has revealed of Himself in His beloved Son. Do we want any other God? Every one begotten of Him would say, No, I do not want to have another — I do not want to entertain any thought of God save what He has made known in His Son. But, alas! our souls may decline in their appreciation of the God whom they have known, and then the door is open for things to come in which practically displace Him in our affections. So long as we are here faithfulness is tested, and there is ever the danger of idolatry. But His children are, characteristically, "those who love God" (Romans 8: 28).

The second "word" is a warning against making "any graven image, any form", and them. "The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for also the Father seeks such as his worshippers". That is the privilege side, but along with it the Lord insists on the moral necessity and obligation of spiritual worship. "God is a spirit, and they who worship him *must* worship him in spirit and truth" (John 4: 23, 24). We must ever remember this. But spiritual

worship necessitates *spiritual worshippers*. How could a natural man worship in spirit? Or even a carnal believer? An unspiritual man can only introduce unspiritual elements; what is of the creature will appear in it rather than what is of God. It may be the product of laborious skill, like a "graven image", but it will not really correspond with the divine speaking. Great pains are often taken to make what is called the service of God attractive or impressive — beautiful music, intonations, religious vestments, and so on — but *who* is impressed by these things? *Who* is served by them? God or man? They please the eye and ear of the creature; nothing but what is "in spirit and truth" will do for God.

We may, through great mercy, be delivered from much that is material and formal — that has "graven image" character under God's eye — but we need to remember that even beautiful and scriptural expressions which others have used in the Spirit, or which we ourselves have used at some time in the Spirit, may be used formally, and without having the true spirit of them in our hearts. The service of God can only be sustained in spiritual character as we give place to the Holy Spirit, and walk in self-judgment; that is, as we ourselves are truly spiritual.

A "graven image" could never be a true expression of God; it could never express a living God. It would always be the product of man's mind or imagination, perhaps helped by Satan. It would be man's thought of God, or how Satan would have man to think of God, and not the blessed revelation which He has made of Himself in His Son. Christendom today is well-nigh full of thoughts of God which are as alien to the revelation He has made as any "graven image" could be. It is well for us to see that we have not before our hearts any thought of God other than what He has made known of Himself in Christ. The epistle to the Galatians shews how soon even true believers may entertain a thought of God which is not at all according to what He has revealed of Himself in grace. We see how it provoked the holy jealousy of Paul, and his zeal was the expression of the jealousy of God.

"For I, Jehovah thy God, am a jealous God". God is not jealous in relation to unconverted people. Jealousy supposes a definite engagement or committal; it supposes that we have known the love of God, and recognised that He is entitled to our affections, and we have given them to Him. Jehovah could say seven hundred years afterwards, "I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness" (Jeremiah 2: 2). Has there been a day of espousal in our history? Have we ever given God our affections? If so, He never forgets it, and if there is departure on our side it awakens His holy jealousy. If "love is strong as death" it has its counterpart in a jealousy which is "cruel as Sheol: the flashes

thereof are flashes of fire, flames of Jah" (Song of Songs 8: 6). It speaks of the intensity of divine love; God cannot bear not to have the responsive affections of His people. Human jealousy has all kinds of mixed feelings and motives in it, but the jealousy of God is the jealousy of an unquenchable love. Hence we get the judgment of the Lord in immediate relation to His supper. That supper speaks sweetly and touchingly of His love, but if we come to the supper in an unjudged state we must expect that the fire of jealousy will burn.

Hence Paul says, "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?" There must be fidelity to the bond we have entered into; otherwise the fire of His jealousy will burn amongst us.

The blessed God has delivered us from the power of Satan and from this present evil world; He has given us His Spirit; He has fed us with manna; He has nursed us in the desert; He has borne us on eagle's wings; He has cared for us in ten thousand details of wilderness need; He has made known to us His covenant. Has He not won our love? What a solemn thing if, after the love of espousals has had its place, there should come a time when God has to say, I remember when your heart was on fire towards me, but it is cold today!

There are only two characters contemplated in verses 9, 10 — haters and lovers. If we turn away from what is spiritual, we are moving towards those who hate God. Iniquity is found on that line, and sad results for ourselves and our sons; in principle it would apply to all who come under our influence. How important that we should be found promoting what is spiritual! We shall then come in for the "mercy" which is shewn to the "thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments". Such prove the blessed consideration and help of God. See 2 Corinthians 4: 1.

Then, "Thou shalt not idly (or, for an untruth) utter the name of Jehovah thy God". The Name of the Lord is on no account to be connected with what is untrue. It is the seal of God's firm foundation, "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2: 19). The Lord's Name is not to be linked with what is unholy or untrue. That is an important part of the covenant.

The hallowing of the sabbath day is not connected here as in Exodus 20 with God's work in creation, but with deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The sabbath in Exodus looks on to the end of God's work when He will rest, and men will share His rest. But in Deuteronomy the sabbath is kept in remembrance of a complete past deliverance, and it is to be kept in a spirit of grace towards others. "That thy bondman and thy handmaid may rest as well as thou" is added here; it is one of the beautiful touches we find in this book. In Exodus the sabbath speaks of communion with God in His rest; but what is

emphasised here is the enjoyment of a rest which is the fruit of His deliverance — through grace from every kind of bondage, so that it leads to gracious consideration for others. The Lord's deliverances wrought on the sabbath day were Deuteronomic in character. He liberated persons from terrible infirmities that they might know divine favour and power in that way. Could any of them ever forget what a sabbath the day of their deliverance became? Would not every heart rightly affected by such a deliverance be kindly disposed towards others? It is the rest brought to *us* through grace that is remembered in Deuteronomy; in Exodus it is rather how God secures what is restful to Himself.

It is important to see that the covenant has to do, not only with God's relations to us and ours to Him, but also with our relations with His people. The first thing requisite in a child is that it should recognise parental care and honour it. Speaking naturally, no one has such a genuine and unselfish care for our welfare as our parents. It is good when children recognise this, and honour their parents. God has used both father and mother as expressive of His own parental love, and He would set up what corresponds with His own care in every Christian household. "The household of God" is where His parental care is known, and every Christian household should be expressive of features which characterise God's household.

The first principle of the covenant in its application to our relations with the people of God is that we have to recognise that we are under parental care. The Lord spoke more than once to His disciples as "children", and John, who had drunk into His spirit, habitually says, "children". It speaks of parental affection. Spiritual care is surely not less than natural care. Paul's letters breathe the spirit of parental care. To the Thessalonians he says, "But have been gentle in the midst of you, as a nurse would cherish her own children ... ye know how, as a father his own children, we used to exhort each one of you, and comfort and testify", etc. (1 Thessalonians 2: 7, 11). To the Corinthians he says, "As my beloved children I admonish you. For if ye should have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the glad tidings. I entreat you therefore, be my imitators" (1 Corinthians 4: 14 - 16). We may gather from this that to be a mere instructor, even in Christ, is not to be compared with parental affection.

We are not only immediately under God's parental care, but mediately as finding that care amongst His saints. I doubt whether we know really what it is to be of the household of God if we have not recognised parental care amongst the saints. The Thessalonians had recognised it in Paul, and he had

imitators at Thessalonica, for he begged them to know those who laboured among them, and took the lead among them in the Lord, and admonished them. All admonishing and exhorting is to be in parental care and affection. The schoolmaster and the policeman have no place in the household of God.

One of the earliest features of taking up covenant relations is to recognise and honour the parental care that is to be found amongst the people of God. If young believers do not start that way they will miss a good deal that would qualify them to be truly helpful in the household of God. I think it will be found that if hardness and harshness characterise believers they have not had much experience of the warmth and tenderness of parental care. They have not recognised or honoured the parental care that is found in the household of God. They are like children who have been thrust out to earn their own living while they should have been still nourished and cared for in parental affection. It is a great thing to prove in one's early days what the household of God is by experiencing the parental care that is there. That care is to be recognised and honoured; there is great blessing attached to doing so. It secures that days will be prolonged, and it will be well with us in the land which God gives us. If we do not start by appreciating, and responding to, the parental care and interest that is to be found in the household of God we shall never grow up rightly in that household. If we are independent and self confident, and not prepared to be admonished, we cannot have spiritual prosperity. At the present day children soon want to act independently of their parents, but it does not make for happiness, and if that spirit is in young believers they will not prosper in the household of God. It is very blessed to think of being here for a prolonged period for the pleasure of God, and of His people, in His household. We ought to consider whether we are conducting ourselves in such a way as to make it pleasing to God to retain us here for a long time. If I have begun rightly in the household of God I am conscious how I have been fed and nurtured and cared for and warmed. I owe so much to the parental care of the saints that I could never speak evil of them; they will always be estimable and honourable in my sight because I have proved what a benefit they have been to me. Parental interest and care amongst the people of God is the direct product of His love.

The sixth "word" is, "Thou shalt not kill". Matthew 5: 21, 22 would indicate that being angry with one's brother may have something of the spirit of killing him in it. It is right sometimes to be angry, but we must beware of our spirits. John puts it very strongly, "Every one that hates his brother is a murderer, and ye know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3: 15). Cain was of the wicked one and slew his brother. The spirit of the covenant would put that away from us; John brings it before the family of God as a needful

warning. Even if there has to be discipline it is for the life of the person, not to kill him. The most terrible of all discipline is to be delivered to Satan, but even this is "for destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5: 5). It is really for the person's life. So if you see a brother sinning a sin not unto death, you ask and God gives him life (1 John 5: 16). And James says, "My brethren, if anyone among you err from the truth, and one bring him back, let him know that he that brings back a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins" (James 5: 19, 20). We should not like to burn a man at the stake, but it is quite possible to be found acting in the same kind of spirit that would do it, and such a spirit is altogether out of keeping with the covenant.

"Neither shalt thou commit adultery". Scripture contains many references to adultery in a spiritual sense. There is nothing more important than to maintain fidelity in our affections. Adultery in a spiritual sense is the corrupting of the affections of God's people so that they are unfaithful to Him. Jezebel is the great adulteress in the assembly period; she calls herself prophetess, and teaches and leads astray the Lord's servants. The Lord's present ministry is very largely directed to the end that all corrupting influences may be displaced from the hearts of His people so that they may be marked by purity and fidelity in their affections towards Him, and towards one another.

"Neither shalt thou steal". There is great possibility of our appropriating things in an unlawful way. "Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith Jehovah, that steal my words every one from his neighbour" (Jeremiah 23: 36). Even the words of the Lord may be stolen goods, not honestly come by. The thought of this would make us careful about taking up the words of others, and using them as if they were our own, when we have not bought them by facing the exercise which they involve so as to make them our own in a godly way. According to Ephesians the stealer is to become a giver (Ephesians 4: 28); through honest toil he is to acquire that which he may distribute. To contribute to the brethren is very different from stealing from them. Under the new covenant there is a serving out of things — a ministry of righteousness and of the Spirit — and this becomes characteristic of the mutual activities of the people of God. Each becomes a channel of supply rather than a thief, or one who makes demands. If there is a lack, let us see to it that we serve out to the brethren the thing that is lacking.

"Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour". Many wrong impressions are made, and personal feelings created which hinder confidence, by statements which are not true. There is often failure to exercise godly care in this matter, and the enemy gets an advantage. It is not always that there is

an evil motive, but things are passed on too readily from one to another that are not definitely known to be true.

"Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, nor his bondman, nor his handmaid, his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's". It is interesting to see that under grace desires run the other way; instead of there being a wish to deprive one's neighbour there is desire to enrich and add to him. There is desire to be contributory. Hence we get such scriptures as "Desire earnestly the greater gifts" (1 Corinthians 12: 31); "I desire to speak five words with my understanding that I may instruct others also" (1 Corinthians 14: 19); "Seek that ye may abound for the edification of the assembly" (1 Corinthians 14: 12); "So that, brethren, desire to prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14: 39); "Thus, yearning over you, we had found our delight in having imparted to you not only the glad tidings of God, but our own lives also, because ye had become beloved of us" (1 Thessalonians 2: 8); "I have coveted the silver or gold or clothing of no one ... I have shewed you all things, that thus labouring we ought to come in aid of the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20: 33 - 35).

The thought of the covenant is sometimes limited in the mind to our relations with God, but it includes also our relations with one another. The covenant, known in spiritual grace and power, would adjust our relations with the brethren, If God makes a covenant it shews how willing He is to engage Himself to men, and to have men conscious of it so that they engage themselves to Him. He says, "I ... have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage". I have been for you; now you are to be for me in the attitude of your heart towards me, and towards one another. There comes a moment in the history of souls when exercises are raised as to how the pleasure of God is to be brought into effect in regard to them. In the section of this chapter from verse 22 - 33 Moses calls attention to the fact that they had realised the necessity for a mediator, and Jehovah was pleased that they did so. "I have heard the voice of the words of this people that have spoken to thee: they have well spoken all that they have spoken" (verse 28). If the covenant is to be effectuated it must be through Christ as the Mediator. Indeed it is He who is given "for a covenant of the people" (Isaiah 42: 6; Isaiah 49: 8), and He is the Mediator of it (Hebrews 8: 6; Hebrews 12: 24), and the Spirit of it (2 Corinthians 3:6; 2 Corinthians 3:17,18). Everything is made good now through the Lord Jesus Christ. The word "mediator" is not used in Romans 5, but the whole of that chapter is a presentation of what comes to us from God *through* the Lord Jesus Christ; there are seven things

particularly mentioned. Then He is a quickening Spirit, so that those who believe on Him are caused to live in liberty in the knowledge of God and in response to Him. Matthew 5: 17 tells us that He did not come to make void the law or the prophets, but to give the fulness of them, and He does this in those who are quickened by Him.

It is well to note the words, "and he added no more" (verse 22). The covenant was complete, and did not require any additions. When we come to the covenant as we know it, expressed in Christ, we see how complete it is. The full presentation of God in grace, the perfect answer to it in a Man, and divine quickening power brought in to make it effectual in men.

The people representatively and officially — "ye came near to me all the heads of your tribes, and your elders" — express their deep sense of the need for a mediator. I think it may be regarded as typical of the heart of Israel turning to the Lord, for Jehovah approved of it. It sets forth, typically, that they realised how indispensable Christ was in Mediatorship. The solemn accompaniments of cloud, obscurity, and darkness brought this home to them. For us there is a greater solemnity at Calvary than was known at Horeb. "There was darkness over the whole land" (Matthew 27: 46). The cry of the holy but forsaken One brings home to us what God is in His purity and majesty in far greater intensity than the thunderings and trumpet soundings of Sinai. Infinite love is there indeed, but infinite holiness too, and it is not well that the sense of this should be feeble in our souls. We are creatures, and we have been sinful creatures, and God is God and He is holy. He would have us to fear Him; it is most wholesome to do so; there could be no true knowledge of His love otherwise — no true valuation in our hearts of Christ as the Mediator. We must learn what we are in the presence of the greatness and holiness of God. This was Job's lesson. He had long known that man could only be accepted with God on the ground of the burnt offering (see Job 1: 5) but he did not realise what he himself was, in presence of the greatness and purity of God, until he saw and heard God for himself. He had to learn the need of Christ, as Ransom, Redeemer, Mediator, Interpreter. Every exercise that leads us to value Christ is of incalculable advantage and benefit.

There was spiritual intelligence in what the people said when they asked that Moses might be the mediator between God and them. If the pleasure of God is to be effectuated in us it must be through Christ as the Mediator, and through His being the Spirit of the covenant to quicken us. In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul enlarges on this. He says that "the Spirit quickens" (verse 6) and then, passing over the parenthesis to verse 17, he says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, but where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, looking on the glory

of the Lord with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit”.

Moses was not only a type of Christ; but he was a remarkable vessel of the Spirit of Christ. If Moses could have imparted to the people his own spirit the covenant might have been blessedly effectuated. How delightful it must have been to God to have a man with whom He could speak face to face! “If there be a prophet among you, I Jehovah will make myself known to him in a vision, I will speak to him in a dream. Not so my servant Moses: he is faithful in all my house. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him openly, and not in riddles” (Numbers 12: 6 - 8). If it had been possible for Moses to quicken the people, and to give them his spirit, how different all would have been! But we have come to One who can do what Moses could not do, great as he was personally and as a type. Our Moses is not only the Mediator to bring to us the knowledge of God in holy love, but He is a quickening Spirit to make us to live in the appreciation of God as He has made Him known, and He gives His Spirit so that we may respond in the liberty of holy affections to God, and move in holy affections, too, towards His people.

“Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments continually, that it might be well with them and with their sons for ever!” (verse 29). Such are the breathings of the heart of God, and through the Mediator He has provided all the conditions by which His desires can be realised in His people. This scripture suggests that as under the mediatorship all the conditions suitable to the inheritance would be brought about. God is now putting, the Spirit of the Lord — the Spirit of Him who is the Mediator — into millions of hearts, that they may know God in His love, and be able to answer to the pleasure of His love concerning them, and to do so in perfect liberty of heart. God as known through the Mediator is the infinite Source of supply; He supplies all that His heart requires, so that all that pertains to the covenant, and that is suited to the inheritance, may have its place with us for His pleasure.

DEUTERONOMY 6

Deuteronomy 6

The object which the covenant has in view, as we see at the end of the previous chapter, is that a living people are secured for the pleasure of God, and for the enjoyment of what His love bestows on them. It secures moral conditions which are suitable to the land of divine purpose — “the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee” (verse 10).

There are two lines suggested in this chapter on which God appeals to the hearts of His people. One is connected with what He has taught us experimentally of the character of the world, and the way in which His grace and power have acted to deliver us from it. And the other is connected with the unchangeableness of His purpose, as to which He swore long before deliverance from the world was needed. Compare verses 12, 21, 22 with verses 10, 18, 23. “He brought us out ... that he might bring us in”.

God has taken great pains to instruct us in what the world is, and to shew us that His judgment rests on every feature of it. This chapter speaks of the signs which He shewed upon Egypt (verse 22). A sign signifies something; it is instructive; and in the signs we see all the features of the world exposed as having come under divine judgment. We were once in bondage to the power of the world, and it hindered us from being for the pleasure of God, but He has come in to set us free from it so that we might love Him and serve Him in perfect liberty. The world is a “house of bondage”. It is a system of things which hinders liberty in serving God. We have not only been wrong ourselves, but we have been held in a system which is altogether opposed to God, and we have needed to be freed from it. Peter said on the day of Pentecost “Be saved from this perverse generation”. Isaiah not only said, “I am a man of unclean lips” but he added, “I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6: 5). He realised that he was wrong, but his whole environment was wrong also. True repentance involves that we not only judge ourselves, but we judge the whole Egypt system to be a “house of bondage”, and are thankful that a divine deliverance from it has been wrought for us.

Then, on the other hand, Jehovah had sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would give “the land” to His people. He would carry out what He had promised. His oath was connected with “the unchangeableness of his purpose” (Hebrews 6: 17) — a purpose formed long before there was any need of deliverance from bondage. God has called us “out of darkness to his wonderful light”, but that calling is “according to purpose” (Romans 8: 28). “The land”

was ever God's objective for His people. It represents a sphere of spiritual blessing which is according to the love of God (Deuteronomy 7: 8), and which He would have His people to possess and increase in as the true sphere of their life. Many of us might have some difficulty in stating what we understand by "the land", but if it is the present portion which the love of God would bring us into, it is well worth our while to give earnest attention to it.

The first mention of "the land" in Scripture is in Genesis 12. It is to be noted that in Genesis 10 we find among the sons of Ham both Mizraim (Egypt) and Canaan; and in Ham's posterity we get Babel (Babylon), Assyria, Nineveh, the Philistines, Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah. I single these out as being prominent in Scripture as representing the world where man seeks to glorify himself by the use of his own resources or wisdom, or to gratify himself by the indulgence of his lusts in various ways. They represent the whole scope of what man can compass, or acquire for himself, with the aid of Satan who is the god and prince of this world.

But in Genesis 12 Jehovah spoke to Abraham of "the land that I will shew thee" (verse 1), and said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (verse 7). It is a land shewn by God to a man called out by Him, and promised as a gift to that man's seed. It represents what God would call attention to as being of Himself in contrast to everything that is of the world, and which He would give to the heirs of promise.

Stephen tells us that "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham" (Acts 7: 2). God would shew that true glory was with Him, and that He had something for man far better than all that the world could offer. However great the glory of Egypt, or Babylon, or Nineveh, or Sidon, it is the glory of a creature under sin and death, about to be called to account by his despised Creator, and how vain is such glory! But God has imperishable glory, and in the outshining of that glory He calls men in sovereign love, and makes Himself known to them as the God of redemption and of resurrection power, and as giving what is worthy of Himself.

In Genesis 12 we read, "And the Canaanite was then in the land". In Genesis 13 we read, "And the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land". In Genesis 15 we read, "And in the fourth generation they shall come hither again; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full". "The land" was not to be possessed by God's chosen and called people until the maturing of what was evil. God would wait until then; all that He had in reserve — all that was the subject of promise — had to await, for its enjoyment, the development in evil of a power that was opposed to it. The thoughts of God, in regard to what He would give to man, were known as a matter of promise. But spiritual

powers were present which stood against the knowledge of God; and against the realisation of what God would give in love to man. The "four hundred years" of which Jehovah spoke to Abram in Genesis 15 may be taken as typical of the whole period between the promises being given, and their being entered upon in realisation by the "heirs according to promise". Israel's entering into the land under Joshua was not the true fulfilment of the promise, though it was figurative of it. See Hebrews 4: 8. The true entrance into "the land" in a spiritual sense may be *our* portion now; the actual coming into it by Israel is yet future. "The land" speaks typically of eternal life as God's answer in love to all that the enemy had brought in.

"The iniquity of the Amorites" was *full* in a spiritual sense when God had presented Himself in His Son and been rejected, when the Holy Spirit's testimony to a risen and glorified Christ had been refused, and when God's thoughts of redemption, and of dwelling amongst His people, had taken form in the assembly. The character of the opposing spiritual forces was then fully manifested and matured. Then it was that a new sphere of blessing was opened up for men in association with a risen Christ. Eternal life was known as a blessing to be entered on now.

The whole history of Israel, as we have been following it in its typical bearing, requires the death of Christ to give it meaning. The Passover, the Red Sea, the smitten rock, the sacrifices, the brazen serpent, all indicate that there could be no true coming out of Egypt, or passing through the wilderness, save by those who have learned the meaning of the death of Christ. That is, the whole history as to its divine import, applies to *us* who live after the death of Christ is an accomplished fact. There is one more type of that death which we have not come to yet, and that is Jordan. Jordan is a type of the death of Christ as that through which "the land" may be entered. "The land" is a region outside the life of this world altogether. It can, perhaps, be most simply understood if we consider the character of the life in which the disciples were with the risen Christ, and He with them, during the forty days after His resurrection. *He* was beyond death, and outside the life of this world, and in His company *they*, too, had occupations and intercourse, and were found in living associations, that were completely outside the life of this world. The character and occupations of life in the land are set forth in a typical, but divinely perfect way, in the book of Deuteronomy, and also the conditions essential to its possession and enjoyment.

The glory of the present dispensation is that the people of God are so set in the knowledge of His love that they love Him. Apart from this there is no capacity to truly enjoy the land. Hence the Lord Jesus quoted verses 4 and 5

of this chapter as being "The first commandment of all" (Mark 12: 29). It is affecting to think of how He must have delighted to ponder this chapter, and to use it in meeting the temptations of the devil on the one hand, or, on the other, to answer the exercise of an intelligent man like the scribe of Mark 12. The Lord has singled out this chapter, and given it peculiar importance. This should surely arrest our attention.

"Hear, Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah; and thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength", Nothing could be more blessed than to know that it is within the range of possibility that we should love God with our whole moral being. It is indeed our supreme happiness to do so. The covenant having been made known, and the Mediator being now a quickening spirit it is possible for our days to be prolonged as those who love God. It is not only that the love of God is known, but He is loved by His people. Christians are characteristically "those who love God" (Romans 8: 28), and those who do so are known of God. "But if any one love God, he is known of him" (1 Corinthians 8: 3); there is something there which God can recognise, in contrast with mere knowledge. Love is the breath of life. Israel in the world to come will be in eternal life; they will know God as revealed in love by the Mediator, and they will be quickened so as to respond to Him in love. What a delight to think of God's Israel as having every part of their moral being permeated with love to God. I understand that the Hebrew word "quicken" conveys the thought not only of being made alive, but of being preserved in life. Now the glory of the present time is that God has been made known, and the One who has made Him known is the quickening Spirit so that we might live in responsive love to God. 1 Corinthians 8 takes up the thought of "Jehovah our God is one Jehovah". "There is no other God save one ... to us there is one God, the Father, of whom all things, and we for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom all things, and we by him". "To us" that is the position; "One God, the Father, of whom all things". Everything originated with Him — the ancient promises and oath, the deliverance from Egypt, the covenant, the land — all of Him, and for His own delight and glory. Then how did it all come about? By the Mediator, the one Lord, Jesus Christ, "by whom all things and we by him". Everything secured by His mediatorship, and His quickening power. The glory of the dispensation is that God has spoken from the very depths of His nature — from the very heart of heaven — in unquenchable love that we might know Him. And the Person who is the Mediator of all this is a quickening Spirit; He gives His own Spirit to those who believe, so that it may become spiritually possible for us to love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our understanding, and with all our strength. Most of us may feel ready to say, I have not come to that yet.

Well, let us pray about it! Let us desire to see the full glory of the dispensation in which we have part! In eternity we shall love God with the whole energy of our moral being. In the world to come Israel will do so as a people on earth. But do not let us think of it as being impossible today! Let us entertain more worthy thoughts of the spiritual possibilities of the present time!

You will notice that the mind, or understanding, is not mentioned in Deuteronomy 6: 5. The Lord added it (Mark 12: 30) from the Greek translation of the Scriptures, and it is now included in what is made known of the will of God. The mind has a most important place in Christianity, as we may see by looking up the passages which refer to it, The edification of the assembly depends on the mind, or understanding, being fruitful (1 Corinthians 14). So that one is to pray, or sing, or speak with the understanding as well as with the spirit. Paul would rather speak five words with his understanding, that he might instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue, even though the latter might be in the power of the spirit of God. The mind, as well as the heart and soul and strength, may be wholly filled with love to God.

Anything short of this falls short of the blessedness attached to being in "the bond of the covenant". It is a solemn judgment of God upon the heathen world that "God gave them up to *a reprobate mind*", or "a mind void of moral discernment". (See Romans 1) But as a result of new birth man gets *an exercised mind* which is not void of moral discernment. (See Romans 7) Then in Romans 12 we find that saints, indwelt by the Spirit and walking in spiritual liberty, have *a renewed mind* which transforms them into correspondence with the will of God. The scribe of Mark 12 had an exercised mind, and the Lord told him, in substance, that he was not far from having a renewed mind.

That God should be loved with the whole inward being of His people is surely most blessed, and none of us should rest content with anything less than this. It never was, nor could be, secured on the line of requirement; it can be secured, blessed be God, through God revealing Himself in love in His Son, and through the death of Christ, and through the Spirit being given to those who believe. The glory of the dispensation is that God is revealed in love, and that those to whom He has given His Spirit know Him as thus revealed, and love Him, and love one another. We may have to own that the glory of the dispensation is little known by us! Well, let us humble ourselves, and pray that we may know it better for the glory of God.

"The land" can only be enjoyed as the affections of God's people are in accord with the covenant. Hence, "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt impress them on thy sons, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou goest on the way,

and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign on thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and upon thy gates". In "the land" days are to be prolonged in love to God, and everything about us is to carry the impress of how we know God and delight in His will. Our conversation, our service, our countenances, the ordering of our houses, and what comes into them or goes out of them — all to be suitable to those who know God and love Him! Is it not spiritually attractive?

Then in "the land" everything is the fruit of divine giving. Blessed things are there which we did not originate or contribute to; "great and good cities which thou buildest not, and houses full of everything good which thou filledst not, and wells digged which thou diggedst not, vineyards and oliveyards which thou plantedst not". God has provided everything that is essential to the enjoyment of the life which is common to His saints viewed as risen with Christ. Cities, houses, wells, vineyards and olive-yards all have their spiritual counterpart. We are "fellow citizens of the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2: 19); "the cities of our God" are in "the land"; the ideas of "cities" is not connected with the wilderness, but with what is over Jordan. The life of the world is centralised in its cities, but God would give His answer to that in *His* cities. The assemblies, from this point of view, are communities with a civic life all their own. They stand on spiritual territory — on ground which is contrasted by the Spirit of God with being "alive in the world" (Colossians 2: 20). *Christ* is the life of the saints viewed as dwelling together as fellow citizens.

Then "houses full of everything good" would suggest such household conditions as are outlined for us in Colossians and Ephesians. It is to be noted that it is in epistles which contemplate the saints as over Jordan that we get the divine ordering of Christian households. I think we can see that houses thus ordered would be "full of everything good". Each "house" would contribute spiritually to the common civic life as fellow-citizens. "Wells digged" would refer to sources of spiritual refreshment which have been furnished through the labour of others — primarily by the labour of the apostles, but in a subordinate way by the labours of many others who have opened up to the people of God springs of refreshment. "Vineyards and oliveyards" would speak of fulness of joy and of spiritual grace and power. All is looked at here as given in divine love, and according to the promise and oath of God. Nothing is acquired on the principle of works. It is all, as we should say in New Testament language, of the Father (Colossians 1: 12; Ephesians 1: 3); it is all the fruit of the riches of God's mercy and of His great love, and of the

surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2).

No epistle magnifies the absoluteness of mercy, love and grace as Ephesians does. All is as much of grace there as in Romans.

At the beginning all was prepared before the people were called in. All that was set forth in the city, the house, the well, the vineyard, the olive-yard, was set up amongst the saints in the power of the Holy Spirit. All the great and good things were there, and men were called to come into them. It is encouraging and liberating to consider that the most blessed things are provided without contribution from us. Everything essential to our associations, our comfort, our happiness and fatness of soul, is provided, and we come into it purely on the footing of grace. We have to continue in the goodness of God; to depart from it is apostasy. Paul does not say that the Gentile will be cut off if he does not do what is good, or if he does not respond to the goodness of God, but if he does not abide in it. We have to keep the blessed God before us as the Object of our hearts. The supreme truth of Scripture is the Headship of God. David said, "Thou art exalted as Head above all; and riches and glory are of thee ... for all is of thee" (1 Chronicles 29: 10 - 15). The Head of Christ is God; everything that is in Christ, the blessed anointed Man has its origin in God. Luke 14, Luke 15, brings out that everything is divinely provided — the feast, the robe, the ring, the shoes, the fatted calf — and all flows from the heart of God. We are receivers, not contributors, though surely all that originates with God reverts to Him in praise. God's blessed universe is going to be filled out of His fulness, and all is going to revert to Him in praise. It is a marvellous thought!

This is never to be forgotten (verse 12). In the enjoyment even of good there is danger that we may forget the Source of it, or lose the sense of the infinite mercy and grace that secured such as we were for such blessing. Hence the call to "remember" in Ephesians 2: 11. God is a jealous God in the midst of His people (verse 15): He loves them so much that He cannot bear to lose their affections.

The temptation at Massah (verse 16) was a very serious matter in God's sight. There was not water for the people to drink, and they said, "Is Jehovah among us or not?" (Exodus 17). They took little account of what they had already known of God, either His ancient promises or His great deliverance, or His pillar of cloud and fire, or His supply of daily manna. They were ready, the moment a test came, to say, "Is Jehovah among us or not?" The Lord had His testing time, but it never raised any question in His mind as to whether God was with Him or not. He did not need to prove it by casting Himself down from

the edge of the temple. He answered the tempter by this very scripture. Let us beware of the unbelief which would raise a question as to whether God is with His people or not! He is so pledged to them in love and faithfulness that to question it is to tempt Him.

Let us refer again, for a moment, to God swearing to the fathers to give the land. It is mentioned three times in this chapter (verses 10, 18, 23). It must strike everyone of us that it is an extraordinary thing for God to swear. We might say, I think, with all reverence that it would not be an ordinary matter for God to take an oath. Such a solemn asseveration on God's part would only be called forth by the activities of tremendous powers of evil, standing, as it were, to challenge His right of way. Under such circumstances "God, willing to shew more abundantly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of his purpose, intervened by an oath, that by two unchangeable things, in which it was impossible that God should lie, we might have a strong encouragement who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us" (Hebrews 6: 13 - 20). Whether it is the swearing to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as to the land; or the swearing that the generation of hardened unbelief should not enter into God's rest (Psalm 95: 11); or the swearing which constituted Christ a priest forever after the order of Melchisedek (Psalm 110: 4); or the swearing that unto God every knee shall bow (Isaiah 45: 23), the oath on God's part is called forth by the presence of conditions which are contrary to Him.

We have already remarked that when "the land" was first spoken of the Canaanite was there; adverse powers were present. The swearing of the oath by Jehovah was in Genesis 22, after Isaac had been, in figure, offered up, and received again from the dead — a precious type of Christ, the Son of the Father's love.

Then it was said, "Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies". A hostile power was in evidence, but it was to be overthrown and dispossessed. So "the land" represents a sphere which has been held by the power of evil, but from which that power is to be cast out so that the people of God may enjoy a good that is wholly of God — a good that is the divine answer to the evil that was there. "The land" is specifically called "the land of promise" (Hebrews 11: 9), so that it may be regarded as covering figuratively the whole range of divine promise.

If we consider the development of divine promise I think we shall find that as certain manifestations of the power of evil made their appearance in the world God met them by promises. He would defeat the enemy, and in place of every evil He would bring in a corresponding good. The "seven nations greater and mightier than thou" would represent the complete power of spiritual

wickedness. See Ephesians 6: 12. We have to take account of the fact that evil did not originate in this world; it had its origin in the devil (1 John 3: 8), and was found also in other beings who are called his angels. But it came in and got a footing here, and God was displaced in the hearts of His highly favoured creatures. To displace or misrepresent God, or to alienate man from God, and from all that is in the thought of God for man, was, and is, the great design of the enemy. But God met the working of evil in the garden of Eden by a statement which, though not addressed directly to man, had the nature of promise. The Seed of the woman should crush the serpent's head; through Christ the devices of the devil should be defeated.

Sin and death came in, violence and corruption, and then — after the flood — human glory centralised in Babel, and idolatry. The whole system had then been introduced by which men should be held in ignorance of the true God. It might be developed in after ages, but all the elements had declared themselves. Now God shews His hand; He intervenes by calling Abraham out, and by giving promises. It was the God of glory who appeared to Abraham to speak to him of a land which He would shew, to speak of greatness which He would confer, to speak of blessing which should be for all families of the earth! On the principle of God having His place all the works of the devil should be undone. God would secure our attention to things which are great enough for Him to give as the God of glory.

One can see the importance of the covenant having its place in view of entrance into the land, for only a people with undivided hearts — hearts full of love to God — could appreciate what He proposes to give. It is such who can take up warfare for the land. They can understand in their measure the words of our New Testament Joshua, "We do not war according to flesh. For the arms of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful according to God to the overthrow of strongholds; overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God, and leading captive every thought into the obedience of the Christ" (2 Corinthians 10: 4). The "seven nations" represent those spiritual forces which oppose themselves to our true knowledge of God in the sphere of His own actings in resurrection power. They can only be overcome as every thought is led captive into the obedience of the Christ. The Christ whom we have learned to know as the Ark of the covenant, has gone through death as the obedient One in view of our knowing Him and being in association with Him as the risen One. "The land" has its antitype — not in heaven, for we do not expect to find "seven nations greater and mightier than thou" there — but in those blessings and associations which saints are privileged to possess and enjoy spiritually now as those who are risen with Christ, while yet the full power of spiritual wickedness has to be met

and overcome. There are spiritual powers in great activity to countervail every divine thought, and to hinder the knowledge of God. Thoughts — apparently founded on Scripture — are brought forward; “the artifices of the devil” often take this form. Since the Lord has given light as to prophecy and dispensational truth an immense amount of this has been incorporated in various systems of error, and souls are often deceived by what appears to be increased light as to Scripture, whereas the real object is to obscure the true grace of God as made known in the glad tidings, and to bring in entirely wrong thoughts of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father.

Every spiritual gain is secured now at the cost of conflict, and this is particularly the case in regard to what answers to “the land”. Where there is desire to walk in the present truth, and to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, the most subtle efforts of the enemy will be put forth to hinder it.

DEUTERONOMY 7

Deuteronomy 7

The "seven nations greater and mightier than thou" represent spiritual powers that are opposed to God, and to the blessing of His people. "Our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against principalities, against authorities, against the universal lords of this darkness, against spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies" (Ephesians 6: 11). We have to recognise that there are evil powers greater than man whose influence is being exerted upon men to darken and pervert all that is of God. The possession and enjoyment of the inheritance is dependent upon the overthrow of these powers.

When Paul spoke of "the universal lords of this darkness" he was referring to powers which God would dispossess and displace so far as His people were concerned. Divine light was to shine in holy brilliance where the darkness had been. Instead of "spiritual power of wickedness" holding sway, His people were to possess and enjoy a God-given inheritance. So that "the land" as possessed by the people of God is contrasted with certain former conditions, and is the divine answer to those conditions. Light is relative to darkness, reconciliation is contrasted with enmity, reigning in life stands over against the reign of death, the reign of grace through righteousness to eternal life is contrasted with the reign of sin in the power of death, eternal life as the act of favour of God comes in as the contrast with death as the wages of sin, quickened with the Christ is said of those who had been dead in offences and sins, the putting on the new man is contrasted with the old man of our former conversation, sharing the portion of the saints in light is set over against being under the authority of darkness, the expression "the only true God" derives its force from the existence of the many false gods of idolatry, "the truth" stands out in distinctiveness in contrast to all that has the nature of a lie. The inheritance is where the power of the enemy *has been*, but it is *now* to be held for God through the victory of faith.

The inheritance as typified in "the land" has relation to the sphere in which the enemy had operated; it is the fruit of God's victory over every form of the enemy's power. And it is easy to see what a great place this has throughout Scripture.

But the "heirs" have something which is even more precious than the inheritance; that is, their own relationship to the One who in love gives the inheritance. "Ye are sons of Jehovah your God" (Deuteronomy 14: 1). Eternal life is the inheritance as set forth in "the land"; the Lord speaks of eternal life as being inherited (Matthew 19: 29); and this was understood by others, for

more than one said, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10: 17; Luke 10: 25). But the relationship of "sons" is for the satisfaction of the heart of God; He marked the saints out for sonship to Himself "before the world's foundation". This stands connected with eternal purpose, when God had nothing to consider but how He would provide for the satisfaction of His own love. The heirs of the inheritance have their own personal relationship with God as sons, and this is even greater and sweeter than the inheritance. Indeed the inheritance derives its true blessedness from being taken up by those who are personally in the relationship and affections of sons. Eternal life is the gift of God for men, but sonship is *for the delight of God*. Revelation 21: 7 gives the two sides:—"He that overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be to him God, and he shall be to me son".

Every darkening influence — whether it be lawlessness, hatred, corruption, pride, idolatry, philosophy, self-righteousness, infidelity, superstition, or whatever has the character of a lie or of antichrist — has to be overcome and displaced. The power of the enemy lies in "reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God". These things have their origin in heavenly places: they proceed from spiritual powers of wickedness — the universal lords of the darkness that is here. The thought of this is intensely serious. There are great powers standing against the knowledge of God, and they have to be cast out, so that all that God is, as known through promise, may be enjoyed by His people. God would displace every thought that the enemy has brought in by what is of Himself, meeting every evil by a corresponding good, and meeting every lie by the truth, so that His people may stand in an inheritance that is wholly of God in the very region that has been held by the power of evil.

Every darkening influence is to be overcome, and the armour in Ephesians 6 shews us the moral features with which the saints need to be invested if they are to stand as victors in the conflict. Paul used spiritual weapons — weapons that no power of darkness could stand against — and he used them as one who was personally invested with "the panoply of God", and who was "strong in the Lord, and in the might of his strength". Acquaintance with truth in terms is not sufficient; the loins must be girt about, with it. The breast-plate of righteousness must be put on, the feet shod with the preparation of the glad tidings of peace. The shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, must all be there. And the soldier in this warfare must pray "at all seasons, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit".

It is indeed a "deadly fight" between the light of God and satanic darkness, and the enjoyment of the inheritance depends not only on victory, but on the

maintenance of absolute separation from what is of darkness. "Then thou shalt utterly destroy them: thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them. And thou shalt make no marriages with them: thy daughter shalt thou not give unto his son, nor take his daughter for thy son; for he will turn away thy son from following me" (verses 2, 3). There must be the uncompromising refusal of every principle which is not of God, especially when it takes a religious form. "But thus shall ye deal with them: ye shall break down their altars, and shatter their statues, and hew down their asherahs, and burn their graven images with fire".

Satan's great object in the world is to darken souls as to God. He does this not only in the gross form of heathen idolatry, but by the perversion and corruption of Christianity, and the introduction of what is idolatrous in principle, or in direct opposition to the truth. We must never allow ourselves to be persuaded that religious error is a small matter, or that earnestness or zeal in connection with what is untrue makes it worthy of respect. Everything opposed to the true knowledge of God and of Christ, and to the enjoyment of the inheritance by the people of God, is satanic in origin, and no terms are to be made with it. At the present day the spirit of compromise is everywhere in the air. Even when things are judged to be evil there is a great tendency to make covenants with them. A protest against evil has not much force if we go on with the things we protest against.

It need hardly be said that the conflict is not with persons. "Our struggle is not against blood and flesh"; it is against evil influences which operate through persons. As to the persons we desire that they may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. "For a holy people art thou unto Jehovah thy God: Jehovah thy God hath chosen thee to be unto him a people for a possession, above all the peoples that are upon the face of the earth" (verse 6). We are called to be vessels to honour. See 2 Timothy 2 "Wooden and earthen" vessels would represent those who are of fleshly or natural character, but "gold and silver vessels" would represent those who are spiritually formed for the pleasure of God. If we wish to be vessels to honour we must purify ourselves from vessels to dishonour in separating from them. A vessel to dishonour would be one who gave a wrong impression of God, or who in some way perverted the truth. "A holy people ... unto Jehovah ... for a possession" must necessarily be entirely separate from what is of darkness, cherishing the precious light of God, and enjoying the portion of the saints in light, so that they may be a holy possession for Him.

Verses 7, 8 are a touching reminder that we owe all to sovereign love, and to God's faithfulness to His promise and oath. But if it is ever true that He is "the

faithful God, who keepeth covenant and mercy to a thousand generations with them that love him and keep his commandments" (verse 9), covenant conditions on our side must be maintained, and no faithful heart would wish it to be otherwise. Those that hate Him will be repaid "each to his face". God's ways in government secure blessing to those who love Him and keep His ordinances, but they are solemnly retributive to those who do otherwise. If God gives light as to His love and faithfulness it is a most solemn thing not to be affected by it. If He gives any spiritual light and we do not come into accord with it, we may expect to find that His ways are retributive. When any God-given light has been, in principle, hated rather than loved, the result has been that souls have lost what they once seemed to enjoy. We have seen Christians refuse divine light, and go back into things which they once judged. One would not say that any true believer could be spoken of as a hater of God, but the mind of the flesh is enmity against God, and a true believer may practically be influenced and coloured by something which is, at the moment, utterly opposed to the mind of God. It is quite possible to admit the rights of God abstractly, and to profess the truth in a general way, and yet be much opposed to what is of God as sought to be worked out practically. We are tested when it comes to the application of what is of God in a practical way to our walk and associations, because increase of light involves displacement of certain elements of darkness which have been there, and we are not always prepared for this.

Conditional upon the obedience of His people God pledges Himself to them in faithfulness. "He will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee, and will bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy ground, thy corn and thy new wine, and thine oil, the offspring of thy kine, and the increase of thy sheep, in the land which he swore unto thy fathers to give thee" (verse 13). Every kind of spiritual increase is secured to a faithful people by God's sworn covenant and mercy. Barrenness and unfruitfulness can only be regarded as a special and serious exercise. Abundant increase is the normal experience, and the absence of all sickness in a moral sense — "the evil infirmities of Egypt, which thou knowest". We have known painfully what those "evil infirmities" were. "For we were once ourselves also without intelligence, disobedient, wandering in error, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another" (Titus 3: 3). Such "evil infirmities" are not with those who "become heirs according to the hope of eternal life". Where God's love is complacent there will be spiritual health and increase; it will be proved that, as Solomon said, "There has not failed one word of all his good promises which he spoke through Moses his servant" (1 Kings 8: 56). God verified every word which He had spoken. Nothing could be more blessed than to have continual

experience of spiritual increase. Christendom is on the line of seeking material increase — increase of numbers and influence in the world, an enlarged status here — but the true answer to these promises lies in spiritual increase.

Paul speaks of the glad tidings as “bearing fruit and growing, even as also among you, from the day ye heard them and knew indeed the grace of God in truth”.

He speaks of “Bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by the true knowledge of God”. He speaks of “The head, from whom all the body, ministered to and united together by the joints and bands, increases with the increase of God” (Colossians 1: 6, 10; Colossians 2: 19). This is the kind of increase which should be our great object of desire.

God would greatly encourage us to pursue a course which leads to unlimited expansion and fruitfulness in a spiritual sense. He would encourage us to be without fear as to every hostile power (verses 17, 18). God can use apparently insignificant means — “the hornet” — to discomfit the adversaries. “Thou shalt not be afraid of them; for Jehovah thy God is in thy midst, a God great and terrible” (verse 21). The powers of evil and darkness are, indeed, greater than we are, but they are not greater than God, and *with Him* we may move into the conflict with calm confidence. Every darkening influence is to be overcome, and every thought led captive into the obedience of the Christ. We need not fear. Our danger lies, not in the power of the enemy, but in the possibility that we may see something attractive in what pertains to that enemy, and take it to us (verse 25). There is to be no appropriation even of what may seem valuable in itself if it has acquired through idolatrous use the character of “an abomination to Jehovah thy God”. Everything connected with idolatrous worship is to be detested and utterly abhorred, “for it is a cursed thing”. God’s curse is not only now on material images, but on everything that perverts the glad tidings. “But if even we or an angel out of heaven announce as glad tidings to you anything besides what we have announced as glad tidings to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1: 8, 9).

The Galatians when they did not know God “were in bondage to those who by nature are not gods” — they had been poor idolaters. But in turning to Judaism, circumcision, law-keeping, and observing days and months and times and years they were turning “again to the weak and beggarly principles to which ye desire to be again anew in bondage” (Galatians 4: 8 - 11). They were going back to that which was as great a darkening bondage as that of the heathen world. It is an important instruction for us in a day when so much that passes for Christianity is not at all in accord with Paul’s glad tidings, but is rather Judaism with Christian terms attached to it. Instead of illuminating men

with the light of God revealed in Christ it darkens their souls by putting them on the line of works, prayers, sacraments, and all kinds of activities which never perfect their relations with God. It is all part of the influence of "the universal lords of this darkness".

DEUTERONOMY 8

Deuteronomy 8

This chapter brings before us in a striking way God's paternal chastening of His sons in the wilderness, and the end which His love has in view in that chastening. All is "to do thee good at thy latter end" (verse 16) when the wealth of the land is entered upon, which is here described with a greater fulness of detail than before. God's disciplinary ways belong to the wilderness, but they have the land in view, and they are always to be kept in mind.

There is no mention in this chapter of the ways of the people, no reference to their unbelief or their murmurings. The chastening ways of God are the subject; "all the way" is viewed as the leading of Jehovah. The whole of the "forty years in the wilderness" has been divine leading, divine chastening, divine education. We have all had to feel that God's ways with us have been of a humbling character. "To humble thee" (verse 2); "and he humbled thee" (verse 3); "that he might humble thee" (verse 16). We may have been inclined to regard such experiences as being largely wasted time. But in the outlook of this chapter not a day of it has been wasted. There has not been a single unnecessary encampment; not a spot nor a step that we can afford to forget. There has been something of spiritual and abiding value in it all. None of it is to be forgotten in the land.

In Deuteronomy 8 we are not looked at as going through the experiences of the wilderness, but as getting spiritual intelligence as to them under the instruction of Christ, after we have gone through them, so that we may understand their divine intent. A faithful God has been patiently teaching us lessons which are all essential in view of our entering the land and enjoying its wealth. God had the land before Him from the beginning as the inheritance to which He would bring His sons, and His leading and chastening of those sons always had some bearing on the end that was before Him. His ways always subserve the purposes of His love.

God must have His sons conformed to Christ, and with this in view He has to humble us and to prove us. A large part of our wilderness experience is to test whether we are in subjection to God or not, and to bring home to us how much there is in our hearts that is not, according to Christ. HE was ever in subjection and obedience; it was never a question whether He would keep God's commandments or not; He did always the things that pleased the Father.

We, being what we are, need humbling; we need to be proved that we may know what is in our heart. There is a great deal of self-deception with us all until God has proved us. We find out then how much there is in us that is unlike Christ. And God uses this in His grace to create "hunger" in our souls. The humbling lies in the discovery, under divine proving, of how unlike we are to Christ, and how unable we are, of ourselves, to become like Him. God allows this to become an intense exercise; He "suffered thee to hunger". He allows the sense of utter insufficiency in ourselves to be keenly felt, that there may be a deep soul-craving for a sufficiency that is God-given — that is not known to us naturally at all. "Which thou hast not known, and which thy fathers knew not".

God has led us by a way designed to reduce and humble us. We had to "hunger and thirst after righteousness" that we might prove divine sufficiency. Manna speaks of divine sufficiency for each day. "He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little wanted nothing" (Exodus 16: 18). "But God is able to make every gracious gift abound towards you, that, having in every way always all-sufficiency, ye may abound to every good work" (2 Corinthians 9: 8). No one knows the value of the manna but a humbled soul who has been "suffered ... to hunger". The humbling need has to be felt before the supply comes. As humbled under the mighty hand of God we learn to appreciate Christ, who in wondrous grace was once humbled here. If my heart is haughty and mine eyes lofty, if I "exercise myself in great matters, and in things too wonderful for me" (Psalm 131), I am a long way from appreciating "Christ once humbled here". But the divine humblings bring us morally nearer to Him who was "meek and lowly in heart". They create "hunger" for food that will nourish us for a life that is patterned after Christ.

"He ... fed thee with the manna". The humbling and the hunger are not all. There had been right through the wilderness the proving of divine faithfulness and sufficiency. God had been saying to them, and is now saying to us, You must live by what comes directly from Me; I will be sufficient for you. God would remind us of how His grace has waited upon us and sustained us. Every believer who has had experience of God's wilderness ways has had sufficient proof of this to know it to be a reality. In dependence upon God as known in grace we have found support and strength. Every bit of life according to God in the wilderness is in the strength of grace that comes from heaven.

The kind of life that manna sustains was seen perfectly in Christ. There was not a step, not a word, that did not bring into evidence divine sufficiency; He lived by every word that went out of the mouth of God. In so far as we have done so we have learned what it was to be fed with manna. The daily "omer"

of manna was a necessity to the Israelite, and daily grace from heaven is a necessity to us. God would make us know that we do not live "by bread alone" — by natural resources — but by communications from Himself suited to each day's need. We have to learn that we do not live by outward circumstances or conditions, but by the way God is known to us. This is not anything that the wilderness could afford naturally. It is quite a new thing for us to find that what God has spoken is enough to keep us going through the most trying circumstances so that we live in something that is outside all circumstances. A man so living would not consider expediency; he would consider for God.

That was seen perfectly in the blessed Lord. The devil said to Him, You are a hungry man, but if you are the Son of God you can make this stone into bread; why not do it? The Lord replied by quoting the scripture before us in Deuteronomy 8. He was not living by bread, but by every word of God. He was living, as man should live, in relation to God. We are often more occupied as to how we can get comfortably through circumstances than concerned as to being in them in relation to God and His will. God's providential ordering could easily make all things comfortable for me, but that would not ensure my living spiritually in relation to Him. I do not need manna to make me happy and comfortable in a natural way in my circumstances, but to enable me to be in them in spiritual relation to God, so that I am sustained in my spirit by what comes to me from God. God would have us to live by His word; His sons can live on the communications which He makes to them. What a delight it was to God to have One Man here to whom His word was enough! He lived "by every word of God". I suppose every saint must have known what it was to live by *some* word that God has spoken but His beloved Son lived "by *every word* of God". He knew the full sustainment of what God could be for man, and in the consciousness of divine sufficiency He refused the devil's suggestion that He should make bread for Himself.

What is emphasised here is the fact that God in faithfulness provided the manna; it was there for them day by day whether they appreciated it or not; and its great lesson was that "man doth not live by bread alone, but by everything that goeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live". We know from the history in Numbers that the people lost appreciation of the manna. If we walk as men we shall lose taste for the manna. The Corinthians were walking as men, and by the wisdom of man; they were not living by every word of God. It is possible for us to be prudent, and to order our ways with outward propriety and yet have little taste for the manna. It is a pity to be so self-sufficient as to miss the proving of the divine sufficiency which is ever available through God's grace and faithfulness.

"Thy clothing grew not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years". This is what the faithfulness of God secured to His people in wilderness conditions. Clothing that does not, grow old — clothing suitable to the kingdom of God — is described in Romans 12 - Romans 14; we may see there the features with which God would have His people invested in the wilderness. God's faithfulness makes that raiment available, and no one has ever been able to wear it out! It is very durable; it will stand all the vicissitudes of the wilderness, The tribulations of the wilderness — the trying nature of the road — have brought out that God's people have been able to go through.

"Tribulation works endurance; and endurance, experience" (Romans 5: 3, 4). The experience is the proving that through divine faithfulness our foot did not swell. We could speak of ten thousand weaknesses in ourselves, but we have come through to the praise of the One who has brought us through. The wilderness, as viewed here, is just One long experience of divine faithfulness and care, and from this point of view it is intensely interesting. What God can be to His people in the wilderness is as important — in its place — as what He can bestow in the divinely given wealth of the land. Both combine to give us the knowledge of the blessed God who in grace has brought us to Himself.

"And know in thy heart that, as a man chasteneth his son, so Jehovah thy God chasteneth thee" (verse 6). God's chastening is parental, not merely punitive. He deals with us as with sons. See Hebrews 12. God began with the thought of sonship; "Thus saith Jehovah: Israel is my son, my firstborn. And I say to thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me" (Exodus 4: 22, 23). Then all through the wilderness, "as a man chasteneth his son, so Jehovah thy God chasteneth thee". And in the land, "Ye are sons of Jehovah your God" (Deuteronomy 14: 1). We are always sons in the thought of God; it is the blessed relationship with Himself in which His love has set us. We were sons in divine purpose from eternity. Then, when God's calling separated us from the world, it was that we might receive sonship. Then divine chastening came in that we might be freed from things unsuitable in sons, that we might be partakers of God's holiness, and fruitful in all that has the character of righteousness, so that sons' affections might be free. And, finally, in the land the inheritance is enjoyed by the heirs in the consciousness of their relationship and dignity as sons of God for His delight. The inheritance is their God-given portion, but they themselves are His portion, His inheritance, His delight, as in the relationship which His love has called them into, and formed them for. Chastening deals with what is unsuitable in us, but it deals with it from the standpoint of the blessed relationship into which God has called us.

Verses 7 - 10 give us a very comprehensive summary of the wealth of the "good land" which is the fruition of divine promise. There are three parts in the description. Verse 7 speaks of waterbrooks, springs and deep waters; that would have reference to the presence and activities of the Holy Spirit in the saints. Then there is a sevenfold plenty in verse 8 which is suggestive of the completeness of satisfaction which the saints may become possessed of in Christ. And the iron and copper of verse 9 are the hidden strength and wealth of the land. Digging is necessary to secure them; they lie beneath the surface, and can only be acquired as the product of strenuous exercise. But these things are so important that they call for consideration in detail.

"Waterbrooks", "springs", and "deep waters" speak of the diversity, freshness and fulness of the power of the Holy Spirit, in the saints. These are not "wells dugged" as in chapter 6, which would refer to sources of refreshment made available by the spiritual labour of others. These are directly God-given, and I have no doubt they refer to the Spirit as spoken of by the Lord in the Gospel of John. John 4 speaks of the Spirit as living water given by the Son of God which should become in the believer "a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life". And Jesus made known how the "waterbrooks" flow when He "stood and cried saying, If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this he said concerning the Spirit, which they that believed on him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified" (John 7: 37 - 39). Then the Comforter as spoken of in John 14, John 15 and John 16 would surely be typified by the "deep waters".

It is striking that; the first feature mentioned of the "good land" makes prominent, figuratively, the Holy Spirit in His varied activities. Eternal life will only be known and enjoyed as the result of the Fountain of water springing up into it. All refreshment and fertility in that region is dependent on the Spirit. There must be the coming to the Son of God and drinking so that the "rivers of living water" may flow. To how many "eternal life" means only the assurance that one is eternally safe, but in Scripture it is "*the blessing*" (Psalm 133: 3); it means present and eternal satisfaction (John 4: 14); it means fulness of joy (1 John 1: 4). There is no hunger, no thirst, no dryness nor barrenness in the region of eternal life. It is "a land of waterbrooks, of springs, and of deep waters, that gush forth in the valleys and hills". The very language used is calculated to awaken the most lively anticipation in our hearts. For, remember, it is presented to us here in all its attractiveness by our blessed Instructor to allure our hearts onward to something not yet possessed. It is the blessed thought of God, the gift of His love, but, from the standpoint of

Deuteronomy 8, not yet entered upon in realisation. It is into such a land our God would bring us.

“Amid those favoured hills,
The waterbrooks run down;
River and rill the valleys fill;
And the glad land the Lord doth till,
With plenty crown”.

No greater service could be rendered to the people of God today than to awaken the interest of their hearts in eternal life as that which answers spiritually to the “good land”. The heart of God cherishes the thought of eternal life for man, as we see in John 3; and then in John 4 the Spirit is given as living water to be in us a Fountain springing up into eternal life — to carry *our* affections in that direction. It is a real loss for souls to read the scriptures as to eternal life in John’s Gospel merely as assurance of eternal security. They involve this, most surely, but they mean very much more than this; they suggest infinite present satisfaction and blessedness. How few can truly say that they know what it is to live in a “region of satisfied desire” ! But that this is the thought of God’s love for His people, and that this is involved in eternal life, it is impossible, in the face of Scripture, to deny. Let us open our hearts more fully to the precious thoughts of divine love!

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12 of the varied gifts bestowed by the Spirit and exercised in His power. The Spirit divides “to each in particular according as he pleases”, and it is God who sets gifts in the assembly. The victorious and ascended Christ has also given gifts — “some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers” (Ephesians 4: 8 - 11).

All these are “waterbrooks” which flow, fed from “the rain from heaven”, and take their divinely appointed course under the ordering of God without tarrying for the sanction or ordination of men. There is the greatest diversity in spiritual manifestations; no one ever saw two waterbrooks exactly alike; each gift in the power of the Spirit has its own distinctiveness, and carries refreshment and promotes spiritual fertility wherever it flows. The precious things of God are thus kept before the attention of saints in a living way, and fruitfulness is stimulated. How great the contrast between this and the human arrangements and order which prevail in Christendom! Men lay out canals of their own devising, but “living water” does not flow in artificial channels; the Spirit of God refuses to be restricted by the formal arrangements of men.

But we must not limit the activities of the Spirit, as typified in these gushing streams, to specific gifts for ministry. As set together in assembly relations each brother and each sister is to be a contributor of spiritual refreshment. The waterbrooks and springs and deep waters are in the saints generally. The effect of wilderness discipline is to bring under judgment all the elements that would cause believers to be a discomfort to each other, that there may be the unhindered flow of what is of the Spirit of God for mutual refreshment and comfort. Whether it be in the experience of the valleys (Philippians 2), or the hills (Philippians 3), the heavenly springs should flow.

It is very exercising when there is not a flow of "living water" amongst saints. If things are dry I must not blame others; are "rivers of living water" flowing out of me? Until these things take form in the saints they are not available for mutual refreshment. But the end of the humbling and parental discipline of the wilderness is that we come into the land to be possessed of these things, and as being possessed they become available for the brethren. Whatever each of us may have that is spiritual and of Christ is for the benefit of all the brethren. Every brother and sister should have an intense conviction of that. The humblings of the wilderness have in view spiritual enrichment in the land.

The scriptures to which we have referred in John's Gospel have every believer in view. They speak of inward satisfaction, and of ability for mutual refreshment, which *every* saint may look to realise in his own experience. It should be a matter of exercise and desire with each one of us to prove the present gain of the Spirit in this way. One has to admit that it is little known generally, and perhaps none of us can say that we know it more than in very feeble measure. But it is set before us in Deuteronomy 8 as an attractive prospect to encourage any desire which may be present with us towards entering the "good land". Every refreshment and fruit that belongs to "the land" is yielded in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is well to note that this is the first feature of "the land" in which Christ would instruct us. Eternal life is "from the Spirit" (Galatians 6: 8).

Then it is "a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive-trees and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, where thou shalt lack nothing" (verses 8, 9). A great wealth of spiritual substance is brought before us here. We are apt to pass too lightly over these things, but God would have us to ponder each separate item; we shall find great gain in doing so, with prayer that we may have spiritual understanding in regard to them.

"Wheat" speaks of what Christ was as coming in after a new and heavenly order entirely for the pleasure of God. He was "The grain of wheat", which

would have abode alone if it had not fallen into the ground and died. "But if it die, it bears much fruit" (John 12: 24). The saints as the fruit of Christ in death are wheat for the garner of God. "Such as the heavenly one, such also the heavenly ones. And as we have borne the image of the one made of dust, we shall bear also the image of the heavenly one" (1 Corinthians 15:48,49). Believers are "of Christ" — of that order of man — through grace and by the work of God. The food of the land would nourish our souls in the truth of this.

"Barley" — as seen in the "sheaf of the first-fruits" — is figurative of Christ in resurrection, "first-fruits of those fallen asleep". He went into death that He might be entitled to bring out of death all those who are His, and He will do this at His coming for those fallen asleep. There can be no doubt that the saints will all be raised after the order of Christ as risen. But if this is to be manifestly so at His coming He would nourish our souls even now on the great spiritual reality that He has been accepted for us as the risen One. We come into the land as His brethren, risen with Him.

"Vines" yield that "which gladdeneth the heart of man" (Psalm 104:16), and even "cheers God and man" (Judges 9:13). In John 15 where the Lord speaks of Himself as "the true vine", He says, "I have spoken these things to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy be full". "The land" is a sphere characterised by fulness of joy, so that when John reports to us "the eternal life, which was with the Father, and has been manifested to us", he adds, "And these things write we to you that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:4). When, some years back, there was a ministry which called attention to the true character and blessedness of eternal life, it was opposed as being an attempt to rob the saints of something. Whereas the object of that ministry was to bring about, through divine grace, that eternal life should not be a mere word to us, but that we should have some experimental knowledge of its preciousness, and of the fulness of joy which is involved in it. Is it not to be greatly desired that Christians generally should have more spiritual joy? It is one of the attractive features of the land that it is "a land of ... vines"; it yields abundant joy.

"Fig-trees" represent that sweet fruit of righteousness which Israel, under divine culture, failed to yield. See Luke 13: 6 - 9; Matthew 21: 19. One result of the Father's chastening is that it "yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those exercised by it" (Hebrews 12: 11). And Paul prays for the Philippians that they might be "complete as regards the fruit of righteousness, which is by Jesus Christ, to God's glory and praise" (Philippians 1: 11). The fruit of "the land" is figurative of precious things which take form "by Jesus Christ" and in the power of the Spirit in the saints. Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians

describe that fruit in detail. "The fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Ephesians 5: 9).

"Pomegranates" were on the skirts of the cloak of the priestly ephod (Exodus 28: 33), and they were also on the two pillars of brass for the porch of the temple (1 Kings 7: 18). They are also mentioned as characteristic of the bride in the Song of Solomon; when she is spoken of as a garden enclosed the Bridegroom says of her, "Thy shoots are a paradise of pomegranates, with precious fruits" (4: 13). They seem thus to be suggestive of "fruit unto holiness" as brought forth in the saints through being sustained by the priestly service of Christ. The Philadelphian overcomer who is made a pillar in the temple of God would have adornments such as the pomegranates represent, and such fruit is very precious to the heart of Christ as brought forth by His sister, His spouse. "Pomegranates" are yielded by holy affections, for holiness is by love, not by faith. See 1 Thessalonians 3: 12, 13. Such affections would secure unity amongst the brethren, and we may learn from John 17 how delightful this is to the Lord.

It is sad to have to recall that the Spirit of God has not only spoken of the pomegranates as adorning the pillars in the temple (1 Kings 7), but He has recorded how those pillars were broken up, and the brass thereof carried to Babylon (Jeremiah 52: 17 - 23). It is a needful reminder that, through unfaithfulness and departure, holy adornments may be lost, as they have been in the Christian profession generally. Indeed the language of Joel might well be applied today, "Be ashamed, ye husbandmen; howl, ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley: because the harvest of the field hath perished. The vine is dried up, and the fig-tree languisheth; the pomegranate-tree, the palm also and the apple-tree; all the trees of the field are withered, yea, joy is withered away from the children of men" (Joel 1: 11, 12). But if things have withered through unfaithfulness there is yet space to repent, and to return through self-judgment to the precious thoughts of God as made good in Christ, and to humbly wait on Him to make them good in us by His Spirit. In Deuteronomy 8 the abundant wealth of "the land" is set before us in all its fulness, and the question is, Are we attracted by it? Does it allure our hearts? If so, it can, through infinite mercy, be still enjoyed, for in the heart and thought of God He has nothing less for His people.

"A land of olive-trees". Christ Himself could say, "But as for me, I am like a green olive-tree in the house of God; I will confide in the loving-kindness of God for ever and ever" (Psalm 52: 8). And it is the privilege of those who have His Spirit to take up in their measure, the same words. Jehovah had called Israel, "A green olive-tree, fair, of goodly fruit" (Jeremiah 11: 16); and such

has He called His saints to be today. As drawing all from God's loving-kindness, in contrast with the wicked man "spreading like a green tree in its native soil" (Psalm 37: 35), the saints become spiritual, and yield the fruit of the Spirit. They count upon God, they are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, and they partake of the root and fatness of God's goodness. "The land" is characterised as "a land of olive-trees", representing the saints as spiritual persons, capable of yielding spiritual fruit and ministering what is spiritual to others, all having its source in God and in the unction of His Spirit .

"Olive-trees and honey" are put together, intimating that "honey" here is not the sweetness of human nature, but of affections that are spiritual. It would speak of the sweet "consolation of love" which is the product of the united activities of the saints in the divine nature. Nothing could more aptly illustrate activities with a common purpose than a hive of bees. And "the land" is marked by the result of this in "honey". To have the wealth and sweetness of the land we must have the brethren, for the fruition of the land takes form in them by the Spirit. When we see this we begin to appreciate the essentiality of the Lord's commandment that we should "love one another". We begin to understand John's word that "we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren". We need the gain of all that is in the brethren, and we derive it as we love them, and have fellowship with one another. The formal arrangements of the congregational or hierarchal systems in the religious world are grievous to the Holy Spirit because they hinder the development of fellowship and the spiritual affections of the brethren. The wealth and sweetness of "the land" cannot be enjoyed under such conditions.

Plenty and satisfaction can be found in "the good land". It is "a land wherein thou shalt eat bread... and be filled, and shalt bless Jehovah thy God for the good land which he hath given thee" (verses 9, 10). Every spiritual desire finds complete satisfaction there.

The "iron" and "copper" of verse 9 indicate the strength of those divine principles which secure the people of God from the inroads of evil. Iron and brass, according to Deuteronomy, are for security against evil. "Iron and brass shall be thy bolts" (Deuteronomy 33: 25). Things cannot be maintained for God, or for the joy of His people, without "bolts". It has often been noticed that in the days of Nehemiah it is not recorded that Eliashib the high priest put locks and bars on the sheep-gate which he built. He had no bolts of iron and brass, and this laxity led eventually to his preparing a great chamber in the courts of the house of God for the Ammonite (Nehemiah 3: 1; 13: 4 - 9). God would have us to be open brethren in relation to all that is good, but very exclusive in relation to what is evil.

"Iron" speaks of power to overcome the world. Before the time when all the power of the world will be broken by the "sceptre of iron" in the hand of Christ it has been broken morally by Him. He has overcome the world, and His saints can overcome also "through him that has loved us". In presence of divine power the nations are merely "as a potter's vessel". Jeremiah was appointed "an iron pillar, and brazen walls, against the whole land; against the kings of Judah, against its princes, against its priests, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee, saith Jehovah, to deliver thee" (Jeremiah 1: 18, 19).

"Brass (copper)" is clearly connected in Scripture with the unsparing judgment of evil, and moral separation from it. This is seen in the serpent of brass, the altar, the laver, and in the feet of the Son of Man in Revelation 1. As walking in the midst of the candlesticks He does not leave unjudged any feature of evil. If evil is not judged there will be no strength to maintain what is good, The holy and righteous discipline of the house of God is necessary for the safeguarding and preservation of the good that pertains to that house. The promise to the overcomer in Philadelphia is that he shall be made a pillar in the temple of God. It is an allusion to the pillars of brass in Solomon's temple; stability and strength are connected with the maintenance of holiness and truth, and this involves the judgment of evil, and separation from it.

Job 28 speaks in a striking way of the mining operations by which men get precious things out of the earth, and compares with them the finding of wisdom and understanding. And the conclusion reached at the end of the chapter is, "Lo, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding". Iron and brass would mark faithful saints as pursuing the path of separation indicated in 2 Timothy 2. The power of the Lord is with such, enabling them to steadfastly maintain good in separation from evil. We have to judge things first in ourselves. No evil has come into the Christian profession of which I cannot find the root and germ in my own flesh. The distinguishing of good and evil, and separating from evil, are most important. They involve deep exercise, answering to digging, but the result is that the soul is confirmed in moral strength, and this is the basis of all that is spiritual in our souls. The waters flow abundantly in the land, and there is great fruitfulness, but underlying are the iron and brass. They are worth attaining, even though only to be got by digging and by traversing "a path no bird of prey knoweth, and the vulture's eye hath not seen it; the proud beasts have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed over it".

The warnings of this chapter shew that even after the land has been possessed and enjoyed there are dangers. "Beware that thou forget not

Jehovah thy God, in not keeping his commandments ... lest when thou hast eaten and art full ... then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget Jehovah thy God ... and thou say in thy heart, My power and the might of my hand has procured me this wealth" (verses 11 - 17). Even after being in the land we may get lifted up and become self-confident. These warnings are wholesome for us, for we are as much in danger of forgetting God's former ways and humbling as was Israel.

DEUTERONOMY 9

Deuteronomy 9

"Hear, Israel! Thou art to pass over the Jordan this day", is a remarkable introduction to such a chapter as this. For it is a chapter which brings out in dark colours what the people had been according to the flesh. If God fulfils His promises and brings to pass His purpose it is not in any wise because His people are better than others according to the flesh. If "the land" is possessed it is by the power of God (verse 3), and because God will deal with everything that is opposed to the knowledge of Himself, and will fulfil the word sworn to the fathers (verses 4, 5). Entrance into the land is the fruit of divine power fulfilling divine purpose. Israel according to flesh was utterly unsuited to inherit the promises, and this is equally true of ourselves, and God would have us to know it. Hence the instruction of chapter 9.

There is a marked contrast between chapters 8 and 9, we have not read a word in chapter 8 about the wickedness or failure of the people in the wilderness;

"all the way" is regarded as having been come through by Jehovah's leading and care. But in chapter 9 the stiffneckedness, provokings, and rebellion of the past are strongly brought out. The history of the people of God — *our* history — has, indeed, made manifest that it is not for our righteousness, or for the uprightness of our heart, that we enter in to possess the land. See verses 4 - 6. If it is brought about that we do so it is through God's faithfulness to His own promises and purposes. As to ourselves according to flesh we are a stiffnecked people; on our side we have again and again "provoked Jehovah to wrath". And this not merely as unconverted persons. "From the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came to this place, ye have been rebellious against Jehovah" (verse 7); this is since conversion, as we should say.

Every phase of our history has proved what we are according to flesh. It is humbling to think of it all, and God would have His people thoroughly humbled as to what they are in themselves. My flesh at the present time is the same flesh that has been the source of every bit of weakness, or wilfulness, or unbelief, or departure that has ever manifested itself in me. If I think of it I must feel that lowliness and self-distrust become me, and that dependence upon God is my only security.

At Horeb, within forty days of the covenant being made, they so provoked Jehovah to wrath that they owed their preservation from destruction entirely

to the intercession of Moses. "And Jehovah listened unto me also at that time ... and I prayed for Aaron also at the same time". Perhaps none of us have yet realised how much we owe to the intercessory service of Christ, to His advocacy. Not one of us would have continued in the divine way, or would have been brought through in any measure of faithfulness to the present time, but for that blessed service of faithful love. We thank Him for His *finished* work, but let us never forget His *unfinished* work — His ceaseless service as the Intercessor and Advocate! It is true of each believer, as well as of Peter, that Christ prays for him that his faith fail not. Every one who enters the land owes it to the faithfulness of God, and to the intercession and advocacy of Christ. There has been quite enough in our past history to convince us that it must be so. And this leaves all credit and praise where it rightly belongs. All the glory belongs to God.

If Israel quickly turned aside from the covenant, it reminds us how quickly we, in Galatia, changed from Him that called us in Christ's grace to a different gospel! Horeb, Taberah, Massah, Kibroth-hattaavah, Kadesh-barnea have all had their corresponding features in our history. How soon we left our first love, and allowed idolatry and evil teaching! All that has been in the past history of the church, and in its present condition also, shews what we are. And have we not personally seen many sad cases of breakdown and departure, the fruit of worldliness and self-will, which have all exposed our own natural tendencies? If the failures of our brethren have not filled us with a deep sense of what we are they have not rightly affected us. And, to come more closely home, have we not discovered in our own hearts much unwatchfulness, lack of the spirit of prayer, lukewarmness as to Christ and His precious interests, hankering after the world, a seeking of our own things, not the things of Jesus Christ, risings of fleshly pride and various lusts? And all these things have been known to God even if they have not been exposed to our brethren We are to "Remember" and "forget not", all these things.

This is a very different remembrance to that of chapter 8: 2, but the same Voice calls us to both, and it is the Voice of the One who has not failed to exercise an unwearying intercession and advocacy which has prevailed on our behalf. "And I fell down before Jehovah, as at the first, forty days and forty nights, — I ate no bread and drank no water, — because of all your sin which ye had sinned, in doing what is evil in the eyes of Jehovah, to provoke him to anger" (verse 18). The Mediator of the covenant becomes the Advocate for those who so quickly depart from it! But for the intercession and advocacy of Christ where should we have been?

It is touching to see that our blessed Intercessor prays according to what is true in the mind of God concerning His people. If we lose all sense of it, He does not. Moses speaks of them as "Thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness Remember thy servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob They are indeed thy people and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest out with thy great power and with thy stretched-out arm". When the people of God behave badly we are apt to forget that they are redeemed, but Christ never does. It is impossible that what the flesh is, even in the people of God, could invalidate the divine redemption that has been wrought, or the election and calling of God, or the ancient promises, or the fact that God's people "are indeed thy people and thine inheritance".

But, the very fact that these things cannot be invalidated, and that they form the very basis of Christ's precious advocacy and intercession, necessitates the judgment of that in which the flesh has manifested itself. "And I took your sin, the calf which ye had made, and burned it with fire, and crushed it, and ground it very small, until it became fine dust; and I cast the dust thereof into the brook that flowed down from the mountain" (verse 31). The people had to drink it: the bitterness of anything idolatrous is always brought home to us. Indeed the intercession of Christ is often, I believe, answered by the discipline of God in a corrective way. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities" (Amos 3: 2). "Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatever a man shall sow, that also shall he reap. For he that sows to his own flesh, shall reap corruption from the flesh; but he that sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit shall reap eternal life" (Galatians 6: 7, 8).

DEUTERONOMY 10

Deuteronomy 10

If God is to have a people for His pleasure, as redeemed and answering to His love, it must be brought about, as a result of His own work in them, and of their abiding in Christ. And this is set forth typically in the chapter now before us.

We have seen what Jehovah proposed in the covenant through the mediatorship of Moses. What answers to it for us is the revelation of the love of God in His beloved Son. That love could not be satisfied without an answer to it being produced in His people. It would not suffice that the covenant should be made known as in the heart of God concerning His people; it must, necessarily, for His pleasure, be made good in their hearts. But chapter 9 has proved that this has not been the case naturally either with Israel or ourselves. On the contrary, stiffneckedness and rebellion have marked us. Then how can God fulfil His promises, and the purposes of His love, and secure what His heart desires! We must admit that it has all failed on the line of what is natural, but God would have us to understand that it can be secured on the line of what is spiritual. This is true both as to Israel and ourselves. Four times in the first four verses of this chapter we have reference to the "first" tables, and the "first" writing. We know that "the first" in Scripture refers to the natural, "the second" to the spiritual (1 Corinthians 15: 45 - 40). Everything connected with the natural man breaks down; all on that line is perversity and rebellion. So that Moses was constrained to cast the first tables out of his two hands and break them before the eyes of the people (Deuteronomy 9: 17).

Moses himself was typical of Christ as the One who could carry the covenant unbroken; the two tables were in His two hands. But there was no answer to it in man after the order of Adam fallen. The death of Christ made manifest that all was hopeless on that line, for if men could answer to God's pleasure what need that Christ should die for them? The hopelessness of the situation in that connection was demonstrated when the "two hands" of Christ were nailed to the cross. His being made a curse for the people was the most solemn evidence that the first tables were broken. It was the declaration that they were under the curse of a broken law, though He, in wondrous grace, was made a curse for them.

But when we come to the second "two tables" an entirely new thought is introduced. Moses was to hew for himself down here two tables for Jehovah to write upon. It suggests a divine work in man wrought under the hand of Christ as Mediator and Intercessor. The Gospel of Luke presents Him in that twofold

character, and we see Him in that Gospel working so that God might have "good pleasure in men". That is the theme of the praise of the heavenly host in Luke 2: 14. Proverbs 8: 30, 31 stands connected with this: "Then I was by him his artificer", — as it may be translated: see note in New Translation — "and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men".

Christ as the Wisdom of God had the joy of contemplating men, not as fallen and perverse, but as those with whom His delights could be, and He was God's Artificer to bring it about. Those who came under the Hand of Christ were divinely fashioned so that the covenant might be written upon them. "His hands and his feet" (Luke 24:40) cover what is presented in Luke's Gospel. "His feet" would refer to His blessed movements here, making God known in infinite grace, setting forth the covenant as it was in God's heart towards men. But "his hands" suggest the thought of mighty touches of divine skill on the souls of men, so that they might come into correspondence with God, and be responsive to Him. If Christ touches a man morally that man becomes impressionable Godward; there is an undoing of the works of the devil; there is something to shew the skilfulness of the Hand that has touched him. We could not think of Christ touching anybody without some evidence being left of His handiwork.

Moses hewing the tables is a type of Christ as God's Artificer, fashioning men for the good pleasure of God. At the end of Luke we see the result; men with their understanding opened to understand the Scriptures, men just ready to receive the promise of the Father, and to be clothed with power from on high, men "with great joy, and ... continually in the temple praising and blessing God". These were not men after the flesh — fallen and perverse — but men such as Christ and the blessed God could delight in. They were not morally of the first man, but of the second Man out of heaven.

Each of them was expressive of the truth that "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit". And we see them in the beginning of the Acts with the covenant written on them — knowing God's love and loving Him, and loving one another. They were then suitable for "the land"? which is, indeed, "the habitable part of his earth".

God has told us how He will cleanse Israel morally from all their uncleannesses and from all their idols. "And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and keep mine ordinances, and ye shall do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and ye shall be my

people, and I will be your God" (Ezekiel 36: 24 - 27). God will by His own work prepare the heart of Israel to be divinely written upon, and when it is so prepared He will fulfil the word in Jeremiah 31: 33, 34. "I will put my law in their inward parts, and will write it in their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people". All that in which they failed naturally will be secured in them spiritually by the work of God. I believe that the second tables, hewn by Moses, have a typical reference to this.

Paul applies the figure of tables divinely written upon to saints of the present period when he speaks of the saints at Corinth "being manifested to be Christ's epistle ministered by us, written, not with ink, but the Spirit of the living God; not on stone tables, but on fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3: 3). By divine working human hearts become "fleshy tables" on which Christ writes with the Spirit of the living God so that men carry in their affections the impress of what God is as revealed in grace. The new covenant is consummated,

as to the spirit of it, in those who know God through Christ the Mediator, and who love Him and love one another. But this is the fruit of divine working and teaching in a people quickened spiritually by the Lord. "The Spirit quickens ... Now the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3: 6, 17).

Believers now have "the Spirit of the Lord" — the Spirit of that glorious Man who is the Mediator of the new covenant. There is thus "liberty" to take up in holy affections what pertains to the covenant. Only such a people could truly enter into the land, or take up their inheritance in it in a spiritual way for the pleasure of God. It was not — it could not be — made good in Israel at that time, for it awaited the coming of Christ, and the closing up in His death of all that was connected with man after the flesh, and the gift of the Spirit from Him as risen and glorified. But it was set forth typically in the second tables that God would write in such a way as to secure what was in His own mind and heart. The covenant was utterly broken in connection with what man is naturally, but it will be divinely and permanently written in the heart of Israel in another day by the gracious working of God. And the spirit of it is made good today in those on whose hearts Christ writes, and who "looking on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3: 18).

The "ark of wood" suggests the preservation of the covenant — in contrast with its being broken — in a suitable vessel. It was so perfectly in Christ, and everything hangs upon that. It was written of Him "in the volume of the book", "To do thy good pleasure, my God, is my delight, and thy law is within my

heart" (Psalm 40: 7, 8). But He cherished and preserved it as the true "ark of wood" that He might make it the law of the "great congregation". The divine intent was that what was true in Him should become true by divine teaching, and by the presence of His Spirit, in the whole of God's Israel.

But when we think of God's "good pleasure" or "law" *as in the heart of Christ* what an immense expansion is given to it! We are at once carried far beyond *the letter* of "the ten words". The letter, applied to man in the flesh, only gave the knowledge of sin, and was a ministry of death and condemnation. But *the spirit* of the covenant was the knowledge of God as a Redeemer, Deliverer, and Saviour-God — as One so known by "thousands" as to be the Object, on their part, of love and obedience. The spirit of it was that all blessing should come in on the principle of God having His place with His creature, and that God should be known as the Source of all blessing. No right-minded creature could wish that blessing should come in on any other principle; indeed it is morally impossible that it should do so. For God must be God, and the creature must be in the place that becomes it. Otherwise all would be confusion. But see how wondrously God has wrought! A Divine Person — the Son — has come into the world saying, "Lo, I come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do, O God, thy will" (Hebrews 10: 7). All that God delights in for the blessing of His creature man has been brought in on the principle of love and obedience as in the heart of Christ. And the law as put in the inward parts of Israel and written in their heart, under the new covenant, will be the law as cherished and preserved in the heart of Christ. It will be the knowledge of God as forgiving and as bestowing upon them all the good that is in His heart.

It is of the utmost importance that we should think of the "good pleasure" or "law" of God as in the heart of Christ. Christ coming into the world as the obedient and righteous One brought in the good pleasure of God as to man in the full extent of it, and this in reference to all that man was as a sinner. We learn from Psalm 40 that it meant the bringing in of God's righteousness, and faithfulness, and salvation, and loving-kindness, and truth. See Psalm 40: 9, 10. God's thoughts toward us "cannot be reckoned up in order ... they are more than can be numbered" (Psalm 40: 5). The covenant, as we know it according to the spirit of it, is a ministry of righteousness and of the Spirit, and of God's innumerable thoughts of blessing as set forth in Christ. Our sins are purged, never to be remembered any more; we are sanctified and perfected in perpetuity through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10 enlarges on this as the outcome of God's will being taken up in Christ. God's innumerable thoughts of blessing are established in a way that glorifies Him, and fills believing hearts with joy and praise. We know the will or pleasure of God by seeing it made good by Christ. He has gone into death so

that all that was in the will of God for our blessing might be brought into effect.

The three great prophets, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah, bring out what we have been considering. Ezekiel shews how tables are prepared for divine writing; Jeremiah tells us of the writing on them; but Isaiah develops most fully how everything depends on the coming in of Christ, and on the pleasure of God being secured in Him. All hangs upon the Virgin's Son, Immanuel (Isaiah 7), who becomes the Servant upheld by Jehovah, and delighted in by Him (Isaiah 42: 1). "Jehovah had delight in him for his righteousness' sake: he hath magnified the law, and made it honourable" (Isaiah 42: 21.). We read, "The pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand" (Isaiah 53: 10). The Ark of the covenant is spoken of as God's strength and glory. See Psalm 78: 61; Psalm 132: 8. It typifies Christ as the One by whom God causes His counsel to stand, and does all His pleasure. The covenant is available for all the Israel of God as made good in Christ. It will never be understood, or rightly taken up, save in that way. So that everything depends now on our abiding in Christ; it is thus that the covenant will be preserved in its true power in our souls. The unction which we have received teaches us to "abide in him"; and John adds his personal exhortation; "And now, children, abide in him, that if he be manifested we may have boldness, and not be put to shame from before him at his coming ... Whoever abides in him does not sin ... He that says he abides in him ought, even as *he* walked, himself also so to walk" (1 John 2: 27, 28; 1 John 3: 6; 1 John 2: 6).

The ark as seen in Exodus 25 is typical of Christ personally as the One by whom all that is in the pleasure of God will be carried into effect in the moral universe. God and His will are to be supreme, and all has been secured by Christ coming into Manhood and taking up the will of God in obedience and carrying all through perfectly to the glory of God. But I think that the "ark of wood" as seen in Deuteronomy 10 would speak of Christ as the One in whom all that God would bring about *for His pleasure in men* has been patterned. The land can only be entered upon spiritually as what was true in Christ becomes true in the saints. Obedience and love as learned in Christ are to be characteristic of all those who are His. I believe this to be the point of view of the Spirit in Deuteronomy, where possession and enjoyment of "the land" is the subject. "The ark of the covenant, covered round in every part with gold" (Hebrews 9: 4) is Christ in His personal and unique glory, but it seems to me that the "ark of wood" is suggestive of Christ in that aspect in which what is true in Him can also be true in His saints. It suggested that God had His own thoughts in reserve, and that, He would, in due time, secure them, first of all in Christ, and then through Christ in those who should abide in Him as having

His Spirit. One would cherish the thought of this even if we have a humbling consciousness of how little it is so practically.

When John speaks of the "old commandment, which ye have had from the beginning", he is referring to what was true in Christ; but he goes on to speak of "a new commandment", and says of it, "Which thing is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light already shines" (1 John 2: 7, 8). I think the "ark of wood" in Deuteronomy is typically expressive of the "new commandment" as that which being true in Christ can also be true in those who abide in Him. It is striking how John puts the saints, as it were, in Christ's place, and says of them what he had said of Christ. We are more ready to believe that the thoughts of God are secured in Christ than we are to recognise that, by the work of God, what is true in Christ becomes true in those who are His. But the elect of God are sanctified to the obedience of Jesus Christ. The one born anew can say, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man" (Romans 7: 22). And it is through the "obedience of faith" that we receive the glad tidings. Where there is obedience, righteousness, and love, there is moral correspondence with Christ as the "ark of wood". The covenant will be made good in the heart of Israel in a coming day, and surely the spirit of it is made good in the saints in this, the Spirit's day. Or are we to accept that there will be a fuller result for the pleasure of God in saints who are of Israel than there is in saints who are of the assembly?

John would shew us where the commandments are made good; he would say, like Moses in Deuteronomy 10, "and they are there". John does not speak in terms of the covenant, but he gives us the substance and vitality of it as made good in a company who know the love of God, and who respond to it, and who love one another. Such keep the commandments of God; what is true in Christ is also true in them; indeed John says, "that even as he is, we also are in this world". The people of God thus take character from the "ark of wood", and become the expression here of God, and of what is pleasing to God. A vessel is secured in which all that pertains to the covenant can be cherished and preserved. The typical teaching which follows in the book of Deuteronomy can only be taken up spiritually in the light of this. It can only be taken up in virtue of divine work and teaching, and of abiding in Christ.

A parenthesis is introduced in verses 6 and 7 mentioning circumstances which took place historically long after what Moses had been speaking of, but which are brought in here by the Spirit of God to call our attention to two things of great importance. First, the necessity for the priestly service of Christ in view of the land being entered and possessed. Aaron's exercise of priesthood was

limited to the wilderness, but Eleazar is a type of Christ as Priest in relation to entrance upon the inheritance. Aaron represents Christ as exercising priesthood in relation to wilderness needs and weaknesses, but Eleazar represents Him as Priest in relation to the inheritance. Joshua was to stand before him, and he would enquire for Joshua "by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah" (Numbers 27: 21). Eleazar is a type of Christ as Priest in relation to all that which, from the Deuteronomic standpoint, can be described as "good things to come" (Hebrews 9: 11). As the true Aaron He can sympathise and succour in all wilderness needs, but as Eleazar He has complete knowledge, according to divine light, of "the eternal inheritance", and of how we should go out and come in to acquire possession of it. He knows as "high priest of the good things to come" how to allot to all Israel, and to each tribe, their appointed place in the divine inheritance. It is an aspect of His precious and continuing service which we do well not to overlook. The military exploits of Joshua without the priestly direction of Eleazar would not have sufficed to secure to the heirs of promise the enjoyment of the inheritance. And we need Christ as "high priest of the good things to come" — things that have now come, and can be known as spiritual realities — if we are to have present enjoyment of them.

Then the "land of waterbrooks" speaks of a region where there is the flow and activity of the Holy Spirit. The people themselves do not often bring divine thoughts before us; it is generally far otherwise; but the incidents that occurred on their journey are often freighted with rich meaning. And this "land of waterbrooks" to which they came immediately after the transfer of the priesthood to Eleazar was a remarkable anticipation of "the land" as described in chapter 8: 7. It speaks of the copiousness and variety of the refreshings of the Spirit as known even on the wilderness side of Jordan. God is pleased to give to His people manifestations of the Spirit in the assembly viewed as in wilderness conditions, as in 1 Corinthians. He gives ministry in freshness and power there that His saints may be incited to move forward energetically into that which is peculiarly the domain of the Spirit. To experience the activities of the Spirit as described in 1 Corinthians would be a great inducement to go on to know what His activities are amongst the saints viewed as over Jordan. There are thus two great encouragements brought before us in this remarkable little parenthesis: the thought of Christ's priestly service with reference to acquiring possession of the inheritance, and the thought of the Spirit as an abundant and perennial Source of refreshment and fertility.

Then we get in verses 8, 9 the separation of the tribe of Levi. "The tribe of Levi" represents the element that, is distinctly "for Jehovah" (Exodus 32: 26), and which preserves what is of God, and what is due to God, They

consecrated themselves to Jehovah, and brought on themselves a blessing. The overcomers all through have been the true "tribe of Levi"; they have risen superior to what was natural; they have been able to gird on the sword, and to shew that God and His things were more to them than the influence of nature. What should have been true of all Israel was realised in Levi, and Jehovah took them in a peculiar way for Himself. They represented in Israel something which is greater than the inheritance, namely, the direct service of God. This was given to them as peculiar distinction and privilege, and they remained as a separated tribe, not participating in the inheritance like the other tribes, but representing in all Israel what was due to God; and to His holy service. The inheritance was held by the people largely that it might minister to them, and that the service of God in their hands might be fully maintained.

Their service was threefold — "To bear the ark of the covenant of Jehovah, to stand before Jehovah to do service unto him, and to bless in his name, unto this day". These things are distinguished for us from the inheritance, and they represent what the inheritance is intended to support, as we shall see later in this book.

"To bear the ark of the covenant of Jehovah" would represent priestly ability to sustain the ministry of that infinite wealth of divine grace which is enshrined in Christ as the Ark of the covenant. The apostles were true Levites; they carried in their holy service the strength and glory of God as shining out in fulness of grace and truth in Christ. They were ministers of Christ, and, as carried on their shoulders, there was competent new covenant ministry. As sustained of God, they did not stumble, like David's oxen, nor did they allow the Ark to fall into Philistine hands, and their service is a model for all the "tribe of Levi". Nothing can be more precious and holy than the ministry of Christ in the glory that attaches to Him as the Ark of the covenant. This is indeed greater than the inheritance, for it is the shining forth of the glory of Him who gives the inheritance, and the Giver must be greater than the gift.

Then "to stand before Jehovah to do service unto him" refers to sanctuary service — ordering the lamps and the shewbread, burning incense, presenting offerings and sacrifices, and carrying on the service of song. We are apt to think that what serves man is more important than the service of God, but this is not so. The result of our being in the good of what God has given to us will be that we shall have tithes and offerings. We shall minister fully to the "tribe of Levi", and the service of the sanctuary will be sustained. The inheritance is bestowed in order that there may be a result for God in levitical and priestly service.

Then, finally, "and to bless in his name" would indicate that God will have the last word, and that word is always a word of blessing for His people. If He is served according to what is due to Him in His house it will surely result in full blessing, according to the greatness of His Name, flowing out upon His people. It is no small part of the privilege of the "tribe of Levi" to be able to express towards His faithful people the blessed thoughts that fill the heart of God toward them. It is the glory of His Name to be known as blessing.

These things are distinguished for us from the inheritance by the separation of the tribe of Levi, to whom they pertained, from all the other tribes, and by the fact that "Levi has no portion nor inheritance with his brethren; Jehovah is his inheritance according as Jehovah thy God told him". Our Instructor would remind us that, wonderful as the inheritance is, it is bestowed in view of God being served according to His pleasure, and that He would delight to be to us greater, and more to be gloried in, than all He gives. Jehovah was Levi's inheritance, and he was separated to represent in Israel what was due to Jehovah in holy service. We must not think of the tribe of Levi merely as representing certain persons distinguished from others as God's servants, but as representing a spiritual condition and service which the inheritance has to support. God would have us to be concerned, not only about the possession and enjoyment of the inheritance, but about His holy service, and the maintenance of all that is due to Him. He would have us to remember that the inheritance is not everything, but that it is given so that it may yield support for "the tribe of Levi". He would have us see to it that what that tribe represents is maintained and ministered to in ourselves and in others. This is the first mention of the tribe of Levi in this book, but we shall find that it occupies an important place in the subsequent teaching.

We are again reminded in verse 10 of how much we owe to the intercession and advocacy of Christ. It is a persistent service of faithful love which He carries on through the whole period which is typified by the "forty days and forty nights" of Moses intercession. Many a secret unrighteousness that might have developed into open failure or public departure has been the occasion of His advocacy, and in result has been judged, and our soul has escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler. In the remembrance of this we may well be constrained to take up, in our measure, a similar service. "If any one see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life, for those that do not sin unto death" (1 John 5: 16).

Probably many of us have owed our "life" not only to the advocacy of Christ, but to the asking of some brother! I wonder how many brothers owe their "life" to our asking? Sin is a serious matter for it is morally death; but in a

brother it brings into exercise the advocacy of Christ, and the asking of any brother who sees it, and on this ground "he, shall give him life". Instead of the brother who sins being cut off, or permanently lost to the brethren, he gets "life"; he is restored, and retained for the enjoyment of spiritual good, and for the companionship of the brethren.

At the moment to which Moses refers here the people, on their side, had lost all title to the land, but Jehovah listened to the intercession of Moses, and said to him, "Rise up, take thy journey before the people, that they may enter in and possess the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give unto them". What a testimony to the grace and faithfulness of God, and to the fact that His people owe all to His mercy through the Mediator and Intercessor! Many of the people sinned unto death and fell in the wilderness, but those who went in and possessed the land did so on the ground of God's faithfulness to His promise and oath, and on the ground of the intercession of Moses. To speak in John's language, God gave them life.

Christ, as the true Moses, would remind us of how much we owe to His intercessory service. I believe it is due to His intercession if any of us have "life" to enter into the purpose of God, after all that has happened in the history of His people. Every bit of faithfulness has been the result of Christ's intercession. "At that time Jehovah separated the tribe of Levi". "That time" was when Moses prayed; and I have no doubt that whatever has been distinctively for God has been secured and maintained by the intercession of Christ. The overcomers "unto this day" have been thus maintained; He prayed that faith might not fail. But for the intercession of Christ *everything* would have broken down in the assembly, but through His prayer something has been maintained for God, and will be to the end. As we learn this it turns us more simply and wholly to Him; He gets a very great place with us; we do not trust in ourselves or our own faithfulness; *we believe on Him*.

Christ as Mediator has brought the light of God to us; as Intercessor He sustains His saints that they may enter into it, and answer to it. Such are the conditions of weakness on our side that we could not be self-supporting. Indeed the creature will never be self-supported; even in condition of glory in eternity all will be sustained in virtue of God being all in all, and Christ being Head, and the Spirit all-pervading.

One loves to regard every bit of faithfulness, and holy separation, and devotedness that has ever appeared in the assembly as the fruit of the intercession of Christ. Our Moses would bring home to us how dependent we have been, and are, on His intercession. It is good that we should linger on this. None of us would have ever got the victory over natural influences, or

would have had the things of God preserved in their preciousness in our hearts, if Christ had not prayed for us. If "we more than conquer" it is "through him that has loved us". When Paul asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" he is thinking of the love in which He intercedes for us at the right hand of God. None of us could face the pressure: or resist the seductions, if we were not sustained by the intercession of Christ. The very fact that we have the Spirit is in answer to His prayer. "And I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth" (John 14: 16). Then the Spirit in us becomes an Intercessor (Romans 8: 26, 27), and we ourselves become marked by an intercessory spirit. It is not learned or self-sufficient people that get on spiritually, but persons who are marked by prayer and supplication.

It is deeply touching to know that such activities begin at the right hand of God. Every spiritual movement in our souls can be traced to the intercession of Christ, and then we become characterised by prayer. And even our prayers derive their efficacy from His service on high, for as the Angel-Priest of Revelation 8 He has "a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might give efficacy to the prayers of all saints at the golden altar which was before the throne". It is blessed to think of spiritual movement's as beginning at the right hand of God, and being worked out through prayers which go back to be presented there as efficacious through the incense which Christ adds to them. All that pertains to the covenant is worked out in this way, and only thus will "the land" be entered upon and possessed.

Now God is to be feared, and loved, and served, and obeyed in the light of His sovereign love and choice, and the pleasure which He has in His people. "Jehovah took pleasure in thy fathers, to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you, out of all the peoples, as it is this day" (verse 15). "He is thy praise, and he is thy God, who hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen" (verse 21). Now the heart must be circumcised, the will and lusts of the flesh cut off, so that the blessed character of God may be reproduced in His people.

Much is said of the greatness of God, but the tenderness of His grace is magnified. "Who executeth the judgment of the fatherless and the widow, and loveth the stranger, to give him food and clothing. And ye shall love the stranger; for ye have been strangers in the land of Egypt". I think at least ten times in this book the widow, the fatherless, and the stranger are mentioned as subjects of care. It shows how God would have His people to enjoy all that His love and purpose have conferred on them in a spirit of grace and consideration that is like His own. There will always be among the people of

God opportunities for the expression in a practical way of His own gracious character. And He delights, too, as the last verse of the chapter shows, to multiply His people. On the first day of the assembly's history He added three thousand souls, and how many saints there are on the earth today it, would be hard indeed to tell!

DEUTERONOMY 11

Deuteronomy 11

This chapter ends that part of the book in which our attention is called to the lessons of the past. Those who have reached the position contemplated in Deuteronomy have had personal knowledge of three things. They have seen the overthrow of the world-system and its ruler; they have been the subjects of God's dealings in the wilderness; and they have been taught by a terrible example that God will not tolerate insubjection to Christ. It is in the light of these things having been known that we are to love God, "and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his ordinances, and his commandments continually" (verses 1 - 9).

The world has been fully exposed by its rejection of Christ. "And this is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light; for their works were evil". There is not the slightest change as to this; it remains true "unto this day". The presence of the Spirit demonstrates that the world is in sin, that it would not have the righteous One, and that its ruler is judged. And this is true of the Egypt-world — the world of human resource and wisdom. Many who would judge the Sodom-world, or perhaps even the Babylon-world, are ensnared by the Egypt-world. "The princes of this age" are the great intellectual leaders who give no place to Christ as the Wisdom and Power of God. We are told of the Egyptian Benaiah smote, that he was "an imposing man" (2 Samuel 23: 21), and when men get a reputation for learning they become "imposing". The conclusions and deductions of scientific men get weight because they have a show of being based upon diligent investigation of facts. But very often they leave entirely out of account the greatest facts of all.

The wisdom of this world never gives any place to God's wisdom. It never considers that Christ was God's Wisdom and Power for creation, and for establishing the laws by which "all things subsist together". Still less does it think of Christ as God's Wisdom and Power for redemption, or for the bringing about of God's pleasure in a universe where all things shall be headed up in Him. Paul says of "the rulers of this world" that they "come to nought". If all men are under death as the judgment of God upon sin, and this has been demonstrated by Christ dying for all, what does it make of all man's cleverness and learning? He is a sinful creature — proved to be such by his desire to live upon his own resources, and to put God as much out of his thoughts as possible. The death of Christ has proved that, apart from Him, and from His death, there is no hope for man. Man with all his wisdom comes to nought,

even as the army of Egypt did when the water of the Red Sea flowed over them. This is never to be forgotten.

Then the fate of Dathan and Abiram is a solemn warning to all within the Christian profession to beware of being rebellious against the authority of the Lord. They were insubordinate, and they were swallowed up. Spiritual safety and prosperity largely depend on the rights and authority of Christ as Lord being practically owned amongst His people.

The description of the land in verses 10 - 12 is of the deepest interest; the contrast with Egypt is strongly marked. Watering with the foot as a garden of herbs would speak of human labour and effort with a very restricted result. There was nothing spontaneous there; no free flow of the Spirit. On fleshly principles, which rule in Egypt, all is laborious, and there is a small result. That is pretty much how things are carried on in the religious world, even where there are good intentions. One cannot deny that there is much earnest labour, but what is the spiritual result?

"But the land, whereunto ye are passing over to possess it, is a land of mountains and valleys, which drinketh water of the rain of heaven, a land which Jehovah thy God careth for; the eyes of Jehovah thy God are constantly upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year". There is nothing artificial or formal about "the land". It is a diversified region, where the all-various grace of God in His people manifests itself fully and freely. The preachings in the Acts were under such circumstances as to preclude any studied preparation. The preachers were prepared rather than the sermons An old and honoured servant of the Lord, in answer to the question, What shall I study? said, Study well these four words, "The flesh profiteth nothing"! The preachings in the Acts were "water of the rain of heaven"; the streams flowed down in copious blessing. How definitely the Apostles presented Christ as crucified, risen, and exalted at God's right hand! How wonderfully they quoted and applied the Scriptures! How pointed and powerful was their dealing with men! There was a spiritual naturalness, if we may so say, a simplicity, freshness, sobriety and order in all that they said which made manifest that they preached the glad tidings "by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven". All true ministry is in the power of the Holy Spirit, and it tends to promote fruitfulness in the land. It is good to remember that "the land" is our divinely allotted portion; it ought not to be an unknown territory to believers. It contains "Things which eye has not, seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart, which God has prepared for them that love him, but God has revealed to us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God ... But we have received, not the spirit of the world,

but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which have been freely given to us of God: which also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, communicating spiritual things by spiritual means" (1 Corinthians 2: 9 - 13).

We may gather from what Moses says elsewhere that "the rain of heaven" is suggestive of spiritual ministry. He says, "My doctrine shall drop as rain, my speech flow down as dew, as small rain upon the tender herb, and as showers on the grass" (Deuteronomy 32: 2). "The land" is characterised by this in contrast with the foot-labour of Egypt. A ministry which is the product of the labour of the human mind will never be spiritual in character, and it will inevitably become more and more corrupted by the thoughts of men. Spiritual ministry flows from Christ as Head, and is the product of the activities of the Holy Spirit. We see it, in the ministry of the apostles, and any ministry which is spiritual will correspond, in its measure, with the apostle's ministry.

Verse 14 speaks of "the early rain and the latter rain". Both are necessary if there is to be fruitfulness in the inheritance. The early rain comes to prepare the ground, and to start the growth of crops, and the latter rain falls to bring things to maturity. God delights to give a ministry that will promote spiritual fruitfulness. The ministry of the apostles may be regarded as "early rain" given to start everything that was of God, and for God, into fruitfulness here on the earth. But "the latter rain" comes to bring the crops to maturity, and I have no doubt that during the last hundred years the Lord has been giving a ministry which tends to this. It is a time of "the latter rain" — a ministry which has definitely in view the perfecting of the saints, so that there may be a result which is in keeping with the wondrous thoughts of God before the saints are translated. Such a ministry necessarily corresponds with what was at the beginning.

There is "a land which Jehovah thy God careth for; the eyes of Jehovah thy God are constantly upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year". God has thoughts for His people which are worthy of Himself; He has loved men in view of their having life eternal (John 3: 16).

The inheritance is the fruit of the love of God; John says, "See what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God". And Paul in writing to the Colossians says, "Giving thanks to the Father, who has made us fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light". That is the inheritance. It is the full thought of divine favour for men, the wealthy place of blessing in Christ, in whom all the rich thoughts of God have been secured. The love of God ever cherishes the inheritance for us and cherishes us for the inheritance;

the youngest believer is entitled to take that home to himself in all its blessedness. Persons who are heirs to a great inheritance usually think a good deal about it; but what inheritance can be compared to ours? We are not incompetent to take it up; the Father has made us fit — or competent — to take it up, in the divine nature. According to Ephesians we have “obtained an inheritance, being marked out beforehand according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will, that we should be to the praise of his glory”. It is purely a question of God’s sovereign love, and of where it has given us our portion. He cares that we should know what it is to be risen with Christ, and to dwell together as brethren in unity, apart from lawlessness, hatred, idolatry, and all the death and dearth of this world. There is a region where divine pleasure dwells, where the love of God is known, where His Son is the Object of faith and love, where the Comforter abides, and the brethren love one another, where eternal life is given to those whom the Father has given to the Son. This is the land which God cares for, and on which His eyes are continually. The question arises, Do we care for it? Do *our* eyes rest upon it continually? It is evident that it will be so if we have fellowship with God.

God would use the writings of John to attract our hearts by the report of eternal life as manifested in His Son, and by shewing us the moral features of those who have it. Those writings present eternal life to us as something to be *consciously known and possessed now*. It was a distinct word of the Spirit to the assemblies when a beloved servant of the Lord said in departing, “Let not John’s ministry be forgotten in insisting on Paul’s”. Thank God, it is possible for us, in spite of all the ruin around, to move together in the family affections of the children of God, and to enjoy together as brethren a “land” which is vastly different from anything that exists in the world. We can occupy a region that the blessed God is deeply interested in. The heart of God is set upon men having eternal life. It has been before Him from the outset, and it has continued before Him all through the centuries of the assembly’s history, and His eyes are upon it still as that which His love has purposed for men. There is everything about the inheritance to make it supremely attractive. God would allure us; it is a matter of intense concern to Him that we should be attracted by what He cares for, and that our eyes should be on the things that His eyes are upon. Israel fell because they did not hearken to the word which spoke to them of the inheritance — the promised land.

Obedience and love are the conditions on which “the land” can be possessed and enjoyed. It is noticeable how frequently the word “commandment” is used in John’s writings; indeed the word, in a Christian sense, occurs in the Gospel and Epistles of John much more than in all other New Testament writings. It

stands over against the lawlessness which is natural to the human heart; to come under "commandment" is to be completely delivered from lawlessness. How could one in lawlessness have eternal life? But the keeping of commandments flows from love; the gospel by revealing the love of God puts a spring of love in our hearts which would never otherwise be there. Then it is also true that the saints are begotten of God, and as such they love Him, and they love those begotten of Him. His children are manifested in this way.

The result of being under commandment as loving God is that rain is given in its season; there is no lack of ministry to promote spiritual fertility, to bring about the perfecting of the saints. "And thou shalt gather in thy corn, and thy new wine, and thine oil ... and thou shalt eat and be full". Satisfaction is the result of cultivating the inheritance under favourable conditions. Spiritual diligence is needed in the divinely given and fruitful land. There will be neither harvest nor vintage nor store of oil, if these things are not looked for and laboured for. It would be a poor thing to assume to possess the land if we do not gather in its produce!

The three things mentioned here are brought together in Psalm 104: 14, 15. "Bringing forth bread out of the earth, and wine which gladdeneth the heart of man; making his face shine with oil; and with bread he strengtheneth man's heart". How strengthening to the heart it is to be fed upon Christ as the "corn" of the land! He has been brought forth out of the earth in resurrection power, having "annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility", that God's "purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time", might be made manifest (2 Timothy 1: 9, 10). All that was in God's purpose and grace for men has taken form in Christ as the risen One so as to be food for us as verified in Him. He is the great expression of divine faithfulness — every promise of God is made good in Him. That is the food of the saints as in the land. Psalm 37 says, "Dwell in the land, and feed on faithfulness"; that is the corn of the land, it is the bread that strengthens man's heart. It is the faithfulness of God to His own promises. There is not one word that God ever committed Himself to in the promises that He has not secured in Christ risen; the sure mercies of David are there; that is the food of the land. It is what Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 1: 18 - 20. "Now God is faithful, that our word to you is not yea and nay. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, he who has been preached by us among you (by me and Silvanus and Timotheus), did not become yea and nay, but yea is in him. For whatever promises of God there are, in him is the yea, and in him the amen, for glory to God by us". That is outside wilderness life; it is the corn of the land. We are to gather it into our spiritual store and feed on it.

"*Thy new wine*" is typical of the joy that belongs to the kingdom of God. That, too, has its place beyond the reach of death, for the Lord had death before Him here, but He looked beyond to drinking of the fruit of the vine in the kingdom. I have no doubt it is figurative of the joy which is connected with the favour of God being fully known. Grace is a joy to the heart of God. We read that new wine "cheers God and man" (Judges 9: 13). The Lord Jesus gives us a taste of the joy of God in grace, and of His own joy in making it known, in Luke 15. The kingdom of God is where He has His own way in the perfect grace of His heart, and where men are brought under the sway of His grace. In "the land" there is a continual fresh gathering in of the joy of grace. Grace as known in "the land" is spoken of in Ephesians. "To the praise of the glory of his grace" (chapter 1: 6); "the riches of his grace" (chapter 1: 7); and "the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus" (chapter 2: 7).

Then *the oil* speaks of the peculiar richness of what is found in the Spirit. "Fatness" is connected with the olive both in the Old Testament and the New. "Let your soul delight itself in fatness", is, I have no doubt, an allusion to what lies in the Spirit. The "root" of the olive tree (Romans 11) would be faith in Abraham which counted on God, but the "fatness" of it lies in the Spirit. So we find that the blessing of Abraham has come to us in Christ Jesus "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3: 14). Everything taken up in the Spirit has peculiar richness; it makes man's face to shine (Psalm 104: 15). The word for "oil" here means "to shine"! The brethren truly shine as they "dwell together in unity" according to Psalm 133 "Like the precious oil upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, upon Aaron's beard, that ran down to the hem of his garments; as the dew of Hermon that descendeth on the mountains of Zion; for there hath Jehovah commanded the blessing, life for evermore". The gain of "the land" is that these things are acquired; spiritual strength and joy and character attach to those who become possessed of them.

"Thy corn, and thy new wine, and thine oil", convey to us that as in the inheritance, and as making its cultivation, under the blessing of God, the business of our hand, there will always be fresh crops coming in as "the produce of the field, year by year". Things never become stale; there is continual freshness about every new crop. It is not that the produce is of a different kind; we do not want novelties; *they* are noxious weeds. But while there is no change in the character of it — it is still corn, new wine and oil — it is being continually acquired in a fresh way.

It is a serious thing not to have rain; it leads to perishing “quickly from off the good land which Jehovah is giving you” (verse 17). A spiritual ministry cannot be looked for when hearts are deceived, and yield to corrupting influences. Where there is general departure from the right ways of the Lord “the rain of heaven” is withheld, and what is preached and taught largely takes the character of what the people want to hear. Nothing could be more solemn than this, and it accounts for much that is going on today. It is not that erroneous teaching caused the departure, but departure of heart from God on the part of His people leads in His governmental ways to their being deprived of “rain” and left to the influence of what is pernicious. We have to “take heed” to the beginnings of departure, for the enemy’s workings are very insidious and deceptive; he brings in what is idolatrous in a very subtle way.

In the absence of spiritual ministry “the good land” is lost as to all practical gain of it. How few today are enjoying the produce of “the land”! How few have even any definite thought of what “the land” represents as a spiritual region which can be entered and possessed and enjoyed, through the favour of God, at the present time! Is it not true that the professed people of God as a whole have been deceived, and turned aside, and that they have “perished from off the good land”?

The land is properly the sphere of life; it is where saints live in the blessed conditions which God has established in His love. After all, vital Christianity is a simple thing: it lies in the affections. Paul passes by knowledge almost in a slighting way; he says, “we all have knowledge”, and declares that it puffs up. But he adds, “if any one love God, he is known of him”. If our affections have found their Object and Centre in God — and He has revealed Himself in grace and love to that end — it will bring the pleasure of God into every detail. It will be in the heart and soul, in the service of the hand, and in the very countenance. This is how the affections move as in the bond of the covenant. We love because He first loved us; it was He who set all in motion by revealing His own love.

The fellowship of saints according to John — that is, as walking in the light as God is in the light, and as in the joy of that eternal life which has been reported to them — very much answers to “the good land”. It is enjoyed together by the holy and faithful brethren in Christ. It may be intruded upon, and wholly forfeited in a practical sense, by the allowance of what is idolatrous or lawless. Therefore the “words” are to be laid up in heart and soul, and are to be a sign on the hand and frontlets between the eyes (verse 18).

The knowledge of God and of all that lies in His will, should always have place with us and govern us. These things are not to be Sunday matters only, or

reserved for meetings; they are to appear in us continually. It is right that Christians should be known by their very countenances and general bearing. How often we feel that it is so; we see a person we have never seen before, and feel sure he is a believer. An old brother used to say that some ought to carry a board on their backs to say they were Christians, for otherwise nobody would know it! Such persons have not frontlets between their eyes!

The things of God are to be household topics; our very houses and gates are to carry the impress of them. When people come into our houses they soon form a judgment as to what are the interests which are cherished there. Our "gates" have an important place in this book: they refer to what comes in and what goes out of our houses. You may be sure that *something* is written on all our "gates!" Now what *is* written there ?

The children are to grow up under divine teachings and impressions. It is a deep exercise to read in Judges 2: 10, "And also all that generation were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, which knew not Jehovah, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel". What an exposure of the conditions in Israel! What an uncovering of household secrets! Where had been the teaching of the children? Where the all-pervading influence of Deuteronomy 11: 18 - 20? Alas! it had not been there. Some may say, But we bring our children to the meetings; they will learn and be impressed there. Neither meetings, nor any other instruction, can take the place of divine impressions in the home. What goes on in the meetings will not have moral power if it is not supported in the households of the saints. Children may forget what they hear in meetings and Sunday Schools, but I do not believe that the oldest man can forget the impressions made upon him by the home piety of his parents. It is by such hallowed influences being passed on "that your days may be multiplied, *and the days of your children*, in the land which Jehovah swore unto your fathers to give them". The fact that the next generation did not know Jehovah, nor His works, is solemn evidence that the public weakness and departure which so soon manifested itself in Israel had its origin in individual heart and soul departure, and in the households of God's people ceasing to be what they were meant to be — the very citadel of piety.

God has ever in mind the continuation of things. Young people are growing up amongst us: what kind of impressions are we giving them? Are we furnishing them with something more excellent than what is in the world? Their education, and necessary contact with others, exposes them to Egyptian influences. How important that the household influences should be of God! Moses is an example of one who got such impressions from his parents that all

the wisdom of the Egyptians did not damage him. It would be well if we gave young people the impression of great satisfaction. When I was a boy I remember a brother coming to my father's house, and I said to myself, I wish I knew all that he knows! But another brother came, and he made me feel, I wish I had what he has! There was an impression, not of mere knowledge, but of substance and satisfaction. That is what tells on children as well as others.

God would have our days and the days of our children, "multiplied ... in the land". We may ask ourselves, *how many days* have we spent in the land? It is a great joy to spend even an *hour* with the brethren, when one can say of it with some confidence that it was spent "in the land".

A remarkable expression comes in here; "as the days of the heavens which are above the earth" (verse 21). It suggests the heavenly character of life in the land, corresponding with John's Gospel and Epistle — what is heavenly in character realised down here on earth. When eternal life is brought in publicly the Father's will is to be done on earth as in heaven. There will be correspondence between heaven and earth. How good to be moving on spiritually in such a way as to be conscious that we are in harmony with what is going on in heaven! Good is supreme there, the will of God is there, the love of God, and the mutual flow of holy affections! And such is the character of life in "the land".

As we move on in obedience and love God will dispossess every adverse power before us. Satan has filled the world, and the human mind, with thoughts adverse to God, but all are to be dispossessed. It is beautifully set forth in the apostle's words, "For the arms of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful according to God to the overthrow of strongholds; overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God, and leading captive every thought into the obedience of the Christ" (2 Corinthians 10: 4, 5). Not a single thing is to be left in possession that is opposed to the knowledge of God, or that is inconsistent with the obedience of the Christ. The objective and the subjective come together here; the knowledge of God and the obedience of the Christ — that blessed Man who never opened His heart or mind to anything that was not of God. We can safely and fully commit ourselves to every thought of God which we derive from Christ; we need not be on our guard there. Whether He sets forth God in grace or government, in boundless love and mercy, or in the unsparing and eternal judgment of evil, we can open our hearts unquestioningly to it, knowing that we shall never find that we have been misled.

Then, on our side, we have a perfect Model and Pattern in the obedient One, whose every thought was in accord with God. Every misconception of God,

every idolatrous influence, every thought of self-pleasing and disobedience, came in from "spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies", and it is all to be dispossessed. God's purpose is that His people should be completely victorious over every adverse power, and that they should stand in the possession and enjoyment of all that is in the thought of His love for them. The youngest believer should encourage himself to say, That is the will of God concerning His people, and I must not content myself with anything less.

"Every place whereon the sole of your foot shall tread shall be yours; from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the hinder sea shall your border be". The whole scope of what can be held from God, and for God, now comes into view. It is the kingdom in its wide extent as including all that comes under divine sway. It includes the responsible side and the privilege side — the good of Romans and also of Colossians and Ephesians. But possession is conditioned by "whereon the sole of your foot shall tread ... all the land that ye shall tread upon". This shews that we have *to go there*. The land was ours by divine gift before we left Egypt, but it cannot be possessed or enjoyed until we put our foot upon it. "The act of favour of God" is "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord". Every believer can say that it is his as a matter of divine gift. But is it *mine* as a matter of possession and conscious enjoyment? It cannot be this until my foot treads the land where it is known and enjoyed.

Finally "a blessing and a curse" are set before us (verse 26). The government of God and its results are strongly emphasised in this book. Blessing does not come apart from the moral conditions which are suitable to God's people. Whatever is contrary to His pleasure must come under curse. The epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians bring out the grace and love of God very fully, but they both recognise His government also, and in connection with it blessing and curse. "God, who shall render to each according to his works: to them who, in patient continuance of good work, seek for glory and honour and incorruptibility, life eternal. But to those that are contentious, and are disobedient to the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there shall be wrath and indignation, tribulation and distress, on every soul of man that works evil, both of Jew first, and of Greek; but glory and honour and peace to every one that works good, both to Jew first and to Greek; for there is no acceptance of persons with God" (Romans 2: 6 - 11). "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man shall sow, that also shall he reap. For he that sows to his own flesh, shall reap corruption from the flesh; but he that, sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit shall reap eternal life" (Galatians 6: 7, 8).

Blessing is still attached to obedience and curse to disobedience. This is true in all dispensations: it is a moral necessity. 2 Peter, 2 Timothy, Jude and Revelation shew us a character of things in the Christian profession which must inevitably come under the curse of God. We are to flee from everything of that kind, "And pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2: 22). Thus shall we secure the blessing and escape the curse.

It is essential, in view of possessing and dwelling in "the land" that this eternal principle — for its action goes on into eternity — of blessing connected with obedience and curse with disobedience should be fully recognised. So "thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim and the curse upon mount Ebal". It is striking that in this connection we get Gilgal mentioned for the first time, the Spirit of God thus suggesting that a circumcised people alone could truly recognise this principle of the ways and government of God, or be consistent with it so as to secure the blessing.

"The oaks of Moreh" carry our thoughts back to Genesis 12, for at that very spot Jehovah appeared to Abraham, and promised to give the land to his seed. Moreh means "Teacher", and "the oaks of Moreh" would suggest the stability which is connected with divine teaching and divine faithfulness. God's ancient promises cannot be invalidated, but they can only be made good in a people who have taken up the moral exercises connected with Gerizim and Ebal — blessing and curse — and who recognise that the flesh has been cut off in the death of Christ, and who now refuse and disallow it as being only capable of bringing in curse. Then the blessing can be enjoyed without let or hindrance, and this is what God contemplates for His people. "For ye pass over the Jordan to enter in to possess the land which Jehovah your God giveth you, and ye shall take possession of it, and dwell therein" (verse 31).

DEUTERONOMY 12

Deuteronomy 12

The people of God are viewed here as having come into the inheritance, and it is of the greatest importance that we should accustom ourselves to consider that we have our portion there. It is the thought of divine love for us; we get the inheritance purely by the love and calling of God — by the gift and appointment of the One who bestows it in love upon us. No amount of desire would secure to me the inheritance of some wealthy person. I could only get it by his appointment or by being his heir. I could say to the youngest and feeblest believer that long before he was born God had prepared the inheritance for him. We were born anew, and redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, that we might possess the inheritance which the love of God designed for us. It is as much in the mind and heart of God that we should receive and enjoy the inheritance as that we should receive remission of sins. Jesus glorified sent Paul to the Gentiles “that they may receive remission of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26: 18).

We come in this chapter to “the statutes and ordinances which ye shall take heed to do in the land”, and the first of these refers to the place where Jehovah would set His Name. This is a primary consideration for those who love Him. “Unto the place which Jehovah your God will choose out of all your tribes to set his name there, his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come”. This is contrasted with “*all the places* wherein the nations which ye shall dispossess have served their gods”. There was no unity in demon worship, for unity depends on the fact that “God is one”, but this fact necessitates unity amongst His people, and particularly in their approach to Him.

God will not tolerate anything that is idolatrous; it is positively and wholly evil, as putting something in His place which is contrary to His Name and nature. Hence everything of this kind “ye shall utterly destroy” (verses 2, 3).

But then amongst His people there was to be but one “place” where Jehovah would set His Name, and where His habitation would be; that place was common to all Israel. It would refer, typically, to the truth of the assembly as being one and the same universally, though now taken up and acted on locally by His saints wherever they are found. Approach to God is universal in its character; He has but one way for all His people wherever they may be found. There cannot be anything sectarian, or local, or national about approach to God. No believer could think of saying, I approach God as a Wesleyan, or as a

Baptist, or as a member of the Established Church, or as an English or a Spanish brother! If we approach God at all it must be as of His assembly, and that puts the matter at once on universal ground. The way of God's appointment is the same for all His people. All Israel "from Dan to Beer-sheba" had to come to the one "place" where Jehovah set His Name.

This is not altogether a new instruction, though it takes a new form as in "the land". The books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers have made us familiar with the thought of "the tent of meeting" as God's dwelling place in the midst of His people, where alone He could be approached according to His own prescribed order. That was in wilderness conditions, answering to the assembly of God viewed as in 1 Corinthians. But the same thing, in principle, has place in "the land", and is to regulate and characterise the saints in their movements Godward.

This chapter requires us to accept as an unquestionable divine principle that if we approach God it must be in the way which He has appointed. It has often been said — and practically acted on — that the principles on which God's people assemble together, and the modes of divine service or worship which they adopt, are left to their own choice or judgment, and that each one must follow his own taste or conscience! But is not that exactly what is forbidden in verse 8? Surely God must be allowed to say how and where He may be approached! By choosing one place out of all the tribes of Israel in which to set His Name Jehovah preserved the unity of His people in their approach to Him. He excluded, not only idolatry, but also sectarianism and independency from their worship.

The "place" has now to be learned by its moral and spiritual features. It is "neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem"; it has to be found spiritually. "But the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for also the Father seeks such as his worshippers. God is a spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth" (John 4: 21 - 24). We know something from Psalm 132 of the exercises of David with regard to finding out "a place for Jehovah, habitations for the Mighty One of Jacob". He could say, "Behold, we heard of it at Ephratah, we found it in the fields of the wood". Ephratah was where he had been born and brought up, and the mention of it suggests that from his youth David had thought of "a place for Jehovah". He found it first where Caleb found the land — *in his heart* — and if we do not find it there first we shall not seek or find it at all. But, having it in his heart, he swore and vowed to give himself no rest until he found it for Jehovah in Israel.

Israel had to pass through a most humbling history before the "place for Jehovah" came to light. They had to learn their own proneness to idolatry, and the terrible consequences of it in the government of God. "They provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. God heard, and was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel; and he forsook the tabernacle at Shiloh, the tent where he had dwelt among men, and gave his strength into captivity, and his glory into the hand of the oppressor; and delivered up his people unto the sword, and was very wroth with his inheritance". *Then* it was, when all was manifested failure on their part, that the "place for Jehovah" came to light. "Then the Lord awoke as one out of sleep ... and he smote his adversaries in the hinder part, and put them to everlasting reproach. And he rejected the tent of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, the Mount Zion which he loved; and he built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which he hath founded for ever. And he chose David his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds" (Psalm 78: 56 - 72). The chosen "place" came to light in connection with the chosen "servant" — typically Christ.

To understand the character of the place where God sets His Name we must realise the complete breakdown of everything on man's side, giving occasion to God to introduce His kingdom on the principle of sovereign mercy in Christ His beloved Son, the true David. When the Lord Jesus was here "the dayspring from on high" visited men "on account of the bowels of mercy of our God". All was failure and ruin on man's side but the power of the kingdom came in God's Anointed — a power adequate to deliver men from every form of the power of evil. And even the rejection and crucifixion of Christ only served to bring out more fully the sovereign character of divine mercy, for redemption was accomplished therein and Christ was raised from the dead, and exalted by God's "right hand as leader and saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins" (Acts 5: 31).

"The Mount Zion which he loved" is "the city of David"; it is called "the stronghold" (2 Samuel 5: 7). The sanctuary was built under the protection of that "stronghold". I take it to set forth the strength of divine grace and mercy in a risen Christ. The "stronghold" secures everything against the enemy, so that the "sanctuary" may be built in which everything is secured that is in accord with God's Name.

The instruction of Deuteronomy 12 looks on to the time when the people should have come to the rest and to the inheritance, and when they should have "rest from all your enemies round about, and ye dwell in safety". It

awaited the establishment of the kingdom under David, and the subjugation of all enemies by him, so that the house could be built in peace by Solomon.

If we do not know the power of the kingdom, as vested in the Lord Jesus, to deliver us from the whole power of what is evil, we shall not be really free to come to the place where God sets His Name. The power of the kingdom is first learned in the blessing and deliverance set before us in the epistle to the Romans, but it is interesting and helpful to see that we do not leave it behind when we go on to Colossians and Ephesians. In Colossians we are viewed as translated by the Father "into the kingdom of the Son of his love", and in Ephesians we read of "inheritance in the kingdom of the Christ and God". The risen Christ was seen by the apostles "during forty days, and speaking of the things which concern the kingdom of God". He would have them well acquainted with "the stronghold of Zion, which is the city of David". The power of all enemies is broken there, lawlessness is at an end, for we are under the sway of God as known in infinite grace and mercy through our Lord Jesus Christ. There can be no doing whatever is right in our own eyes when that rule is established in our souls.

We have referred to the kingdom thought being carried on from Romans to Colossians and Ephesians. In principle the same thing is true of 1 Corinthians. If assembly order according to 1 Corinthians is not respected and adhered to, and the things written there recognised as "the Lord's commandment" (1 Corinthians 14: 37), there will not be much known of the place where God sets His Name. If one does not obey "the Lord's commandment" one may be actually, and even publicly, lawless, though taking the place of being in the kingdom. "The name of our Lord Jesus Christ" has a wonderful unifying power for all those who are subject to Him. "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all say the same thing, and that there be not among you divisions; but that ye be perfectly united in the same mind and in the same opinion" (1 Corinthians 1: 10). Indeed the more simply and fully we have divine Persons before us the more we shall be brought into true unity.

David in Psalm 78 is clearly a type of Christ, but David in 1 Chronicles 21 finds the place where Jehovah would set His Name through a humbling experience of his own failure. He was moved by Satan to number Israel, evidently for his own glory and to God's displeasure, and his sin was followed by a pestilence which destroyed 70,000 men of Israel. In deep repentance David took the sin wholly upon himself, and then he was told by the prophet Gad to "go up and rear an altar to Jehovah in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite". There, after buying the place for "the full money", he "offered up burnt-offerings and

peace-offerings, and called upon Jehovah; and he answered him from the heavens by fire upon the altar of burnt-offering And David said, This is the house of Jehovah Elohim, and this is the altar of burnt-offering for Israel" (1 Chronicles 22: 1). It was a sin-convicted man, deeply repentant and fully confessing, who was shewn the place where Jehovah would set His Name. This was after Satan had done his utmost to bring in judgment, the state of the people being such that they were righteously exposed to it. If God is approached it must be in the deep sense of the sovereignty of His mercy which furnishes in Christ as the Burnt-offering a ground of acceptance when everything has been forfeited by human failure.

He is "rich in mercy"; it is a chief glory of His Name; it is on that footing alone that we know Him or can approach Him. And this is true for all the Israel of God; no one can truly approach Him except in the consciousness of it. This gives force to the word "choose" which occurs fourteen times in chapters 12 to 16 of this book. It indicates the sovereignty in which all is secured that is truly for the glory of God.

"To set his name there". His "name" indicates the way in which God has made Himself known; He is in the light of revelation, and He must be approached accordingly; it could not be pleasurable to Him to be approached in any other way. The full truth as to the blessed God is out. The great truth of the Old Testament was that there was one God known as the Creator-God, the Almighty and Jehovah. In the world and in Israel the devil was always seeking to corrupt and destroy that truth by turning men aside to "gods many and lords many". But in the New Testament, as it has been said, the truth is made known that "God is one". The Father has been revealed in the Son, and the Spirit given to those who believe. Now the great power of Satan is in the form of antichrist, who "denies the Father and the Son" (1 John 2: 22). But the Son has set the Father's Name in the affections of the men whom the Father gave Him out of the world. He manifested the Father's Name to them, and prayed the Father to keep them in it, "that they may be one as we". There can be no divergence there. If we approach it must be in the light of God's Name as now revealed, and that light is not merely individual or local; it is universal in the sense that it is the same for all saints.

If the saints "with one accord, with one mouth, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15: 6), they are evidently on ground common to all of them; they are unified in glorifying God. If no human thoughts, or arrangements, or ordering were allowed to interfere with this, the saints would reach morally the place where God has set His Name. "For through him we have both access by one Spirit to the Father" — the Jew and the Gentile both

coming through Christ and by one Spirit to the Father! (Ephesians 2: 18). And again we read, "Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access in confidence by the faith of him" (Ephesians 3: 12). This is the character of approach which belongs to "the land". When we enjoy this great privilege we are not on individual or local ground; we are on ground which is common to all saints; we are enjoying the universal privilege of the assembly. And that is set forth, I believe, figuratively in the place of approach where all Israel found themselves on common ground before Jehovah their God.

If God is revealed and known as the Father His love places His saints in a relationship in which they can suitably and affectionately answer to that revelation. "Ye are sons of Jehovah your God" (Deuteronomy 14: 1). The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has "marked us out beforehand for sonship through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has taken us into favour in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1: 5,6). If we have access to Him it must be according to the place and relationship in which He has set us before Him. His sons can come near in liberty and with pleasure. The spirit we have received is contrasted in Romans 8 with "a spirit of bondage"; it is "a spirit of sonship whereby we cry, Abba, Father". "God sent forth his Son ... that we might receive sonship. But because ye are sons, God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4: 4 - 6). We are sons, and we have the Spirit of sonship, that we may have access to God in holy liberty. We can conceive the joy with which true lovers of Jehovah would come out of all the tribes to be together on the common ground of "Sons of Jehovah", and to bring offerings which were the evidence that they were enjoying, and prospering under, His favour. They would come to enjoy His blessing, and to minister to His pleasure, in the place where His Name was set. However great the enjoyment in their own gates, it was surpassed by the joy to be found in consciously ministering to the pleasure of God in that chosen place. We may be sure that there is that which answers to it for us today.

We see in Acts 20: 7 that the saints assembled on the first day of the week to break bread. In doing so they left, for the time, what was merely individual, or of household character. To use the language of our chapter, they came from their own gates to the place where the Lord had set His Name. I have no doubt that each of them could have truly said, "The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to thy memorial" (Isaiah 26: 8). Now Scripture assumes that all believers eat the Lord's supper, for Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 10 of "The cup of blessing which we bless", and of "The bread which we break". The "we" is the universal Christian "we", like the "we" of 1 Corinthians 12: 13. The

breaking of bread is the divinely ordained rallying point in Christianity. It is undoubtedly characteristic of the normal coming together of the assembly of God, as we may learn from Paul's epistle to "the assembly of God which is in Corinth". Anything that ignores this, or the assembly order that goes along with it, fails to answer to the place where God sets His Name. It is for Christians who break bread to see that they do it with pure heart, and with due regard to the honour of Christ, and in holy separation from all that is contrary to the light and principles of God's assembly.

The Spirit of God would teach us in 1 Corinthians 10 that the communion or fellowship which is involved in breaking bread is universal in character. To break bread locally without regard to the universal fellowship would be like eating the hallowed things in our own gates instead of in the place where Jehovah's Name is set. We must come spiritually to a "place" which speaks of the unity of all Israel in fellowship and in approach to God. As to the actual coming together to eat the Lord's supper it is in "every place" where His Name is called upon, but fellowship and approach to God are universal in character. While our assembly relations are taken up locally, it is important to see that they are taken up in the light of what is universal, so that in taking them up we embrace, in mind and affection, all saints. Viewing the saints according to what is of God would lead to our being exclusive of every principle or practice that is contrary to the universal truth of God's assembly. We should neither tolerate sectarianism nor independency. We are reconciled to God "in one body"; therefore assembly approach to God must be in the recognition of this. There could be no stronger expression of unity than "one body" formed by "one Spirit", and that the Holy Spirit of God. "In the power of one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or free, and have all been given to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12: 13). The consideration of this raises exercise that we should be careful to be in accord with the character and unity of God's assembly. It calls us to self-judgment, and to serious enquiry as to the existing state of things in the Christian profession. We cannot accept that there is no longer anything that answers to the place where Jehovah set His Name.

If national or sectional distinctions are retained in our minds, such as the difference between Jew and Gentile, it is clear that we are not in our spirits on the ground that both have "access by one Spirit to the Father". The Lord requires that even personal differences are to be adjusted before we offer at the altar (Matthew 5: 23,24), because every one who offers must recognise that the altar speaks of the unity of all Israel in approach to God. If something has come in contrary to that unity, the character of approach is practically falsified. This is a very serious consideration.

The saints now are "built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2: 22). They "are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2: 5). They form God's house, over which Christ is as Son (Hebrews 3: 6). "His habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come" involves for us affectionate interest in the house of God, consistency with the truth of that house, and subjection to Christ as Son over it. Worship is "by the Spirit of God" (Philippians 3: 3), and it is also in "truth" (John 4: 24). It is in accord with the revelation of God, and with the place and relationship in which He has set His saints. The way of approach to God is the same for saints in England, India, New Zealand, South America, or wherever they are. Those who approach God do so on ground common to all, even the truth and principles of His assembly, and this is what for us answers to the place where He sets His Name.

We have a personal history with responsibilities and exercises of an individual character; we have also responsibilities and privileges which we share with our brethren locally who call on the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ; but in approach to God we are on ground which is universal. It is not prayer that is contemplated here; that surely has its most important place; but here it is rather the offering of "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ". It is ministering to the pleasure of God — appearing before Him, not as empty or in need, but as furnished with gifts and offerings which are acceptable to Him.

"And thither ye shall bring your burnt-offerings and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and the heave-offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your voluntary offerings, and the firstlings of your kine and of your sheep" (verse 6). The "tithes" and the "firstlings" are the only obligatory offerings in this chapter. "The land" is viewed as yielding such abundance that the people, richly furnished with the blessing of Jehovah, are wealthy in affectionate desire towards Him. The burnt-offerings, sacrifices, heave-offerings, vows, voluntary offerings, choice vows, all speak of free and willing movements of heart towards God. Every one of them has reference to Christ as apprehended and appreciated in the hearts of His saints. Those appreciations are to be brought to His assembly, and enjoyed there for His pleasure. God would enrich us in our own "gates" with the preciousness of Christ, and then lead us to bring it to the place where He sets His Name that He may have what is due from the hearts that love Him, and that we may enjoy it in a deeper and fuller way in conscious nearness to God in His assembly. How the formal arrangements of the religious world, and its human order, interfere with all this! But it is good to dwell on the precious thoughts of God, and when saints begin to think

affectionately of what is due to God they will be prepared to learn the character of the place where He has set His Name.

The point of instruction here is that all is to be brought to that place. It has to find its relation, and to make its contribution, to what is universal. Do we think of all our spiritual gains as furnishing material for the service of God, and for enjoyments of assembly character? That is what they are given for, and only thus can they be rightly enjoyed. For we must note that our happiness has a great place in this connection. "And ye shall eat there before Jehovah your God, and ye shall rejoice, ye and your households, in all the business of your hand, wherein Jehovah thy God hath blessed thee" (verse 7 and also verse 12). Our richest enjoyments depend on our recognising what is due to God in His assembly, and that, as of that assembly, we stand in relation to all His saints. Have we really understood this? Have we drunk into the spirit of Psalm 122? Have we had any "choice vows" which have been delightful to us in making them, and delightful to God as brought to Him, and delightful in His assembly as brought into the common fund of spiritual joy?

"Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt-offerings in every place that thou seest". No "right of private judgment" as to this was to be thought of. Every Israelite was to own the one place which Jehovah would choose, and to come there with his offerings. The principles of the assembly of God are marked by unity and universality; they are to be acknowledged by all His saints everywhere. It could not be of God that we should choose the principles on which we come together, or that we should set up principles contrary to the order and constitution of His assembly. It is almost forgotten by many today that God has an assembly, and that He has given it an order and constitution which is universally the same. There is so much that is contrary to that order and constitution that what is suitable to God can only be found practically as we act on the principles of 2 Timothy. We are now under obligation to withdraw from iniquity, and purify ourselves from vessels to dishonour in separating from them, and to "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:19-22). We must go back to the first principles of the assembly, and learn what pertains to it in the mind of God. In spite of all the confusion of christendom saints can still be in the light of Christ as risen and glorified; they can still recognise the presence of the Spirit here, and that all the brethren are "one body" and a habitation of God in the Spirit; they can still confess the truth of God's assembly as seen in Scripture, and seek to be consistent with it. We have to admit that there is grave and general departure from what was set up at the beginning, but 2 Timothy gives us principles according to which saints can

walk together amidst all the evils of the last days, and still be vessels for holy service.

It is important that we should distinguish between "the place which Jehovah will choose" and "all thy gates". The one refers to approach in assembly conditions, which are universal in character, though actually taken up locally "in every place" where saints "call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1: 2). The other would refer to what is individual, or of household character, amongst the people of God. Notice the words in verses 15, 20, 21, "According to all the desire of thy soul". What we may get for ourselves in spiritual blessing in our "gates" is only limited by the desire of our souls. We are encouraged to enjoy there "the blessing of Jehovah thy God which he hath given thee". Our individual or household consideration of the Lord's things, our general brotherly intercourse with saints, or even a reading or an address, would come under the head of "all thy gates". We are perfectly free to enjoy the good of "the land". The desire of our soul has full scope; it has often been said that we can have as much of Christ as we want. It is striking, too, that it should be said, "the unclean and the clean may eat thereof" (verses 15, 22). Many of the blessed things which God has given to men can be set before the "unclean" as well as the "clean"; indeed if they were not available for the unclean there would be nothing to bring about their cleansing. The Corinthians and the Galatians were both "unclean", the one by fleshly indulgence, and the other by fleshly religiousness, yet what a precious ministry of Christ was presented to them! What is administered through Christ in the wealth of divine giving is available for all.

The blessed God would have us to enjoy in our own "gates" all that He gives us of spiritual good, but while encouraging us to do so He would remind us of what is due to Him. What we enjoy in our own "gates" is preparatory to going to the place where He sets His Name. Believers say sometimes, I can enjoy the Lord and His things at home. Of course they can, but it is also their privilege and obligation to recognise in a practical way their assembly relations with the saints. Those relations are not voluntary ones; they are divinely formed; and a very considerable part of our blessing, as well as of what is due to God, is found in the practical recognition of them. In a day of great departure and weakness we may find but few with whom we can walk in the truth, but the truth itself is universal, and every saint is under obligation to acknowledge it. The tithes, the firstlings, the vows, the offerings were all due to God, and His portion was to be rendered in the place chosen by Himself. Let us enjoy all that we can of spiritual good, personally, household-wise, and in our intercourse as brethren, but let us not forget or despise the assembly of God.

In rendering what is due to God we leave, for the time, our own "gates", and we come to what is universal in character. Many believers think almost exclusively of what *they* can get; to speak of meetings as "means of grace" is a common phrase with many. But is there to be no consideration for what is due to God? Is He to have nothing from His people? If we have the blessing of Jehovah in our gates the result will surely be that we shall have tithes to bring; we shall acquire burnt-offerings and peace-offerings; we shall develop devotedness and spiritual affections that will make "choice vows". Our hearts, made wealthy in the appreciation of Christ, will be moved to minister to God, and to recognise that He has an appointed place where it is His pleasure to be ministered to. We shall delight to go to the place where He sets His Name, and we shall not appear there empty. He will get something, and His saints will get something, and all our spiritual joys will be deepened as we take them up with Him and with His people. It is really a question of the place God has with us. It was said of Benjamin, referring to Jerusalem as the place where Jehovah would set His Name, "He will cover him all the day long, and dwell between his shoulders" (Deuteronomy 33: 12). Jehovah's protection would be over His beloved, but He would dwell between his shoulders — His dwelling place would be in the strength of His people's affections.

If we bring our tithes and offerings and vows to the place where God chooses to set His Name we shall not fail to get our portion. "Ye shall eat there before Jehovah your God, and ye shall rejoice, ye and your households, in all the business of your hand, wherein Jehovah thy God hath blessed thee" (verse 7; see also verses 12, 18). The "business" of our hand is never really so prosperous as when we carry it on with constant reference to the blessed God, and to what is due to Him. We greatly deepen and increase our own joy by holding things in relation to God and to His assembly. There is more joy in eating "before Jehovah" in His assembly than there could be in eating in our own "gates". Things are enjoyed there in the great expansion that comes by taking all saints into account, and viewing all their blessing as held in common to the glory and praise of God.

"Thou and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy bondman, and thy handmaid, and the Levite that is within thy gates; and thou shalt rejoice before Jehovah thy God in all the business of thy hand" (verse 18). It is "Israel's custom" so to do (Psalm 122: 4 margin). It is evident from this scripture that all the business of our hand is to be carried on in view of what can be brought to the place where God sets His Name; its end is there, and there only can it be enjoyed in the fullest possible manner.

"All the business of thy hand", implies diligence in the appreciation and cultivation of the inheritance. It is to be our definite business to see to the working out in result for our own joy of that which God gives us. So far as I can learn in Scripture, God has nothing for lazy people, and there is nothing for God from them. Many quietly accept that the inheritance is given to them in the love of God, and they perhaps know what it is to be under showers of blessing in the way of ministry, but they are indolent and slothful, they are not carrying out diligently what Scripture calls "the business of your hand". It is through the "business" of our hand that the inheritance becomes fruitful. There will be no crops, no corn or new wine or oil, apart from diligence, and the result will be that there will be no tithes. We fail from want of spiritual diligence in regard to the things we admit to be true. In Romans 12 we are incited to diligence. "As to diligent zealousness, not slothful; in spirit fervent; serving the Lord". This is of the greatest importance in view of its effect on the meetings; the end in view is that there may be something brought to the meetings which will be an enrichment of the communion of the brethren. This is the product of diligence in cultivating the land. If we accept that divine love has given us the inheritance let us cultivate it with purpose of heart. In so doing we shall be working for an assured result; there is no question about God giving the increase. There will be crops in abundance, and tithes to carry to the place where God causes His Name to dwell, to be eaten there in communion with the brethren before Him. Let us throw ourselves into this "business" with wholehearted energy and confidence; the product of it is very attractive.

Our secular occupation in this world is discipline for us; it is a constant exercise to carry out the will of God in relation to it. But it is not our true "business"; our "business" is to cultivate the inheritance. I have noticed that people who are pretty fully engaged in necessary duties prosper most spiritually; those who have little to do, and much leisure, often do not prosper because they lack the discipline of daily duties. The discipline we get in every day life is intended to help us in view of our appreciating, and entering upon, and cultivating the inheritance. A brother was asked not long ago why he did not retire. He said, I feel I cannot afford to dispense with the discipline my business is to me. We are not here to make money but to be disciplined, and the circumstances of daily life as under the ordering of God will not hinder us in regard to the inheritance. It would be strange if the providential ordering of God for those in His kingdom were such as to hinder us from enjoying the things which it is His peculiar pleasure to confer upon us. It could never be so. We are hindered by seeking our own things, not by things which lie in the will of God for us.

“Corn”, “new wine”, and “oil” represent things which we are continually gathering in by the work of our hands as in the inheritance. But as we gather them in we have always to remember to tithe them, and the tithe has to be carried to the place where God causes His Name to dwell. Every spiritual increase has to be linked with the assembly — the common meeting place of God’s people. What one gains individually or household-wise is always to contribute to the communion found where God dwells in the midst of His people. The tithes have to be eaten there.

It is not in this case ministering directly to God, but ministering to the communion of His saints before Him. It is most agreeable to God that we should come before Him to enjoy together in communion that which He has given to us as the food and fatness of the inheritance. How the practical working out of this would free the meetings of the saints from all formality! Since we last came together there has been, so to speak, a fresh harvest from our fields, a fresh vintage, and a fresh gathering in of oil throughout Israel. And each one comes with the tithe that we may all eat together before God in the place where He dwells. All is fresh — the same Christ, the same grace, the same Spirit, but all acquired in a new way through fresh diligence and living exercises. So that the tithe is something which was never eaten quite in the same way before. The communion of the saints as gathered together has thus continually a fresh and satisfying character. There is nothing old or stale. The communion is such as to suit a living God, and a people who are living in the good of what He has given. It is the communion of saints viewed, not in the Corinthian aspect as in the wilderness, but as in the land. It is our communion viewed as in the enjoyment together of eternal life.

God delights in the spiritual communion of His people before Him — their common enjoyment of things which lie outside the range and power of death. Are we bringing the tithes to further this? Have we got increase as the result of diligent cultivation of the land so that we have something to tithe — something which we can bring to the gathering place of God’s people to promote spiritual communion? I am not referring exactly to what is *said* in the meetings, though I have no doubt if spiritual substance is there it will find expression. But I challenge myself and you as to whether we are acquiring spiritual increase? There is something very abnormal if we are not. But if we are, it is obligatory to tithe it for the promotion of the communion of the saints. The communion of saints in eating together what is typified by the corn, the new wine, and the oil of the land is eternal life.

The communion of saints viewed as in the land depends on moral conditions being maintained which are suitable to the place where God dwells, and it

depends upon the tithes being brought. Independency, and what is right in our own eyes, are ruled out. All must come to the one appointed place; this is not a matter of choice, but of God's appointment. If it is not carried out the service of God according to His pleasure is not rendered.

God is saying by this institution of tithes that He gives spiritual increase to promote spiritual communion. It is more to Him to see us united in the communion before Him of what He has given us, than it is to hear wonderful words from us while the communion is lacking. It is very much for the pleasure of God that we should know the fellowship of saints as in the wilderness, according to 1 Corinthians, but if we desire to minister to His full pleasure it must be by enjoying the fellowship which pertains to the inheritance — to that sphere where eternal life and sonship are entered into.

DEUTERONOMY 13

Deuteronomy 13

The last section of the previous chapter is a warning against being ensnared by things over which one has previously got the victory. Many a person has walked in apparent superiority to certain things for years, and then fallen under their power. An order which is pleasing to man after the flesh is sure to have idolatrous elements in it. There will be something in it that either obscures the revelation of God, or to some extent takes away the glory of Christ, or sets aside the Spirit of God. The result of such things getting a place in practice or in teaching is that the character of what professes to be approach to God becomes such as not to be pleasurable to Him, and there may even be introduced into it that which He regards as "abomination".

As to what is evil, and contrary to God, we are not even to "inquire" into it. "I wish you to be wise as to that which is good, and simple as to evil" (Romans 16: 19). There is a great tendency in the human mind to crave knowledge as to what is wrong, and many have been ensnared by needlessly investigating evil teachings, and have fallen under Satan's power thereby. The important thing is to know what is good, and to go on with it.

Chapter 13 regards the people of God as having known Him. We are not to be turned aside to "go after other gods, whom thou hast not known" (verses 2, 6, 13). We are to be true to what we know. This is a principle which will preserve the youngest babe in Christ. We may not know much, but let us be true to it, and we shall be preserved, and we shall follow on to know the Lord. There was a man who only knew "one thing", but he would not be diverted from it, and he quickly got more. (See John 9) What we, as believers, know of God is so precious that the devil will do all he can to divert us from it. But we must resist him, "stedfast in faith" (1 Peter 5: 9).

The instruction of this chapter is very solemn, for it shews the extreme displeasure with which God regards those who seek to draw His people out of the way in which He has commanded them to walk (verse 5). Such persons were to be put to death, however near and dear they might be; they were not to be spared, pitied, nor screened. They were marked by speaking "revolt against Jehovah your God"; they were abhorrent to Him, and He would have them to be reprobated in the most absolute way by His people. It need hardly be said to Christians that in its application to ourselves this does not suggest any violence against persons, but extreme moral detestation and condemnation of what is contrary to God in their teachings, There is not to be the slightest allowance of, nor fellowship with, the evil deeds of such as

pervert the truth, or "the right paths of the Lord". It is our privilege and our duty to pray for the good of persons whose teachings are false, and to desire that God may "give them repentance to acknowledgment of the truth, and that they may awake up out of the snare of the devil", and to this end we are to be marked by "in meekness setting right those who oppose" (2 Timothy 2: 24 - 26), but the spirit and action of grace towards them personally is in no way to weaken our abhorrence of the teachings with which they are identified. Such persons are to be outside the pale of Christian fellowship, like the twice-admonished heretical man, of whom Paul says, "Have done with" him (Titus 3: 10). Not bringing the doctrine of Christ, they are not to be received into the house, nor greeted (2 John 10, 11). They are to be separated from as vessels to dishonour (2 Timothy 2: 21).

This chapter would lead us to anticipate the possibility of being tested by pernicious influences in three different forms. Verses 1 - 5 refer to "a prophet, or one that dreameth dreams, and he give thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass that he told unto thee". We are expressly warned against such in the New Testament. "Many false prophets", says John, "are gone out into the world" (1 John 4: 1).

"But there were false prophets also among the people", says Peter, "as there shall be also among you false teachers, who shall bring in by the bye destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2: 1). And Paul speaks of such as "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And it is not wonderful, for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. It is no great thing therefore if his ministers also transform themselves as ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11: 13 - 15). Paul says also, "For I know this, that there will come in amongst you after my departure grievous wolves, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves" — the elders of the assembly in Ephesus! — "shall rise up men speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20: 29, 30).

There are many such at the present time, and some of them profess to give signs or wonders — healing, speaking with tongues, supernatural manifestations or communications from the spirit-world, and so on — and what they say may sometimes really "come to pass" (see verses 1, 2). But these things are not to be allowed to impress or overawe us; they are to be regarded as a test. "For Jehovah your God proveth you, to know whether ye love Jehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul". We shall find that all these prophets and dreamers, while they may speak "swelling words",

and even quote Scripture largely — as did also their master the devil — speak “revolt” against

“Our God whom we have known,
Well known in Jesus’ love”.

They speak “revolt against Jehovah your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage” (verse 5). They do not call upon us to wonder and adore as we behold the Lamb of God in the place of sin, and of sin’s judgment, as the Passover. They do not tell us that He who hung upon the cross was “over all, God blessed for ever” (Romans 9: 5), or that the Fulness of Godhead dwells in Him bodily as a glorified Man at the right hand of God. They do not magnify to our souls the grace of a Redeemer and Saviour God, or the fruits of redemption in present and eternal blessing. They do not tell us that through the one offering of Christ we are perfected for ever, or that God’s salvation in a Risen Christ gives complete deliverance out of the present evil world. They do not recall to us that we have been set free from everything that once held us in bondage, and that God in the fulness of His love has delighted to give us His Spirit, and to bring us to the abode of His holiness, and to bless us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. They may tell us of wonderful things — past, present, or future — but the actual effect of their specious teaching is to take us away from the truth of the glad tidings, and from that knowledge of God in which all true blessing consists.

It is a day of false prophets and dreamers, but without exception they are marked by defective and erroneous thoughts of the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by thoughts of God which are contrary to the truth of the glad tidings which have been announced to us, and which also we have received, and in which we stand, and by which also we are saved (1 Corinthians 15: 1, 2). They may “by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting” (Romans 16: 18), but they really speak “revolt” against the God whom we know as Redeemer, Justifier, Saviour and Deliverer, and whose good and acceptable and perfect will it is now our privilege to prove.

In verses 6 - 11 the test comes in a more secret and appealing way. “If thy brother, the son of thy mother,

or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, who is to thee as thy soul, entice thee secretly”, etc. This refers to private and personal influence brought to bear upon us by those with whom we have the closest and most intimate ties of natural affection. But no feelings of personal regard

or natural affection are to weigh with us for a moment to lead us to consent to such enticings, or even hearken to them. We are called upon to discern — and the unction we have received will enable us to discern — when any influence tends to draw us away from what we have learned through the glad tidings, and from that which has been “the faith of God’s elect” from the beginning. For we have had a spiritual ancestry, answering to “thy fathers” in verse 6, and we do well to remember those who have spoken to us the word of God (Hebrews 13: 7). This would apply specially to those of whom Peter speaks as “your apostles” (2 Peter 3: 2). From whatever quarter, or in whatever form, inducements to depart come to us they are to be resisted in the most decided way. “That prophet ... shall be put to death” (verse 5). “Thou shalt in any case kill him” (verse 9).

The third section of the chapter (verses 12 - 18) would refer to departure of a collective or assembly character, for it is “in one of thy cities”. And here we get for the first time an expression which recurs frequently afterwards in Scripture — “children of Belial”. It is sad to think that there are those amongst the people of God who are thus designated by the Holy Spirit. They are morally worthless as having nothing in common with Christ (see 2 Corinthians 6: 15). We need to be reminded that there are such persons, and that their influence may even draw away assemblies. “The woman Jezebel” is a veritable “daughter of Belial”, and her influence in the assembly in Thyatira is of the very character against which Deuteronomy 13 warns us. “Her children will I kill with death; and all the assemblies shall know that I am he that searches the reins and the hearts; and I will give to you each according to your works” (Revelation 2: 20 - 23). This is much like Deuteronomy 13: 11.

Departure from God is never so serious as when it takes assembly character. The angel of the assembly in Thyatira was held responsible for permitting Jezebel with her corrupting and idolatrous teachings, and “the Son of God, he that has his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass”, will judge unsparingly both the teacher and the taught “unless they repent”. Religious influences that do not give Divine Persons their proper place are essentially idolatrous. There should be holy jealousy as to such things, and intense repudiation of them. Indeed in principle this would apply to anything which tends “to draw thee out of the way that Jehovah thy God commanded thee to walk in”. We are to stand perfect and complete in everything that is God’s will, and not to allow any influence that would be contrary to it. Those influences have to be destroyed, as to their power in our souls.

If our brethren would lead us away they are to be resisted. Not even one so conspicuous as Peter was to be exempt from being withstood to the face when

he played a dissembling part (Galatians 2). It might seem immaterial whether a Jew ate with Gentiles or not. Some would have regarded the circumstance as of no importance. But Paul's spiritual eye saw clearly that the whole character of the dispensation was involved; Christianity itself was at stake. And Paul did not spare that in Peter which was to be condemned; he did not screen him, but exposed before all the evil that was working. He killed, not Peter indeed, but that which, at the moment, in Peter was contrary to what both he and Peter had known of God. Peter might well speak of Paul afterwards as "our beloved brother Paul"; no doubt he felt deeply how much he owed to Paul's faithful love. The incident serves to shew how subtle are the influences of evil against which we have to be on our guard, as tending to draw us out of the way in which we have been commanded to walk. Every such test, if gone through with God, will confer spiritual confirmation and gain, but if we yield in what may seem to be small matters greater defection will soon follow.

Certain evils may be "near unto thee" (verse 7). They are so like the truth as to deceive the unwary. We should always bear in mind that opposition to the truth in the last days is "in the same manner in which Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses" (2 Timothy 3: 8). The truth is withstood by imitation; the evil thing is very like the real and divine thing. It has the form of what is right without the spiritual power and vitality of it. The nearer things are the more deceptive and dangerous they are if they are not of God.

Then, on the other hand, there are evil influences which are "far from thee". Teachings which are so far-fetched, and so entirely different from anything we have known, that their very strangeness and novelty has a kind of fascination for the mind. But whether "near" or "far", everything is to be utterly refused which has not been "heard from the beginning". "As for you let that which ye have heard from the beginning abide in you: if what ye have heard from the beginning abides in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise which *he* has promised us, life eternal. These things have I written to you concerning those who lead you astray: and yourselves, the unction which ye have received from him abides in you, and ye have not need that any one should teach you; but as the same unction teaches you as to all things, and is true and is not a lie, and even as it has taught you, ye shall abide in him" (1 John 2: 24 - 27).

Our safety lies in going on with what is good and of God. "Ye shall walk after Jehovah your God, and ye shall fear him, and his commandments shall ye keep, and his voice shall ye hear; and ye shall serve him, and unto him shall ye cleave" (verse 4).

DEUTERONOMY 14

Deuteronomy 14

"Ye are sons of Jehovah your God". Sonship is the relationship in which we stand, through infinite love, to the blessed God. He bestows eternal life upon us; it is the land of our possession — the gift of God for men. But we are sons for the pleasure of God. This thought comes out in many scriptures. "Even as a father the son in whom he delighteth" (Proverbs 3: 12). The Voice out of heaven said to Jesus, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight" (Luke 3: 22). God gives us life eternal as "the land", but He would have us to enjoy it in the consciousness that we are sons for His pleasure. "Thee hath Jehovah chosen for a people of possession unto himself, out of all the peoples that are upon the face of the earth" (verse 2).

God has not only shown us mercy in cleansing and saving us, but He has called us to the blessedness of being sons — objects of delight to His heart. Nothing could touch our hearts more than that. And it brings in an entirely new standard of walk and ways and spirit. If I realise that I am one of the sons of God I am no longer a bondman (Galatians 4: 7); I do not merely ask What is my duty? or, Is there any harm in this or that? I am constrained to enquire eagerly, How can I most yield delight to God my Father? It becomes a holy and abiding exercise that there should be nothing to disfigure the moral beauty that rightly attaches to sons of God.

Any idolatrous mark would disfigure us (verse 1). And we are to live on food suitable for sons; we must beware of influences and associations that are unclean. "Thou shalt not eat any abominable thing".

The creatures that may be eaten represent the influences which we allow to come into our lives and to form us morally. The kind of company we keep, the books that we read! the subjects on which we allow our minds to dwell, all tend directly to affect us inwardly, and to give us character and constitution in a moral sense. We have to exercise discrimination and holy care as to what we eat and assimilate. The clean creatures would be such as have, in a typical or symbolical way, the features and characteristics of Christ. What is not after Christ is unsuitable food for sons of God.

The clean beasts are not particularised in Leviticus 11, but a number of them are mentioned here in detail. In Leviticus 11 the people are taken account of as standing in relation to Moses and Aaron, the mediator and the priest, and thus called to be a holy people because Jehovah was holy. But in Deuteronomy

14 we are viewed as sons in family relationship, and as such the features of Christ are to mark us for the delight of God.

"The ox, the sheep, and the goat" are frequently used in Scripture as types of Christ. What, marks the ox is strength for labour; see Psalm 144: 14; Proverbs 14: 4. It is written of Christ that "coming into the world he says ... Lo, I come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do, O God, thy will" (Hebrews 10: 5 - 7). He came in with capability to do all that was according to God's pleasure. There was strength to carry out the will of God in every detail in patient, persistent energy. "I do always the things that are pleasing to him" (John 8: 29). I have read that no animal draws with such a steady pull as the ox; there are no fits and starts, no rushing and halting, but an even, onward, persevering movement. Such was the service of the blessed Son of God as Man here. The forty times repeated "immediately" or "straightway" in the Gospel of Mark has always arrested the attention of readers. How He passed on from one service to another! Never in a hurry; always at leisure — if we may so say — to attend to the need that presented itself; but completing each act of service that He might pass on without delay to the next. Does not the consideration of it make most of us feel ashamed to reflect on how casual and intermittent our little bit of service has been!

There are, indeed, sabbaths for the ox (Deuteronomy 5: 14), and times when the Lord may say, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest a little" (Mark 6: 31). But it is well to remember that the sabbath comes at the end of six days of labour. "Six days shalt thou labour, and *do all thy work*". Patient and persistent labour is to mark the sons of God. They are to feed upon Him who said, "I must work the works of him that has sent me while it is day. The night is coming, when no one can work" (John 9: 4). I cannot doubt that one great corrective of the carnal state at Corinth lay in the Apostle's words, "So then, my beloved brethren, be firm, immovable, abounding always in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15: 58). As sons we are to feed on Christ as symbolised in the ox, so as to be characterised by strength for persistent toil. It is a mark of sonship.

Let us not be content to have the light of sonship as the blessed relationship to which God has called us in infinite love. If the Spirit of sonship in our hearts has put us consciously in the place and affections of sons, let us see to it that, as led by the Spirit of God, we are acting as sons, finding our delight in doing what is pleasing to God. "And they shall be unto me a peculiar treasure, saith Jehovah of hosts, in the day that I prepare; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Malachi 3: 17). Ephraim had to

bemoan himself, and to be chastised, because he was "as a bullock not trained", or as the Authorised Version reads, "unaccustomed to the yoke" (Jeremiah 31: 18). How we need to be trained so as to bear the sons' yoke of Christ, and to be devoted to the service of God in the liberty of sons! We shall then find that Christ's yoke is easy and His burden light.

The sheep is not marked by the strength or labour of the ox, nor by the stately step of the goat, but by uncomplaining submission to suffering. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, but he opened not his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and was as a sheep dumb before her shearers, and he opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53: 7). It is precisely in that connection that we are told He has left us a model that we should follow in His steps. See 1 Peter 2: 21 - 23. It is as feeding on Him, and abiding in Him, that we shall be able to walk even as He walked.

The goat is mentioned among the things which, "have a stately step", and which are "comely in going" (Proverbs 30: 29 - 31). How "stately" were the Lord's steps! With what calmness and dignity He moved on amidst the contradiction of sinners, and in presence of weakness and misunderstanding in His disciples! Never halting or perturbed, never uncertain as to what step to take next! Wherever He was, in every circumstance — even the most uncongenial — He was "comely in going". Whether in presence of the devil, or of cavilling, unbelieving men; with Pharisees, Sadducees, the chief priests, Pilate, Herod, we never see anything but stateliness, dignity, and comeliness in the way He moved. The contemplation of it makes most of us feel ashamed of ourselves. But if we fed on Him as the goat we should acquire ability to move with stately steps. Our steps need not fail of the grace and dignity that is proper to sons of God. It is largely a question of the kind of food our constitutions are being built up on. The different features of Christ set forth symbolically in the clean animals have to be appropriated and assimilated so that we may be sons of God in moral constitution.

The "hart" sets forth another deeply interesting feature that belongs to sons. It is expressive of inward and ardent desires after God. "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Psalm 42: 1). The wonderful heart-breathings after God which form so distinct a feature of the Psalms are all the fruit of the Spirit of Christ, and sometimes they rise to prophetic utterances of Christ Personally. His tarrying in Jerusalem at the age of twelve, and being found "in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers and hearing them and asking them questions" (Luke ii), shew the intensity of His interest in all that was of God. He was, indeed, engrossed in His Father's business. And when afterwards He cast the money-changers and merchants

out of the temple, "his disciples remembered that it is written, The zeal of thy house devours me" (John 2: 17). What a corrective of Laodicean lukewarmness would be found in feeding on the characteristic feature of Christ which is set forth in the hart! Nothing is more important than that this feature should have a very distinct place in our moral being.

The "hart" and the "gazelle" are both mentioned as symbolical of Christ in the Canticles (Song of Songs 2: 9, 17). The "gazelle" would seem to suggest the thought of what is beautiful or glorious, for the word is translated "beauty" in Isaiah 4: 2; Daniel 8: 9; Daniel 11:16; Daniel 11:41; Daniel 11:45. It is translated "glory" in Isaiah 28: 5 and other passages; "ornament" in Ezekiel 20: 6. What grace and beauty marked all the ways of Christ! He was, indeed, "fairer than the sons of men", and in all that is morally glorious in its excellency He is available to be fed upon that the "sons" may take character from Him. Let us not say that it is out of our reach, for God has placed it in Christ for us that we might appropriate it into our affections as their food and joy, and what we feed on will inevitably form us. There can be no lower standard of what is suitable in the sons of God than what was found for the delight of God in His beloved Son as Man here. The heart that loves Him would refuse to cherish, or to be content with, anything lower or other than that.

So far as I know the remainder of the beasts that may be eaten are only mentioned here, save that the stag appears in the provision for Solomon's table. We may find it difficult, through our ignorance of the animals referred to, to say just what features of Christ each one of them sets forth. In one sense it is a comfort to know that there is a wealth of suggestiveness in the Spirit's typical presentations of Christ that is beyond us. It is something still to be searched out, and known and fed upon. Each one of these animals symbolises features which can be safely and profitably assimilated by sons of God. They all have the same kind of feet and digestive organs.

Separation in walk must be accompanied by inward rumination, or what we are in our true inwardness may be quite different from what we appear to be outwardly. This is the case with the swine, representing those who may be very separate outwardly, like the Pharisees, but who are unclean inwardly. Paul could say of Timothy that he had followed up his teaching and conduct and purpose and faith. He not only heard things, and passed them on to others, but he followed them up in the exercises of his own soul. Meditation and reflection are essential; it is most important that we should have the "knowledge which cometh of reflection" (Proverbs 8: 12). For lack of it many earnest persons are very immature in the knowledge of God and His things

which should mark His sons. We cannot be intelligent sons for the pleasure of God by merely receiving what others say; an inward reflective process has to go on answering to chewing the cud. As we truly feed on Christ, with inward consideration, we retire more and more from the world, and from what marks it, because we perceive that there is no delight for God in it, or in its things. Anything outside what was true in Christ has the character of what is unclean. A separate walk, and inward occupation with the things of God, are features that are not to be lacking in sons of God.

We are not to be deceived by persons who have, or appear to have, some of the features which are approved of God. Some may be like the camel, the hare, and the rock-badger, who chew the cud, or appear to do so, but have not cloven hoofs. Such appear to give place in their thoughts to the things of God, but their practical ways are not at all in keeping therewith. And, on the other hand, the walk may be exemplary in a legal way while the heart is a stranger to the inward movements which are proper to those into whom the Spirit of God's Son has been sent forth. Such inconsistencies are not to be found in the sons of God. "Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcase shall ye not touch".

The creatures "in the waters" have to move through an element which comes closely into contact with them, and only those who can do so with purpose and definiteness, and without being unduly affected by it, are to be eaten. The natural is very near to every one of us, and if we are to move through it as sons of God for His pleasure we need "fins and scales". Probably many of us are more tested by what is natural than by what is worldly; we are in danger of being diverted or unduly deflected by the natural influence of relatives or friends, with the result that our course lacks spiritual definiteness.

If Barnabas had been characterised by "fins" he would not have parted from Paul. He allowed, at any rate for a time, a natural partiality to govern him, and under its influence he lost the immense privilege of being the companion of Paul in his labours. A definite following of Christ, and a walk in the Spirit, are needed if we are to move through the natural influences, which are so close to us, in a way that is suitable to sons of God.

The birds represent influences — good or evil — that move in the spiritual sphere. The "clean birds" are not specified here, but twenty-one are mentioned as not to be eaten. There are many evil influences in a spiritual sense. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, if they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4: 1). We must beware of spiritual influences that are not of the Holy Spirit. Satan is the prince of the power of the air; he is the prime mover in all that is contrary

to God; but the forms which evil takes are very varied, and we must not forget that they are found now within the Christian profession. We read in Revelation 18: 2 that "Great Babylon ... has become the habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hated bird". "But the Spirit speaks expressly, that in latter times some shall apostatise from the faith, giving their mind to deceiving spirits and teachings of demons speaking lies in hypocrisy" (1 Timothy 4: 1, 2).

There are not only systems of teaching that are in bold and open opposition to Scripture, but others that are specious and make a great show of being accurate in their deductions from Scripture. But every evil teaching strikes in some way at the Person or the atoning work of the Son of God, or obscures the glad tidings of God so that men are turned away from the great salvation which is in Christ Jesus. Other evil influences obscure the truth of the heavenly calling of the saints. It is sad to see even true believers carried away by such things as Anglo-Israel theories, or the imagined prophecies of the great pyramid! There is a certain fascination for many minds in the attempt to fit current events into scriptural prophecy, but such occupations tend to divert from the present witness of the Holy Spirit to a glorified Christ in heaven.

Without attempting to point out in detail the characteristic features of each unclean bird mentioned here, it may suffice to say that many of them are birds of prey, and some are lovers of darkness, and none of them represent what God can approve as giving character to His sons. It is to be noted that the paragraph begins with "All clean birds shall ye eat", and it ends with "All clean fowls shall ye eat" The best preservative against what is unclean is to be actively occupied in the assimilation of what is clean. And those "born of water and of Spirit", have an inward cleanness that enables them to judge accurately between what is clean and unclean. The sons of God know the difference. It is suggestive that in Genesis 7, where we have the first mention of "clean" and "not clean", there is no list given to guide Noah in the selection. It is written that "Noah was a just man, perfect amongst his generations: Noah walked with God". Such a man did not need a list; his own inward perceptions, as taught of God, sufficed to distinguish the clean from the unclean. And the "sons" of God know the difference; they "have their senses exercised for distinguishing both good and evil". Every child of God knows intuitively the difference between what is of Christ and the Spirit and what is of the mind and tastes of the flesh. Of course it is possible to put away a good conscience, and to have the spiritual sensibilities so perverted or deadened that the power of discrimination is practically lost, but this is a sad state of departure from God. John writes to "little children" — the babes in the family of God — that they have the unction from the holy One, and know all things . "I have not

written to you because ye do not know the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth" (1 John 2: 20, 21). There is capacity even in babes to discern what is of Christ and of the Spirit. The sheep of Christ "follow him, because they know his voice. But they will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him, because they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10: 4, 5).

We have to be exercised as to what we receive in connection with ministry — even ministry in the assembly as referred to in 1 Corinthians 14 "And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge". Everything is to be tested. "Do not lightly esteem prophecies; but prove all things, hold fast the right" (1 Thessalonians 5: 21, 22). But it must be remembered that ability to judge lies in being spiritual ourselves. "The things of the Spirit of God ... are spiritually discerned; but the spiritual discerns all things, and *he* is discerned of no one" (1 Corinthians 2: 14, 15).

"All clean birds shall ye eat All clean fowls shall ye eat". It is as much as to say, Go on with what is clean, and leave alone all that is otherwise! I do not think that it would greatly profit us to know in detail what every unclean bird represents. We must beware of occupying ourselves with what is evil, even if professedly to judge it. Some may be called as a matter of service to investigate wrong teachings and to refute them, but for saints generally it is well not to know them. "I wish you to be wise as to that which is good, and simple as to evil" (Romans 16: 19). When we see that things are not of God, it is well to leave them alone. Let us go on with what is spiritual. The sons of God must feed on Christ, and take character from such features as are "clean" in the sight of God. I think it must be admitted that most believers are not well developed in spiritual constitution. A good constitution can only be built up by feeding on good food. No doubt the saints appreciate spiritual features — the features of Christ — when they are set before us objectively, but it is another thing to be possessed of them as developed in ourselves. Of how many of the features of Christ could I say that I have eaten and assimilated them so that they have become incorporated in my moral being?

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God". How blessed when the inward thoughts and feelings are the product of the leading of the Spirit of God! It is in this way that the saints come out characteristically and definitely as the sons of God. Through mercy we are where there is the comfort and blessing of the light of sonship. We know that it is the thought, and purpose of God's love that we should be His sons in Christ Jesus by faith. The gospel gives us the precious light of this. But then if we are to answer to the thought and pleasure of God we must appear in the character and wealth which are seen to attach to "sons of Jehovah" in Deuteronomy 14,

Deuteronomy 15. And in view of this what we feed upon is of the utmost importance.

"Ye shall eat of no carcase; thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is within thy gates, that he may eat it, or sell it unto a foreigner; for thou art a holy people to Jehovah thy God". There are things which may be permissible, or even profitable, for strangers or foreigners that are not at all suitable for sons. There is a wholly different, and far more elevated, standard for the people of God than could be thought of by the natural man, However excellent his ideals might be. A "carcase" is something that has not been devoted to death with any definite purpose in relation to God. It has died in the natural course of things, or by misadventure. God's sons are not to be characterised by what speaks merely of the absence of natural energy. People may give up the things of the world, or some of them, simply because their tastes have changed in a natural way, and they prefer a quieter life. In some cases the power to enjoy the pursuits of the natural man may no longer be present. There is no value in this for God. His sons are to be marked by positive spiritual energy which will impart a sacrificial spirit and value to their course. Their bodies are to be presented a living sacrifice. "The deeds of the body" in a fleshly sense are not to cease by the failing of natural energy to carry them into effect, but they are to be put to death by the Spirit.

Then the remarkable injunction that comes in here, and elsewhere, "Thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother's milk", would seem to be a reminder that God would have His sons to regard all that is of Himself in nature. It was God who established the relationship between a kid and its mother, and because He established it, He would have it to be regarded by His sons with tender and refined sensibilities. God would have tender considerations and sympathies in His people. The natural mind would be ready to say, What difference would it make either to the kid or its mother if it were boiled in its mother's milk? What would either of them know about it? But God would say, It is a matter that I concern myself about; I wish my sons to think tenderly of natural relationships. The more we regard what is of God in nature the more deeply we shall feel the sufferings which have come into the natural sphere through sin, and sympathies will be developed which are worthy of God. When the blessed Son of God saw disease and death it was an intense grief to Him because it traversed all God's original order. He was deeply moved when He saw in the sorrow and suffering of the creature the evidence of the power of evil having come in. It is written that He "healed all that were ill; so that that should be fulfilled which was spoken through Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Matthew 8: 17). As it has been said, He bore in His spirit what He removed by His power.

The groan of a suffering creation is a grief to the heart of God. It is a marvellous statement that not one sparrow falls to the ground "without your Father". He bears every creature in His mind, even, as we should say, the most insignificant. And if this is the case how much more does He think of, and feel for, the intelligent creature man, on whom He has so specially set His heart? At the present time His sons have to suffer with the groaning creation, and as part of it, that we may be sympathetic with all its sorrow. When the Son of God came into the world in the fulness of divine power to heal every disease and meet every need He came in sympathetically, so that we not only find Him speaking words of power, but *touching* those He healed. His touches spoke of sympathy. Divine power was there in Him to annul death and call the dead Lazarus out of the grave. But what tender sympathies were expressed in the tears of Jesus! The sons of God have to suffer now, both actually and sympathetically, that they may be qualified to come out at the "revelation of the sons of God" in a sympathetic spirit for the emancipation of the groaning creation. It is not for the pleasure of God that His creatures should groan, and His sons would never willingly add to the sufferings of any creature of God. But sufferings being present, as the result of man's sin, they give occasion for the development and expression of consideration and sympathy which is of God. Such feelings are proper to the sons of God. We may learn much of the heart of God in what He says of a kid and its mother.

The tithe of Deuteronomy 14: 22 - 27 is clearly additional to that spoken of in Numbers 18, which was to be given to the children of Levi for their service. The first charge upon spiritual prosperity is the support of what is levitical. The temporal support of those who serve the Lord in spiritual things has its place (1 Corinthians 9), but the tithes would represent rather that spiritual prosperity is to yield an abundant supply for the sustenance in a spiritual way of service for God. The levitical element in ourselves, and in the saints generally, is to be nourished and supported. If we have the wealth of the land, what answers to corn, new wine, oil, firstlings — a supply of what is connected with Christ and the Spirit and with spiritual increase — let us not forget that it is all to be tithed for service. If we do not render the tithes we rob God, and we shall lose His blessing. See Malachi 3. If those who have increase in spiritual blessing are not found serving the Lord proportionately in diligent zealousness and fervency of spirit they will assuredly lose what they have. The maintenance of service is perhaps more important than it is generally supposed to be; it is a definite mark of sons of God.

In presence of much fleshly activity in the Christian profession it is greatly for the pleasure of God that we should diligently maintain spiritual and devoted service. It is the practical evidence of spiritual prosperity. We were taken

account of for service from the outset, as the Levites were numbered from a month old, but every year should see us coming to greater maturity in that respect. All the elements of what is levitical are seen in Romans, but they are seen in full maturity in Philippians.

We must not think entirely of the Levites as representing a separate class — while, of course, recognising that there are distinct gifts — but rather as typifying the whole company of saints as united together to render holy service. Service does not take the same form in every one; it is taken up by each according to the measure of faith given by God; but it all blends in unity. When each is going on diligently with his appointed service things work happily and in harmony; there are no elements of discord or divergence.

Our first exercise should be to acquire spiritual substance, but then it is given that it may be tithed for the support of service. If what we suppose to be spiritual gain does not promote what is levitical there is something wrong about it; the tithes are not being rendered. Whenever we get any spiritual increase it must always be a definite exercise that it shall contribute to direct service to God and to His people. This is the first charge on the wealth of the inheritance.

Then the chapter before us speaks of a second tithe, which is to be eaten before Jehovah in the place which He chooses to cause His Name to dwell there. It suggests the peculiar gain and joy which is connected with honouring God in the assembly conditions which He has established. It has been made possible, through the grace of the Lord, for us to “come together” in conditions which are suitable to God, and to eat the Lord’s supper together (see 1 Corinthians 11), and thus to be convened in assembly character. This involves separation from evil, for God’s Name is in His assembly, and it is a holy Name. We must remember that any spiritual blessing which we have individually is to be tithed for the assembly; it is to contribute to our joy as those privileged to meet at a centre common to all saints, To recognise that there is such a centre, and that all saints are under obligation to regard it, is bound up with the fear of God. “That thou mayest learn to fear Jehovah thy God continually” (verse 23).

This is a word for any who may think that they can enjoy the Lord and His precious things at home, and that they are not under any obligation to take practical account of God’s assembly. There are certain things, represented by this tithe, which cannot be enjoyed at home *for the pleasure of God*. To eat them there would not be “before Jehovah thy God”. We are thus reminded that whatever we gather up of the wealth of the inheritance is to be held relative to the common meeting place of saints. For here it is not something to

be offered to God, but something for us to eat ourselves. It suggests a peculiar spiritual gain and joy which accrues *to us* from recognising what is due to God as to the assembly. We get our joy full. Such is the precious link between God and His sons that their enjoyment is secured and enhanced by the recognition that He has a place which He has chosen to cause His Name to dwell there. If we have not that in mind we are not behaving suitably to sons of God.

The provision for cases in which the way might be "too long" intimates that it may not always be easy to avail oneself of assembly conditions. Fellowship with God's people according to the truth of His assembly is not always easily obtainable. We are in "difficult times", but it is peculiarly pleasing to the Lord to see that we value what is of Himself even when it makes unusual demands. It has often happened that when believers have found themselves at a distance from privileges of assembly character they have been tempted to give up the truth, and to fall in with a human order of things. But difficulties are not to be succumbed to, but surmounted. The full value of the tithe is to go to God's appointed centre. The two going to Emmaus gathered in much on that eventful resurrection day, but we may say that they carried their tithe to the common fund with those who were "gathered together"

(Luke 24: 33). And on the day of Pentecost the Spirit of God gave the saints a sense that they were all bound up together as having common interests, possessions and joys. Who can doubt that this intensified the joy of each?

Then "at the end of three years" there is another tithe; it suggests the result of a prolonged experience of the wealth of the land. The third year is called specifically "the year of tithing" (Deuteronomy 26: 12). And this tithe is to be laid up "within thy gates; and the Levite — for he hath no portion nor inheritance with thee — and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that Jehovah thy God may bless thee in all the work of thy hand which thou doest". The result of three years' enjoyment of the plenty of the inheritance is that one becomes qualified for a very large-hearted ministry to those who have need. A solemn affirmation as to this has to be made, as we see in Deuteronomy 26: 13 - 15, from which we may learn how important as a condition of blessing was the faithful rendering of those hallowed things to those for whom they were appointed.

The favour and love of God bestows the inheritance. Then spiritual diligence is needed, set forth in the requisite tilling of the ground and gathering in of the crops. Without this there will not be much to tithe. The land is good, but it is the diligent soul that is made fat in it. Then the tithes are abundant. There is

nothing said of more than one tithe until we come to Deuteronomy, but now we see the people, viewed as "sons of Jehovah", so enriched that they can render even three tithes, and out of their abundance can minister satisfaction to every kind of need. This chapter and the next, dealing with tithes, the year of release, the giving bountifully to a poor brother, the furnishing of the Hebrew servant — man or woman — all bring out in a striking way the wealth of "sons of Jehovah". God counts upon enriched affections in His sons, so that, as in the wealth of the inheritance, they can be large-hearted in liberality without putting any strain on their resources.

DEUTERONOMY 15

Deuteronomy 15

The increasing wealth of the sons of God, as dwelling in the land and gathering in its fruits, is beautifully brought out in these chapters. There is a continually increasing yield for God and for His people. From the first year there is a tithe for service and for assembly enjoyment. From the third year there is a tithe for the benefit of the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless and the widow. There is ability to give expression to what God is in grace to those who have need. Then "At the end of seven years thou shalt make a release". All this indicates in a blessed way increasing formation in the divine nature. The saints are viewed as continuing to be nourished in the good of the land, and as increasing in spiritual wealth. God's sons are becoming more like Him — more imbued with the spirit of grace. They are getting freed from the spirit of demand. If I am requiring and demanding from my brethren, even if what I require is due to me, I have not lived long in the land. I have not been there "seven years". I have not learned much of God's ways of acting.

I may know that I have a righteous claim on my brother for something that is due to me which has not been rendered. In such a case I am in the position of a creditor. We may be in that position sometimes, though I fear we are more often in the position of debtors to our brethren. There are parts of Scripture which apply very distinctly to debtors, and to what is due on their part, and we must have full regard to those scriptures, but *this* is not a chapter for debtors but for wealthy persons, sons of God, heirs of all God's wealth. It is a chapter for creditors. "*Every creditor* shall relax his hand from the loan which he hath lent unto his neighbour; he shall not demand it of his neighbour, or of his brother; for a release to Jehovah hath been proclaimed" (verse 2). This indicates such maturity in the divine nature that God's sons can act even as He has acted Himself. What an exalted privilege is that! To sing truly, "Oh what a debt we owe" would enable us to take up the creditor's privilege in the year of "release!"

There are times when our brethren come under obligation to us. A creditor is one who has a righteous claim on his neighbour or his brother for something. It is well to consider whether we have righteous claims that remain unsatisfied. Let us turn over our ledgers and see if we have any entries standing against brothers or sisters! Yes! Brother So and so did not treat me with the respect that was due to me; he did not shew me Christian consideration or courtesy! And another brother took full advantage of my kindness, but expressed no gratitude; he made no return for all the good I

have done to him! And a sister spoke unkindly of me; she even said what was not true! And another promised to do a certain thing, but he never did it! All such things as these put us in the place of creditors. Such debts as that go on piling up year after year, and the creditors get soured by thinking so long about the debts that have never been paid! God does not like to see His sons maintaining demands on one another, so He steps in to confer a great privilege on all creditors. The creditor here is the one who gains, for he shines in the glory of correspondence with God. How could you enjoy your sabbatical year if you were thinking all the time of undischarged debts due to you from your brethren! Many local difficulties are the result of old standing accounts. There is a rankling sourness in the heart on account of things said and done years ago, and it is destructive of family affections and spiritual prosperity. These things shew that we have not been "seven years" in the land; we have not yet acquired sufficient wealth to "make a release". If we keep up personal grievances against our brethren we are missing the creditor's privilege in the year of release.

How often people say, "But I want righteousness". They forget that righteousness now consists in acting towards others in the same way that God has acted towards us. See Matthew 18: 21 - 35. Certain things are due on the debtor's part, and God's work in him would lead to the acknowledgement of this, but, as we have said before, this particular scripture is not occupied with the debtor, or the relief he gets; it is the setting forth of the creditor's privilege, and of the gain which accrues to him as he takes it up. It is not even spoken of here as a release to the debtor; it is "a release to Jehovah". The creditor has an opportunity of showing how he appreciates Jehovah's gracious favour, and of reflecting it in his conduct towards his poor brother. It is poverty in our brother that has brought him into the place of a debtor. If he had been spiritually wealthy he would never have incurred the debt; he would have undoubtedly discharged all his righteous obligations. But *his* poverty may furnish *me* with an opportunity to act as a wealthy son of God, and to make a release.

Making "a release to Jehovah" is not writing it off as a bad debt. It is really transferring the undischarged debts to God's account, who will certainly see that the creditor loses nothing by reflecting His character and ways. There is no question of the justice of the creditor's claim, but he is wealthy enough through divine favour to relax his hand and not demand it. He knows that God will give him such wealth that he will be far better off by freeing his brother from all demand than he would have been by insisting on having all that was due. "For Jehovah will greatly bless thee in the land that Jehovah thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, if thou only diligently hearken unto

the voice of Jehovah thy God, to take heed to do all this commandment which I command thee this day" (verses 4, 5). On this line you will never yourself be a debtor; you will never be a poor man in Israel. I have often seen people on the line of demand, but I have noticed that they are invariably poor in spiritual wealth. When the spirit of demand has been in my own heart I have found it spiritually impoverishing.

"Of the foreigner thou mayest demand it", shews that the subject here is relations between the people of God; the "release" applies to those within, not without. How many wounds are left smarting year after year because creditors are not rich enough to relax their righteous demands on their neighbour or their brother! God says, I want all my sons to taste the luxury of making a release. One might reverently say that God knows the pleasure of making a release; He has done it Himself; and He wants all His sons to have the same joy — to be wealthy enough to do it ungrudgingly! It is "a release to Jehovah"; that is, it is entirely done to Him for His pleasure.

The year of release would apparently coincide with the sabbatical year. It seems to me it was a necessary accompaniment of that year. It was a year without toil; no tilling of the ground, no agricultural work at all — a year of restful enjoyment. God would have His sons free at such a time from everything that would interfere with complete rest. How could we be in restful enjoyment with a lot of entries in our books against our brethren? How many lose spiritual enjoyment by dwelling on some wrong — real or supposed — that has been done them! I believe the year of release is a benefit to the creditor even more than to the debtor. It is presented in that light in this chapter. The creditor is wealthy enough to make the release without putting any strain on his resources, and he gains immeasurably by doing it. The spirit of demand amongst saints is the fruit of our not knowing how great is the wealth that belongs to the sons and heirs of God. It is a spirit that might suit poor persons, but it does not give the impression of wealthy sons.

The spirit of "release" comes out in such scriptures as, "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any should have a complaint against any; even as the Christ has forgiven you, so also do ye" (Colossians 3: 13). "And be to one another kind, compassionate, forgiving one another, so as God also in Christ has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4: 32). The Lord taught His disciples to pray, "And remit us our sins, for we also remit to everyone indebted to us" (Luke 11: 4). It assumes that those who thus pray have observed the year of release; the Lord would have us to enjoy the privilege of doing so. On the other hand, the consequences of not making a release are very serious. "For if ye forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father also

will forgive you yours, but if ye do not forgive men their offences, neither will your Father forgive your offences" (Matthew 6: 14, 15). The children of Israel went into captivity because they had apparently ceased to observe the sabbatical year about the time of David. They had to go into captivity for seventy years to make up for seventy sabbatical years that had not been kept (2 Chronicles 36: 21). Governmentally we may lose all spiritual freedom and enjoyment if we do not "make a release". If I find my heart indisposed to do it I have to recognise that I am small in the divine nature; it is *I* who am not acting as a son of God; *I* am the debtor rather than my poor brother; I must judge myself rather than him. The effect of making a release is that in my spirit I am in the liberty of grace and love towards my debtor. *He* may not yet be in freedom with me, for that will be dependent upon something on his side. But, as we have already said, this chapter is for creditors, and how they are to act if they are wealthy sons of God.

Then there is to be gracious consideration for "a poor man", "thy poor brother" (see verses 7 - 11). The word "bountifully" occurs three times in these five verses. This is a perpetual obligation, "For the needy shall never cease from within the land". God will see to it that there will always be opportunity for His bountifulness to be expressed through His sons. Hardened hearts, or shut hands, or things of Belial in the heart, are not suited to sons of God. There is not to be a thought of withholding, or of consideration whether we shall ever get back what we give. It is the spirit of grace in sons toward those marked by poverty, need, lack. How many such there are! There is always to be a bountiful hand open for them; they are to be kept going by the wealth of others. We are not to suppose that any wealth we have is for ourselves alone, or that it is only to be expended in mutual enjoyment amongst those who are as well off as we are! It is to be ministered "bountifully" to the poor and needy; that they are such constitutes their claim, and to care for them is one of love's luxuries. I am not referring altogether to temporal needs, though surely such a scripture has a definite bearing on them. But I am thinking for the moment of those who are spiritually poor. How many there are who never seem to know spiritual prosperity; they never acquire resources of their own; they never contribute anything; they seem to always need to be supported and kept up by the spiritual wealth of others! Well, they furnish a fine opportunity for bountifulness on the part of those who are spiritually richer than they are. I knew a brother who felt keenly how poor spiritually the saints were amongst whom he lived and served. They never seemed to get on, or to be capable of taking in spiritual thoughts. He got discouraged, and asked the Lord to move him to some place where there would be more interest and appreciation. He told me that the Lord seemed to say to him, Did you want to

care for my saints? and he answered, Yes, Lord, I did. Well, there they are; go on caring for and feeding them! And he went on doing so until the Lord called him home.

There is a tendency with us to look for some kind of return, and to shut up our hand if we see no prospect of getting it. But as wealthy sons it is our privilege to support, and to supply the lack of, the spiritually poor without considering whether there will be any return or not. The Lord's own words were, "Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be sons of the Highest" (Luke 6: 35). If I am only prepared to dispense my spiritual wealth on condition that I should be appreciated, or honoured, or respected, it is "a thing of Belial" in my heart. Paul was a wealthy son, and he said, "Now I shall most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls, if even in abundantly loving you I should be less loved" (2 Corinthians 12: 15). He had drunk deeply into the spirit of the scripture we are now considering. We like to be with those who understand us, and who can reciprocate our thoughts and feelings, but this must not be allowed to diminish our bountifulness to those who have need. They are to be valued and ministered to because of what they are to God.

The "Hebrew man" or "Hebrew woman" of the next section (verses 12 - 18) are brought in to complete the picture of the bountifulness which is to mark sons of God. It is no repetition of the ordinance in Exodus 21, where the "Hebrew bondman" is a well-known and precious type of Christ. *There* the central figure is the bondman, but *here* it is the bountiful conduct of the master when he sends his servant out free. He is to be sent away furnished — or as the margin reads, adorned — with every good. "Of what Jehovah thy God hath blessed thee with shalt thou give unto him". It is not the blessed service of Christ here, but the wealth that sends away full one who has been sold for service. The servant here is "thy brother"; there is no such word in Exodus 21. Each scripture is perfect in its own setting. The point here is how we act towards a brother or sister who may have come under obligation to us. It supposes a certain right acquired; the man or woman "have been sold unto thee". Such a circumstance in Israel would indicate a very reduced state; it would imply poverty and indebtedness and a condition of servitude brought about under the governmental ways of God. But, as Scripture often reminds us, thoughts of grace underlie even the government of God, and we see a striking illustration of it here. There may be circumstances, perhaps undoubtedly the fault of our brother, which give us a hold upon him. But how are we going to use it? Will we get all that we can out of him, or will we remember that we are privileged to let him go free, and to adorn him with good? There is a statute of limitations as to what we may exact from our

brother, even when we have a righteous claim upon him in the government of God. He is not to be kept more than "six yeses", and at the end of the term he is not to be let go empty; he is to be provided with capital to begin afresh free from the poverty which brought him into servitude. He has been under obligation; in the seventh year he is released from it; but the point in this scripture is the style in which he is released; it is to be worthy of "sons of Jehovah". We are to remember how God released us; we came out from Egyptian bondage enriched with "utensils of silver, and utensils of gold, and clothing" (Exodus 12: 35). There is to be not only a release, but the man or the woman are to be adorned with the best, that we have. It is the spirit which Paul desired to be found in Philemon; his runaway slave was to be received as "a beloved brother", and Paul counts upon Philemon doing "even more" than he said.

Whatever obligation a brother may have come under he is to be treated in a brotherly way, and with a bounty that is worthy of God. If he comes into permanent obligation it must be entirely in the freedom of love. There is nothing said here about his wife or children; it is the personal relation of one who has found a brother that he is well with, and he loves him and his house so much that he does not wish to be free from him, That is the impression that a wealthy son of God would make on one who came under his hand. When the bondman is entirely freed from any claim he devotes himself "for love's sake" to serve his brother forever. Both the master and the bondman are thus seen to be true "sons of Jehovah", acting in a spirit of love, and bound together in that spirit. What a contrast to the selfish and exacting spirit that marks man after the flesh!

A new section begins with verse 19, and it, brings before us important instruction as to certain things which have to be done "in the place which Jehovah will choose to cause his name to dwell there". We have learned from chapter 12 that this "place" has typical reference to conditions which are common to all the people of God in their approach to Him. It speaks of divine assembly conditions which are the same for all saints — a gathering centre by which the unity of God's people in approach to Him is secured, and to which His people universally are to come.

Now we learn from this section (Chapter 15: 19 - 16: 17) the character of certain prescribed privileges which were to be taken up in this place. It is not here voluntary offerings or "choice vows" prompted by the devoted affections of Jehovah's people richly blessed by Him. The things enjoined here were obligatory on every Israelite as the ordered service "year by year"; so they are evidently typical of great spiritual features which are to characterise the saints

as coming together before God in assembly conditions. His pleasure in His saints will be secured as these things are taken up, and the thought of this makes them intensely interesting and attractive to those who love Him.

"Every firstling" — it is the word usually translated "firstborn" — was to be hallowed, and eaten before Jehovah in the place which He would choose. Judgment came on the firstborn of Egypt, but a hallowed firstborn was a memorial of how Jehovah had secured His "firstborn" for Himself. It represented the distinctive place and relationship which God had predetermined to bestow upon His loved people. The thought of "firstborn" originated in the purpose of God. Before He had said anything of the passover He made known to Pharaoh the peculiar place that Israel had in the purpose of His love. "Thus saith Jehovah: Israel is my son, my firstborn" (Exodus 4: 22). In sovereign love He gave them that place for His own pleasure. Paul in Romans 9 mentions sonship as the first distinction of Israel. "Whose is the adoption (sonship)"; that was their primary distinction; Paul puts it before the covenants, and the lawgiving, and the service, and the promises. It is true of us also that sonship is our chief glory, conferred upon us by God's sovereign love for His own delight.

On the natural line the firstborn in Scripture very often loses the pre-eminent place, as in the case of Cain, Ishmael, Esau, Reuben, Manasseh. The firstborn as the chief of *man's* strength was set aside, but God's firstborn never loses the place accorded to him, for it is by the gift and calling of God, which are "not subject to repentance" (Romans 11: 29).

It is interesting to see that God declared the sonship of Israel, and their firstborn character, to the enemy and oppressor; it was purely a question of what they were in the thought of God's own heart. I do not know that it was ever said to the people that they were sons until the end of the wilderness; but God said it to Pharaoh. God let out to him the great thought of His love about His people. The first announcement of Christ was made to the serpent. It was to Balak that Jehovah declared His estimate of His people in all its blessedness. Some of the most precious utterances of the Lord about His saints were spoken to unbelievers and adversaries. When God is speaking to His people He is sometimes hindered by their state from communicating all that is in His heart. The Corinthians were in such a state that they were not prepared to hear the great thoughts of God. But when God is speaking to the adversary He can tell out all that is in His heart concerning His people.

Sonship is the place of relationship and dignity which has been brought to light in Christ; there could not be anything greater than that. If we come into it, we come in through Christ and in Him, and in the value of redemption, but

redemption has sonship in view (see Galatians 4: 5). The truth that Israel was God's son, His firstborn, underlies the Passover. We see in Ephesians that God marked us out for sonship before the foundation of the world, and it was *to Himself*; that is, it was for the pleasure of His love. That underlies the coming in of Christ for the accomplishment of redemption. Behind it was the precious thought of divine love that God would have sons. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ; according as he has chosen us in him before the world's foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love; having marked us out beforehand for adoption (sonship) through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has taken us into favour in the Beloved". It is in view of this that redemption has come in, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1: 3 - 7). When God takes sons for His own pleasure, He righteously clears them of everything that attached to them in their sinful state; He clears them by redemption. The passover is God's way of clearing His people so that He may have a son to take out of Egypt. The prophetic word was, "When Israel was a child then I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11: 1). As we know, the Spirit of God in the New Testament quotes that as having direct reference to Christ. The Spirit of God identifies sonship as in Israel with sonship as in Christ. This is divine instruction for us; it was not understood by them, nor could be. The Passover was God's righteous way of taking His son out of Egypt; He settled in the value of redemption every righteous liability attaching to His people. He covered His people in the power of redemption so that He might take them out of Egypt according to His own thought in the grace and dignity of sonship. Redemption is the righteous title of God to carry out the pleasure of His love in regard of those who have been sinful. It is interesting to see that the one other passage in Scripture except Exodus 12 where we get the word "passing over" is in Isaiah 31: 6. "As birds with outstretched wings so will Jehovah of hosts cover Jerusalem; covering, he will also deliver, *passing over*, he will rescue it". This gives us the true thought of the Passover; it is God passing the wing of His protecting love in the power of redemption over His people as a covering so that the destroyer is not suffered to enter; His people's houses are delivered.

There are two firstborns referred to in Exodus 4. "The firstborn in Egypt, the first-fruits of their vigour in the tents of Ham" (Psalm 78: 51), represent everything that is excellent in dignity and strength with men, and the judgment of God is on it, and we have to learn this. But there is a firstborn for

God, and He secures His firstborn through death. God has brought in Christ and His death as an entirely new starting point — a “beginning of months”. He has secured something which has excellence and dignity, firstborn character, for the pleasure of His own love. It is good to get the divine thought of firstborn.

“By faith he (Moses) celebrated the passover and the sprinkling of the blood, that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them”. Moses, I think we might say, represented Christ who has celebrated the true passover; He has become the passover for all His people, so that, not only is the destroyer unable to touch them, but they are secured as objects of pleasure in dignity and strength, for the delight of the heart of God. We learn typically in Exodus 12 that God brings in Christ and His death as a new starting point from which He moves to give effect to all that is in His own heart. If God moves from that point, who can tell the immensity or the blessedness of the result which He will secure? Who can measure it? The result is that God will have many sons, according to His eternal purpose, and not only sons but firstborn sons. In a natural family it would be impossible for all the sons to be firstborn, but it is possible with God. All His sons are firstborn, for they all take character from Christ; they are all distinguished. The kind of sonship which they have is patterned after His, and they are all enregistered in heaven; they are sons after a heavenly order (Hebrews 12: 23).

The “firstborn” is the distinguished son; he has pre-eminence in the family; and the thought of being “firstborn” attaches in a special way to Christ; He is spoken of repeatedly as the Firstborn. God says of Him, “I will make him firstborn” (Psalm 89: 27); and in the New Testament we are told that God is going to bring Him as the Firstborn into the habitable world, and when He does all the angels are to worship Him (Hebrews 1: 6). Then He is the Firstborn from among the dead, the Firstborn of all creation, and the Firstborn of many brethren. Those titles and honours shew the distinguished place that Christ holds pre-eminently. How gladly do our hearts accord Him that place! But then, as we have seen, God spoke of Israel also as His firstborn, shewing that in His mind something of the distinction of Christ was to be theirs also. Israel was to be not only a son, but a distinguished son as firstborn, and in that way peculiarly for God’s delight. And saints of the assembly, too, have firstborn character; they have it in a higher way than Israel, for they are “enregistered in heaven”.

Sonship properly belongs to the land; in the wilderness God acted towards Israel as a father, but on their side, they were not addressed as sons until Deuteronomy 14, when Moses said, “Ye are sons of Jehovah your God”. The

only man, perhaps, in the wilderness who had an appreciation of sonship was Caleb, and he had been in the land. He said, "If Jehovah delight in us". That is a beautiful expression of the spirit of sonship; Caleb had a sense of the delight of God in His sons. We need a greater consciousness of the place which has been accorded to us in the sovereignty of divine love, through redemption. We have a distinguished place of dignity with God as part of a company of firstborn ones. The light which God has vouchsafed to us is the light of sonship. God's thought is to place His sons as heirs in the inheritance so that they may enjoy all the wealth of it in the blessed consciousness of their place of dignity with God as sons for His delight. We have to take up these scriptures in their typical import. It was impossible that Israel could enter into them; these things were written primarily for us, His called ones of the present time.

I trust we can now see something of the force of "Hallow unto me every firstborn ... it is mine". And again, "Thou shalt offer (literally, transfer) unto Jehovah ... every firstling" (Exodus 13: 2, 12). And again, "For every firstborn is mine. On the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and beast; mine shall they be; I am Jehovah" (Numbers 3: 13). God did not think of the firstborn in Israel according to flesh; the slain lamb had met all that for Him, and as having eaten the lamb they were personally identified with it, and it with them.

It has pleased God to mark us out for sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself. He has favoured us in this wonderful way. Christ is the Beloved; it is what He is to His God and Father, and what He is to His God and Father we are as in Him. God delights to have it so; it is what He has proposed for the satisfaction of His love. Redemption through blood came in to take us righteously out of all we were involved in, but God took us out by redemption — even as He did Israel — with sonship in His heart. He would have sons, and it was with that in view that His beloved Son was here as Man for His delight. I have often thought of how the Lord spoke of Himself as "him whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world" (John 10: 36). He was set apart in a unique way for the Father's pleasure, and something of a similar thought is suggested in "Every firstling ... thou shalt hallow to Jehovah thy God". Every firstling was typical of what is set apart for God — for His pleasure. Hence, "Thou shalt do no work with the firstling of thy kine nor shear the firstling of thy sheep". This is not like the corn and new wine and oil which we spoke of before as given to men; the firstlings are hallowed to God; they are typical of what is for Him.

The firstborn among kine and sheep would be typical of that character of sonship which has been seen in Christ, and which is now conferred in sovereign love upon the many sons His brethren, and which is for the delight of God. We may be well assured that the Spirit of God's Son sent out into our hearts would be continually giving us increase in the form of "firstlings". God would give us, as prospering in the land, fresh apprehensions of sonship in that excellent character which is so pleasurable to Him.

But those apprehensions are intended to bring us together "in the place which Jehovah will choose, thou and thy household". Every Israelite with a firstling had to bring it to a meeting place common to all Israel, and to eat it there. What a blessed communion is here suggested! All eating before Jehovah that which speaks of the delight which He has found in His Firstborn, and in all those on whom he has conferred sonship, and who have the character of firstborn ones before Him! All appropriating inwardly, and in common joy, the delight which it is to the heart of God to have an assembly of firstborn sons to share "The portion of the Firstborn Son, The full delight of heaven",

What is brought out in the type before us is not offering to God, but eating together before Him. It is the communion of His saints together in feeding on the precious thoughts of His love as brought out in connection with what has the character of firstborn. We are thinking of what *He* has got for His own possession and for His love's satisfaction. And we cannot have the *communion* of this in *our* gates. It must be, and can only be, in the place which He chooses. The communion of sonship is found in the assembly. But that communion is dependent upon our bringing "firstlings". There must be the acquisition of God's thought, the apprehension of it in Christ, and as being true for all God's called ones. But we cannot hold it, or have the communion of it, without the truth of the assembly being recognised in a practical way. We must bring our "firstling" to the place where all Israel are bringing theirs! We are divinely taught that what is for the delight of God embraces all His sons. We must be where other sons are to enjoy the communion of sonship.

Of course we are sons individually, but the thought of sonship in Scripture is that it is collective; we belong to an assembly which is composed of sons all having firstborn character. Scripture gives the thought of "many sons"; in Romans we read "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God". The sons of God are going to be revealed — the whole company of them. They will be seen as perfected into one according to John 17 — in the unity proper to a company of sons. So in Galatians and Ephesians the thought is collective: "Ye are all God's sons ... in Christ Jesus ... ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3: 26, 28). In Ephesians 1: 5 the "us" is the whole company

of many sons. The Son of God is "Firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8: 29).

So that if I get a "firstling" — if I get by the Spirit a thought of God's delight in Christ as His Firstborn, and of His delight in that assembly of sons which has firstborn character as being of Christ through redemption — I am under obligation to find the place where I can meet other sons in the way of God's ordering so that we may eat together before God in the communion of sons. I would ask any Christian, Have you found such a place as that? It is one thing to say that we believe in the communion of saints, and another to enjoy it. The pleasure of God is found in His people being together before Him in the communion of sonship. I am sure we need to entertain a more exalted idea of the communion of saints. Every apprehension that we get by the Spirit of our association with Christ as sons is like a firstling. It is a spiritual apprehension of what is in the mind of God concerning all His saints, and it is given to us in order to minister to the unity and communion of the saints as coming together in the place where He causes His Name to dwell.

This will make it clear why nothing that was defective could be thus sacrificed and eaten before God. It would not be suitable as a type of what was in the mind of God concerning His people. Our place as sons before God in Christ Jesus does not admit of any thought of defect. So that a firstling with a defect does not set forth what is suitable to the assembly. The thought of defect could not apply to Christ personally, but it might apply to my apprehension of Him in relation to the place which the saints have with God. The firstling with a defect, which might be eaten "in thy gates", but which was not to be brought to the place which Jehovah would choose, would raise an exercise in our souls as to whether our apprehensions of Christ in relation to our place with God are such as to be suitable to God's assembly viewed as in the land. There may be thoughts of Christ which have value so far as they go, but in which there is an element of "defect". They do not identify Him with the saints, or the saints with Him, according to the perfection of the divine thought. There may be food in them which can be partaken of in *our* gates, but they are unsuited to the assembly in the aspect of it which we are now considering. In the assembly thus viewed, there should be nothing of the nature of defect in what is offered and eaten. It was said in the preface to a well-known hymn book, "The great principle in selecting and correcting has been that there should be nothing in the hymns for the assembly but what was the expression of, or at least consistent with, the Christian's conscious place in Christ before the Father". Many hymns marked by affection and piety have "defects". They do not really identify the saints with Christ's perfectness before the Father. They are not suited to God's assembly as typified by the

place in the land where He has set His Name, though they may have a place privately, and some spiritual value. But the thought of Christ as Firstborn, and of the saints as sons with Him who is above, hallowed for the pleasure of God, is a very precious one to God, and He would exercise us to be possessed of it without any defect. It is the purpose of His love, and He would have it to form the substance of our communion together before Him. We ought not to be content with such fellowship as may be known and enjoyed in the wilderness. To minister rightly to the pleasure of God we must move on to take up the fellowship of saints as it may be known in the land.

“Because ye are sons”; that is what we are; we must never let that go; we have a most exalted and dignified place with God; every saint has that place; it is according to the place that Christ has as Man with God. “But because ye are sons, God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4: 6). The Spirit of God’s Son will never deviate from what is suitable to the relationship which divine love has given us. As in the hearts of the saints He will always promote those emotions and affections which are proper to sonship. Let us yield ourselves to be thus intelligently formed in a spirit of sonship. Assembly communion is to take character from eating the “firstlings”. All the precious thoughts of God connected with the “firstborn” are to form the substance of our communion and the nourishment of our souls before Him. What an exalted character does this give to the communion of saints!

DEUTERONOMY 16

Deuteronomy 16

The passover now comes before us as another thing to be observed in the place which Jehovah would choose to cause His Name to dwell there. The keeping of this service was the first thing enjoined to be done when they came into the land (Exodus 12: 25), and it was to be "an ordinance for ever". It has its place at the present time, for we read, "Our Passover, Christ, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5: 7), and it will be observed in the millennium (Ezekiel 45:21); it is of abiding importance for the people of God.

When the passover was kept in Egypt they were just about to come out as a redeemed people, and ever afterwards it was a memorial of how they came out; they were never to forget how, or by what means, they came out of Egypt. As in the land we are never to forget the value or the blessedness of the way in which God brought us out of the world; it is an essential part of the communion of the assembly that this should be maintained. If God has taken us up in love as His "firstborn", as we have seen in connection with the firstlings, it is requisite that He should deliver us from "the present evil world", and that we should be in moral separation from the flesh which is corrupt and corrupting. Therefore the passover and the feast of unleavened bread are to perpetually characterise the fellowship of His people. The one speaks of the death of Christ, and the other of those moral exercises which are needful to preserve consistency with it.

It is helpful to note the connection of the passover with what is brought before us typically in the agricultural year, for this is the setting of the feasts in Deuteronomy 16. The passover characterises the month Abib; then the feast of weeks is reckoned from the beginning of harvest; and the feast of tabernacles is when the harvest and vintage are gathered in. This chapter begins, "Keep the month of Abib, and celebrate the passover to Jehovah thy God; for in the month of Abib Jehovah thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night". The connection of the passover with the month Abib is repeated again and again in Scripture. The word Abib is translated in Leviticus 2: 14. "And if thou present an oblation of thy first-fruits to Jehovah, thou shalt present as the oblation of thy first-fruits *green ears of corn*". That is the word Abib; it is explained in the following words as "corn beaten out of full ears".

The month Abib was when the barley harvest came to maturity. The passover being characteristic of that month teaches us that the maturing of God's thoughts of blessing for men must ever be connected with the death of Christ. Through that death God delivers His firstborn, and takes them out of the world

which is under judgment. He secures the beginning of His harvest in that way. "Ye come out today, in the month Abib. And it shall be when Jehovah hath brought thee into the land ... which he swore to thy fathers to give thee, a land flowing with milk and honey, that thou shalt keep this service in this month" (Exodus 13: 4, 5). The bringing out and the bringing in are in the value of the death of Christ. Christ as risen is the First-fruits, but the harvest includes all that are His. The death of Christ secures all that is secured for God or for men. The month of Abib speaks of the beginning of a divine harvest every part of which is secured in the redemption value of the death of Christ. So that the passover has its place for ever — for the assembly, for the remnant, for millennial Israel. It is "an ordinance for ever". In the light of this, one can understand the Lord speaking of the passover as being "fulfilled in the kingdom of God".

God works out all the designs of His love by bringing in Christ as the slain Lamb. "Our Lord Jesus Christ .. gave himself for our sins, so that he should deliver us out of the present evil world, according to the will of our God and Father" (Galatians 1: 4). The present evil world is the world of religious flesh, and it is the place of bondage. By Christ and His death God takes His firstborn out of the place of bondage to serve Him in liberty. If we are in bondage we are not out of Egypt; we have not apprehended Christ and His death as the way by which God would bring us completely out, of every kind of bondage. It would be an impossibility for one to remain in Egypt who had known the sign of the blood, and eaten the Lamb roast with fire.

It is noticeable that in the mind of God, as given to us in Deuteronomy 16, the great thought connected with the passover is being brought forth out of Egypt. This is mentioned four times; see verses 1, 3, 6. Indeed this is what God proposed from the outset. (See Exodus 3:8; Exodus 3:10; Exodus 3:12; Exodus 3:17; Exodus 6:6-8; Exodus 6:13; Exodus 6:26,27; Exodus 7:4,5.) And it is repeatedly dwelt upon in the scriptures which refer to the passover. (See Exodus 12:17,42; Exodus 13:3,4; Exodus 13:8,9; Exodus 13:14; Exodus 13:16; Exodus 23:15; Exodus 34:18) In many minds the thought of being sheltered from judgment is the principal thing connected with the passover. But if our thoughts are limited to this we shall miss the great import of this precious institution. Such a thought as being sheltered by blood, but remaining in Egypt, is foreign to Scripture. Wherever the blood was on the doorposts and lintel, those within were feeding on the lamb with girded loins, feet shod, and staff in hand, and they were eating in haste. They were going out *immediately* as redeemed to God. Redemption is greater than shelter, for it secures a people delivered out of the world for the pleasure of God. The uniform testimony of Scripture is that by the passover God was acting in love for the

redemption of His people, having regard to His covenant and His wondrous thoughts of favour towards them. See Deuteronomy 7: 8; Isaiah 43: 1, 4; Isaiah 63: 9; Hosea 11: 1.

The blood of the lamb on the door-posts and lintel was "a sign on the houses in which ye are". It was a sign that God's firstborn was there, and that he was there as a redeemed one. The old hymn puts it, "The blood was the sign that marked them as Thine". In the passover lamb God disclosed in a typical way what had been in His mind "before the foundation of the world". His book of life was the book "of the slain Lamb" (Revelation 13: 8). No doubt Peter is referring directly to the passover when he says, "Knowing that ye have been redeemed ... by precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ, foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but who has been manifested at the end of times for your sakes, who by him do believe on God, who has raised him from among the dead and given him glory, that your faith and hope should be in God" (1 Peter 1: 18 - 21).

We know God as a Deliverer and Redeemer, for He has brought in Christ as the Lamb *for our sakes*.

He attaches great value to us, and would have us redeemed out of bondage and from vain conversation so as to be for His pleasure. Great and wondrous are the thoughts of God concerning His people, but they could only be brought to pass through redemption — through the precious blood of Christ. This was typified in Israel's deliverance, but the Lamb was not really manifested until "the end of times"; we have to look at it as typifying what is known now. God has brought in Christ as the Lamb for our appreciation and appropriation, and His precious blood is the sign of redemption. By the spotless Lamb and the precious blood *God Himself* becomes the Object of faith and hope. He covers His people with His protecting wing, and does not suffer the destroyer to touch them. He passes over, not merely in the sense of leaving them alone, but as Himself becoming their Shelter in virtue of that precious redemption of which the blood was the sign.

"And thou shalt sacrifice the passover to Jehovah thy God, of the flock and of the herd, in the place which Jehovah will choose to cause his name to dwell there" (verse 2). God has moved in love to bring a people forth from sin, the world and Satan, from all that marks man as in the flesh. In doing this He had before Him His purpose to have His firstborn, and to place him in the inheritance which His love would bestow in "a good and spacious land". The death of Christ is very precious to God as that by which He gives effect to the great designs of His love. Hence He speaks of the passover as "my sacrifice"

and "my feast" (Exodus 23: 18; Exodus 34: 25), and He would have it to be celebrated to Him in the place which He chooses to cause His name to dwell there.

The death of Christ in passover aspect is very great before God, and He has ordained that it shall be perpetually the subject of assembly communion. It is not a matter for "one of thy gates", but for "the place" chosen by God. It is an exercise which involves the communion of saints; it is an apprehension of Christ which can only be taken up assembly-wise. It is too great, if one may so say, for the individual, for it has in view the whole result which the passover contemplated in the mind of God. Eating the passover is to mark God's assembly as gathered together at a common and divinely appointed meeting place. Our coming together as in the land must be in accord with such conditions as are suitable to God's Name and dwelling. Only under such conditions can there be anything that has divine sanction as a gathering centre for His people, or that has the true character and communion of God's assembly. When king Hezekiah celebrated the passover he was careful to keep in mind its assembly character (2 Chronicles 30); it was for all Israel even if they did not come. That is how we have to take it up now; a great many may not take up the privilege, or respect the conditions which make it possible, but it is there for all saints.

The place which Jehovah chooses sets forth the divinely appointed conditions by which God would unify His people in their fellowship, and in their approach to Him. Such conditions must be according to His own choice; He will not admit of anything else. Man's choice as to how God should be served has brought in every kind of disorder and confusion. But God's choice if truly acknowledged, would eliminate these things, and unity would mark His people, founded upon complete separation from the world, and the purging out of all leaven.

There is a tendency with us to regard divine things almost exclusively from an individual standpoint, but we have to learn to look at them in their bearing on God's people as a whole. In the chapter now before us the Passover, the feast of weeks, and the feast of tabernacles had all to be observed in the place where Jehovah would cause His Name to dwell. They set forth things which have assembly character, and which are to be taken up assembly-wise. We shall not otherwise see them in their proper setting.

Paul was writing "to the assembly of God which is in Corinth" when he said, "For also our Passover, Christ, has been sacrificed". He introduced it, not as an individual matter, but in its bearing on the unleavened character and communion of the assembly. The first element in assembly conditions is that

the assembly is not of the world; it has been taken out from the world for the pleasure of God in all the value of the death of Christ. God has "visited to take out of the nations a people for his name" (Acts 15: 14). Then God's assembly must be unleavened; its fellowship necessitates the purging out of everything which would puff up the flesh.

This is a serious, as well as a blessed, exercise. "Thou shalt eat no leavened bread along with it". We must distinguish between the feast of unleavened bread and the Passover. They are identified in Luke 22, and this shews that the feast of unleavened bread is not to be separated from the passover; they are indissolubly connected together. But the feast of unleavened bread lasts seven days; it is to be kept not only when the saints are together, but it is to characterise them personally and in their associations at all times. It not only *may* but *must* be kept in our "gates". If the death of Christ is the holy subject of our communion there can be no allowance of anything that would appeal to the flesh, or give the flesh any place or importance.

The assembly is an unleavened company (1 Corinthians 5: 7), and is under obligation to be so practically. To preserve an unleavened character is essential for all who eat the Passover, whether in the wilderness or in the land, and this extends beyond the meetings. "And there shall be no leaven seen with thee in all thy borders seven days". This must be maintained at home and everywhere. Our personal associations and character, as well as our assembly associations, must be unleavened. The unleavened bread is called here — here only, I believe — "bread of affliction". This seems to indicate the severity of the exercise which is called for to maintain an unleavened character as in the land. The higher the ground which we occupy through grace, the more intense are the exercises involved in maintaining consistency with it. This is illustrated in Paul's experience after he had been caught up to the third heaven. The afflictive character of his discipline was strongly marked, but it was needful to keep leaven from working even in Paul! Not the smallest bit of what would inflate the flesh is to be allowed. "Do ye not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump"? A little bit of what is carnal or legal, if not judged, will work actively to leaven all that with which it comes in contact. We have only to look at the religious world to see how leaven, which was small when first introduced, has permeated the mass with corrupting influence. The life of the flesh is under judgment with God, and has been brought to an end in the death of Christ, who bore its judgment in love. That is the Passover, and it involves the purging out of leaven.

The eating of the passover is always to be in fresh exercise on each occasion when it recurs; none of the flesh is to be "left overnight until the morning". We

cannot reserve the communion which may have been the product of spiritual exercise on one occasion so as to be able to take it up again without a renewal of the exercise. If there has been a particularly sweet time of communion, whether as to the precious death of Christ, or anything else which is a subject of assembly communion, there may sometimes be an attempt or desire to have it again without the fresh and living apprehensions of Christ which produced it, being renewed. But the spiritual communion which pertains to the assembly of God cannot be carried over in this way. It would soon become a form without freshness or power. The communion of the saints before God is dependent on the sustained vigour of their affections, preserving vitality and freshness in their apprehensions and appreciations of Christ. What is "left over night" has no longer this character, and it is no longer in keeping with the spiritual and living character of the communion of saints as together in assembly.

"Thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the time that thou camest forth out of Egypt" (verse 6). The death of Christ is really the end of Egypt's day; it is the end before God of all that belongs to the life of man as in the flesh. The sense of this has to be maintained in the land; it is to characterise the fellowship of the children of God. It was a sad feature in Israel's history that from the time of Samuel they did not celebrate the Passover with the honour that was due to it (2 Chronicles 35: 18). Probably that lay at the root of much of their departure and idolatry, as it is surely the secret of the worldliness, carnality and legality which have come into the Christian profession. The death of Christ has not been fed upon as that by which we are freed from the system in which the flesh has its life.

It is deeply touching to see how the Lord felt about this feast. He sent Peter and John to prepare it; He ordered that there should be a suitable place reserved for it — "My guest-chamber" (Mark 14: 14) — and He said, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer. For I say unto you, that I will not eat any more at all of it until it, be fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22: 15, 16). He looked on to the fulfilment of it, to the harvest of God being matured in the kingdom through His own precious death. Then all the happy subjects of the favour of God will eat the passover together, as understanding that the death of Christ has been God's way by which to bring them out from bondage, and into all the blessing of the kingdom. At the moment Christ and His little company were the true assembly of Israel, and He delighted to eat the passover in communion with them. He saw in them the beginning of those great results which were to be brought about for God through His death — an unleavened company in the communion of His death.

Before the Lord instituted His supper He gave the passover its full character. We may safely say that it had never before been eaten with full intelligence of all that it meant as in the mind of God. And as eaten by the Lord an element was added which does not appear in the Old Testament; that is, "the cup". It may have become a custom among the Jews to have one or more cups, but the Lord taking it up gave it divine sanction and import; it completed the divine thought. It has been God's way in Scripture to introduce a thought, and then from time to time to add to it until He has completed what was before Him in connection with that thought. It was so with reference to the house of God, and other subjects, and it is so as to the passover. As instituted in Egypt the blood is prominent; as spoken of in the wilderness the fat is mentioned; as celebrated in the land it was to be eaten in the place where Jehovah caused His Name to dwell — it was to be taken up assembly-wise. Finally, as eaten by the Lord with His disciples, the cup is added, speaking of the joy of the kingdom as known under the new covenant, and linking it all with His death in passover aspect.

The difference between the passover in its spiritual import and the Lord's supper is a matter which we do well to consider. Luke 22 shews how intimately they are linked together, but at the same time they are distinguished. The passover will, I believe, be carried on by the remnant in the light of the New Testament after the assembly has been translated. But the Lord's supper is, I believe, a remembrance which is peculiarly the privilege of saints who are of the assembly which is His body.

The Passover, as we take it up spiritually now, is the celebration of what God has done for us through the death of Christ, as effecting our complete deliverance from the world system in view of all that He has before Him for us as having inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. The Lord's supper is the remembrance of One who, as having come in Manhood, is cherished in the affections of those who have the place of His wife and His children. It recalls how *He* devoted Himself in love — the true Hebrew Servant who has said, "I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go free". It is more personal and intimate, as suited to those who form His body. It is the remembrance suited in the thought of His love to those who are in the place of His intimate associates who cherish His memory — those who are in the favoured place of being His loved household.

But neither of these precious and holy institutions is to obscure the other. They are both divine and spiritual, and both have their place in the assembly of God. Spiritual intelligence and affections would know how to give each its suited place.

The "feast of weeks" refers to a period counted "from the beginning of putting the sickle into the corn". The wave-sheaf is not mentioned here, but we know that it was the first-fruits of the harvest. Christ Risen was the Sheaf of first-fruits waved "on the next day after the sabbath" (Leviticus 23: 11), and as risen He becomes the starting point of new exercises. The passover was to be sacrificed "at even, at the going down of the sun"; the death of Christ was the end of Egypt's day — of all connected with sin and the flesh — and in that aspect it is to form the substance of our assembly communion. But the "feast of weeks" is reached by counting from Christ as risen; it is connected with the dawn of a new and eternal day in the resurrection of Christ.

It is of the utmost importance that, as believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, we should learn to count from His resurrection. No man in Christendom can write a letter, or an invoice, or read a newspaper, without being reminded that so many years ago the Lord came into the world. The very date preaches the gospel, and speaks of the grace of God to men. But Christendom counts from the coming of Christ into this world, and it connects Christ with the world as it is, and this lies at the root of many mistaken thoughts and actions. How many think that Christ came to improve the world, and spend their lives in trying to further this! It is a great mistake.

We have to learn as the people of God to count spiritually from the resurrection of Christ. He has entered a new sphere altogether outside the life of this world. The sickle has been put into God's harvest, and the first stroke of that sickle has secured Christ as risen. The Sheaf has been waved "to be accepted for you" (Leviticus 23: 11). A risen Christ has been accepted for us, and therefore our acceptance is entirely outside the course of things here. The death of Christ is the going down of the sun in regard to this world, and in regard to all hopes and expectations from man as in the flesh. A new day has begun in the resurrection of Christ, and we have to count from that new starting-point.

In Luke 24 we read that the women who went to the empty tomb saw two *men* in shining raiment; Luke does not say angels, but *men*. "Shining raiment" is not for this world, or for mortal men. No one was ever seen here in shining garments save the Lord Himself on the holy mount. Shining raiment speaks of suitability to the resurrection world. Men could not be risen with Christ other than as in shining raiment; such men belong to the region of things above; they are suitable in their attire for association with the risen and living One. Two men in shining raiment standing by the women might well convey to their souls that they had had old garments — thoughts connected with this world, and with the restoration of the kingdom to Israel according to the flesh, but

that now as the associates of the risen One they would have to wear raiment that was not of this world at all. As risen He was accepted for them in view of the resurrection world.

We have now to count from Christ. If He has died we have died with Him; if He is risen we are risen with Him. Every believer expects to be in shining raiment when God's harvest is *actually* gathered up in resurrection according to 1 Corinthians 15. But that harvest is now being gathered in a spiritual sense consequent upon the resurrection of Christ. The risen One has been accepted for us, and all that are Christ's are bound up with Him in the bundle of the living; they live out of death as bound up with the risen One.

The disciples in Acts 1 were suitable to the risen One through what He had effected for them by going into death, and through His being accepted for them in resurrection, He could shew Himself to them, and speak to them, and assemble with them, and let them handle Him; He could have them to eat and drink with Him. If Christ as risen is accepted for us we are attired in suitability to Him; we are in "shining raiment". Let us never forget it!

The *counting* of Deuteronomy 16: 9 suggests that the resurrection of Christ is not to be viewed merely as a fact, but as involving the taking up, and working out to completion, of certain exercises on the part of His saints. The *counting* of seven weeks would be a definite and progressive process from day to day, and from week to week. The result in view is not brought to completion until the "weeks" are accomplished. The Lord intimated this when He said, "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but do ye remain in the city till ye be clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24: 49). And again in Acts 1: 5, "Ye shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit after now not many days".

In Deuteronomy 16 the *weeks* are to be counted; the feast gets its name therefrom. The week is not a period determined by the course of nature like days, months, or years. There is nothing in nature to indicate the duration of a week; it is a divine period marked by the working of God. It was so originally in creation (Genesis 1); it was a period of divine working which secured a definite result. *Here* we have that thought intensified, for there is a counting of "*seven weeks*", which conveys a very full thought of spiritual completeness. In Leviticus 23: 15 it is expressly said, "they shall be complete". It is typically the period which began with the resurrection of Christ, and ended with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. But during that time a wonderful counting was going on in the souls of the disciples. They were passing through entirely new exercises of which they had previously no idea. They had to learn to count, not only from Christ as incarnate, or as the One who had died, but from Him as risen; and their exercises were brought to completion by the outpouring of

the Spirit upon them. His being accepted for them gave them suitability to take up this new exercise connected with an out of the world condition. Speaking spiritually, they were in shining raiment.

The "feast of weeks" directs our attention to the period covered by the first chapter of the Acts. Jesus was not taken up immediately after His resurrection, nor was the Spirit given at once after His ascension. There was a period of forty days during which He was seen by the apostles before He was taken up, and a further period of ten days between His taking up and the pouring out of the Spirit. It was necessary that time should be given for things to take form in the souls of the brethren as standing in relation to One who was raised from among the dead. This gave a new aspect to everything; it put everything on a new platform. A risen Man could not be connected with the course of things in this world at all, but He was to be the subject of testimony (Acts 1: 8, 22). And in view of this "He presented himself living, after he had suffered, with many proofs; being seen by them during forty days". They had time to become familiarised with Him in His new condition as living beyond death. He was living in an out of the world condition, but He was presented to men so as to be fully verified to them. It was not only that they saw Him, but they heard Him. How wonderful must that speaking have been from the lips of a risen Man "of the things which concern the kingdom of God"! Indicating that the kingdom of God stood in relation to Himself as risen; it formed no part of the course of this world. It was a sphere where the Holy Spirit would be the power (see Acts 1: 2,8), and which would be characterised by saints coming together (verses 4, 6; 2: 1). The disciples would be qualified for that new sphere by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and in the power thus come upon them they would be witnesses of the risen One "to the end of the earth".

But there was more! Having fully verified Himself to them as risen, they beheld Him taken up and going into heaven. He was coming again, but for the present they knew Him as having gone into heaven. They returned to "the upper chamber". It is well that we should mark the character of what was there. Jerusalem was a wonderful city; it is called, even after the death of Christ, "the holy city". It had its magnificent temple with continual services going on. But there was only one spot in that city which was in the light of a risen Man who had gone into heaven, and that spot was "the upper chamber". It answered, for the moment, to the place which God chose to cause His Name to dwell. The one hundred and twenty were unified in the apprehension of a risen and heavenly Christ, and in the apprehension, too, that they were His associates. We may be sure that their prayers related to Him as in heaven, and to His testimony here. And Peter, guided by the Scriptures, indicated that

there must be one to take the place of Judas in the complete testimony of the twelve to Jesus' resurrection.

The Spirit has thus traced for us how the "seven weeks" were counted before the first "feast of weeks" was celebrated. Every time they saw the risen Lord, and every time He spoke to them, a spiritual process was being carried on in definite and progressive exercise. To use the typical language of Deuteronomy 16, they were counting the seven weeks. When that exercise was completed the Holy Spirit came out of heaven, and sat upon each one of them. We have all to do this counting in a spiritual sense. Probably we all believe it to be a fact that Christ is risen, but have we really begun in our souls to *count* from His resurrection? If so a definite exercise has begun with us which stands related to One who is completely outside the course of this world. The counting implies that it is an exercise which takes time to come to maturity.

The Lord takes great pains with us to verify Himself to us as the risen, living One. What He did for Mary of Magdala, for Peter, for the two going to Emmaus, He would do by the Spirit for each one of us. He would cause it to be borne in upon our souls that He is living, but outside the life of this world, and that He has a company who also live outside the life of the world as bound up with Him. He would have us to reckon in a definite way in our souls from His resurrection; we shall not keep the "feast of weeks" unless we do. But as *we* count, *God* works in our souls to complete His own pleasure in regard to us, so that we come before Him as the "first-fruits of wheat harvest" (Exodus 34: 22) — a company of persons in this world definitely identified in mind and affection, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, with the risen and heavenly Christ.

The feasts, as viewed in Deuteronomy, do not typify things as being reached once for all, but as taken up recurrently as the subject of assembly communion. They speak of what is renewed periodically as a matter of fellowship amongst the saints. As holding the feast of weeks the resurrection of Christ, and what it involves for us as taken up in exercise of heart, and the gift of the Spirit in relation to the completion of that exercise, are kept before us in a fresh and living way as the substance of our communion and joy. The pleasure of God is bound up with this being so. It gives us a precious and elevated thought of the living character of the communion which pertains to the assembly viewed as in the land.

What marks the feast of weeks is "a tribute of a voluntary-offering of thy hand, which thou shalt give, according as Jehovah thy God hath blessed thee; and thou shalt rejoice before Jehovah thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy bondman, and thy handmaid, and the Levite that is in thy

gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow that are in thy midst in the place that, Jehovah thy God will choose to cause his name to dwell there" (verse 10, 11). This is beautifully illustrated in Acts 2: 42 - 47. The company of saved ones there constituted the place where God caused His Name to dwell. And the tribute of a voluntary-offering was there, both spiritually and materially. There was a fulness of blessing from God which was made available for all. Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, all heard in their own tongues "the great things of God". The apostles taught; a risen Christ was the Substance of their teaching, and it formed a fellow-ship marked by voluntary offering. The saints were so enjoying together what was wholly outside the course of the world that they were delivered from all natural selfishness. The spiritual communion of the assembly, and its normal effects, are seen there in a very striking way. The fellowship of the apostles was the fellowship of men who had counted from Christ's resurrection, and in whom things had come to completion by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It was, as we have said, the first-fruits of wheat harvest. The feast of weeks was held there in spiritual reality.

This is another aspect of the communion of the assembly viewed as in the land. It is the assembly viewed as having learned to count from the resurrection of Christ, and to complete the counting so that a spiritual result is reached that the Holy Spirit can identify Himself with. There is then ability to render what is spiritual in character. There is voluntary offering, and rejoicing, and a spirit of grace that brings everybody in to share the joy. And this is essential to the pleasure and service of God. It is the communion which is brought about as the result of divine working in relation to Christ risen. The liberty and joy of it is contrasted in verse 12 with the bondage which had been known in Egypt.

Joy is not mentioned in connection with the Passover. "Bread of affliction" and "a solemn assembly" have their place there. But in the feast of weeks there is joy in which all participate. It is not here, as in Leviticus 23, two wave loaves brought out as first-fruits, with testimony in view, but a spiritual result in voluntary offering for assembly enjoyment, and for the pleasure of God, because the spiritual joy of the saints gives joy to God. The joy typified here is joy in the Holy Spirit; it is not that unworthy imitation in which human and natural elements are utilised to attract and give pleasure. The assembly of God is characterised by spiritual joy, and this joy can only be brought in or enjoyed in a spiritual way. "If one member be glorified, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Corinthians 12: 26). If one member is glorified by being enabled to bring in what is spiritual it is for common assembly joy, and in result there is something for the pleasure of God.

The Old Testament gives us “a *shadow* of the coming good things”, but it is ours to have the *substance* of them.

The “feast of weeks” has to do with the time of *first-fruits*, whether of barley harvest as typical of Christ risen, or of wheat harvest as setting forth what was secured at Pentecost in the saints. *First-fruits* suggests the beginning of a crop, of which the greater part will be gathered later. But the feast of tabernacles is when the whole harvest and vintage have been gathered in. It conveys the fullest thought of blessing and joy which the typical year presents. The feast of tabernacles is the crown of the festive year — the time when that beautiful verse in Psalm 65 is realised; “Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy paths drop fatness”. God would not have us to stop short of the crown of His year; He would have us to come to the full measure of His thought, and the purpose of His love. Many of His people are content to have very little, but this is not honouring to the Giver of *all* good.

What marks this feast is unmixed joy. “And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast ... and thou shalt be wholly joyful” (verses 14, 15). The time for being “wholly joyful” has not come publicly yet. No doubt the feast of tabernacles speaks of a coming time when all evil will be set aside and all good will be brought in for the joy of God’s people in millennial conditions. But that is anticipated in the assembly, and it is possible for us to know fulness of joy even though outward circumstances are not yet changed. This is surely an attractive goal set before us, even if we have to admit that we have not yet reached it in soul-experience. There are not only first-fruits but the full harvest, and then the vintage. The remembrance of the wilderness is not brought in here, though that is prominent in Leviticus. It is here the “wholly joyful” character that is the result of God’s blessing. The thought of dwelling in booths is only retained in the name of the feast; its *character* here is fulness of blessing and joy, the communion of which extends to all who are in our gates.

These things, as we have said before, are the word of God to *us*; the primary application of them is to saints who are of the assembly; we are the first to understand them, and to come into the value of them. That is true of the passover and of the feast of weeks, and it is also true of the feast of tabernacles.

The Deuteronomic aspect of this feast is limited to seven days; there is no “eighth day” as in Leviticus 23. It contemplates fulness of joy as brought in at the present time, not as in eternal conditions (which the eighth day would typify), but as in reference to household conditions, and also conditions marked by lack and sorrow. We should not connect the thought of strangers,

or fatherless, or widows with the "eighth day"; such may be found in the "seven days", which is a period answering to the present time. For Israel the seven days would answer to the millennium, while the "eighth day" looks on to what is eternal. But the "seven days" in Deuteronomy 16 have typical reference to the present time. God proposes to give us such a fulness of blessing that we can have a "wholly joyful" communion in the place which He chooses. We may say reverently that God has given us all that He has to give; He has given His greatest and His best. What is brought out here is the completeness of God's blessing, and the fulness of joy which it affords, as constituting the substance of the communion of saints as in the land.

It is to be noticed that it is said, "when thou hast gathered in the produce of thy floor and of thy wine-press", not of thy fields and vineyards. That is, the full wealth of the land has been gathered, and made available for food and joy; it has all been threshed out in the floor, or made into wine. There has been an application of spiritual diligence so as to make it available for common enjoyment. Typically it regards the assembly as in the full wealth and blessedness of the inheritance, so that the end of all God's ways in grace is reached; there is nothing to be added.

Practically our joy is in proportion to our spiritual formation and growth. John divides the family of God into little children, young men, and fathers, which clearly indicates increasing spiritual development. As we thus grow we are more and more able to gather in the rich harvest and vintage of all that is found in Him who is from the beginning. John could say of the fathers, "ye have known him that is from the beginning"; they had gathered in of the produce of the floor and the winepress; it is persons formed in the divine nature who can do that. The little children are able to "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ"; they know the Father in the blessedness of His grace. But there is growth after that. It will be noticed that there is a long interval between the feast of weeks and the feast of tabernacles, a period of constantly added fruitfulness until the whole harvest and vintage is gathered. For us it suggests that from the reception of the Spirit there is continual increase in our apprehension as we move on towards "the fulness of the blessing of Christ".

As we follow the line suggested to us by the passover and the feast of weeks we shall come to the feast of tabernacles. Complete deliverance from the world, and the purging out of all leaven, sets us free for what is spiritual, and on that line we can reach fulness of joy, not only individually but as characterising our assembly communion.

In Leviticus 23 rejoicing before Jehovah is a prominent feature of this feast, but the *communion* in that joy is what is marked in Deuteronomy. "And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy bondman, and thy handmaid, and the Levite, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are in thy gates" (verse 14). The communion of it is emphasised. The fuller our present enjoyment the more will there be to share in grace with those less favoured. It is an immense favour from God to be enabled to secure some of the wealth of the land in such a way that it increases the joy in communion of the people of God as gathered together. But there is also great encouragement to those of us who feel unable to gather in much of the floor or of the winepress for ourselves, or for others. We may have the joy of it as sharing with those who are spiritually wealthy and diligent. Such is the blessed grace of God that we can participate with those who have much greater wealth and diligence than we have. One great gain of being set together in assembly relations is that we are privileged to enjoy the wealth of the inheritance together.

We have to remember, and I often remind my heart of it, that through marvellous divine favour we are living in the time of God's best. God never gave, and never will give, such wealth to His people as He is giving at the present time. It is a grief to the heart, of God if we do not value the greatness of His giving. We all know that if we give a gift we like it to be appreciated, and the choicer the gift in our estimation the more we feel any lack of appreciation. God would encourage every one of us to appreciate the fulness of His blessing in Christ. This is not a matter only for old saints, or persons of great spiritual maturity, but it is for us all — the youngest babe in Christ, the feeblest believer — to recognise that the communion of the assembly of God is a communion of profound joy, because the substance of it is nothing less than *God's best*. It is good that we live at such a time.

In the assembly of God all are not alike wealthy, but such is the constitution of that assembly, and the nature of its communion, that the spiritual wealth of the richest is shared by the poorest, or is available to be shared. So that in this happy sense "the rich and poor meet together" (Proverbs 22: 2). It is not that the spiritually wealthy have to come down to the level of the spiritually poor, but all are to be elevated to the joy that is in the heart of the richest! What a precious thought this is! What a gracious and elevating thing is the communion of saints! Everything that the most spiritual person has of Christ, and of the knowledge of God, and of the joy of divine beneficence is available for my enjoyment. That is the character of the communion of saints as in the land. Even the stranger, the fatherless and the widow may participate in it! Do we know any rich man in Israel who has gathered in abundantly of the floor

and of the winepress! We are privileged to share with him; and, indeed, in a very true sense this is how we come to participate in the joy of the inheritance, if we have done so at all. I suppose we have all known some wealthy persons in the land? I know some, and I have noticed about them a great readiness to invite all their poorer brethren to share the joy of what they have, of the floor or of the winepress!

John was one of those wealthy persons, and Paul was another. The apostles were men who had come into the wealth and blessedness of the land; they knew what it was to cultivate it, and to gather in its produce. They threshed out its corn in the floor, and they trod out its grapes in the winepress; they knew the "wholly joyful" character which its fulness affords. But they have let us know that it was their great desire that we should participate with them, and that their wealth should be the substance of communion for the whole assembly of God. "That which we have seen and heard we report to you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is indeed with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we to you that your joy may be full" (1 John 1: 3, 4). I think that answers to the feast of tabernacles.

John was enjoying the full wealth of the inheritance, and he would have the whole company of saints in the communion and joy of it. He brings out the character of the blessedness which we can enjoy together. "If what ye have heard from the beginning abides in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise which *he* has promised us, life eternal" (1 John 2: 24, 25). It is remarkable that he should write thus to "little children" — the babes in the family of God. He would have them to abide in the Father in His measureless thoughts of grace, and in the Son as the One in whom all those thoughts have been substantiated. Then the brethren are loved as those begotten of God and called to enjoy together in family affections the children's portion, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3: 14). They are our joint-heirs, and our happiness lies in sharing with them. The more we appreciate the wealth of our common portion the more we shall covet to furnish what will minister to the joy in communion of the brethren. It is in that way that the feast of tabernacles is held at the present time.

Then, Paul too, gathered in abundantly, and he has shewn his willingness to share with others, with all saints. See Ephesians 3. In the ministry of the apostles we see the gathering in of the floor and of the winepress. We see the fulness of "the unsearchable riches of the Christ". There is nothing beyond; it is the end and climax of all that God has to give. But it is brought in in the way

of infinite grace, for all to share in the joy of it. The highest and most precious and holy thoughts of God are made known so as to be the blessed subject of the assembly communion of His saints. This would surely suffice to make us "wholly joyful"!

The things spoken of in the epistle to the Ephesians are the crown of our spiritual year; that epistle answers for us to the feast of tabernacles; it gives us the highest and fullest conception of blessing in Christ. And it is evident that it is intended to give character to the joy and communion of all saints. We must encourage our hearts to think of these precious things as realities which are to be known and enjoyed, and which are divinely intended to be the subject of assembly communion. The state of God's people is often such that He cannot bring His great and holy things before them. It was so at Corinth; Paul would not have written the epistle to the Ephesians to *them*, for they were in a carnal state. But God's great thoughts remain, and they are held in reserve even for those who are not able, for the time, to appreciate them. So Paul says to the Corinthians, "But we speak wisdom among the perfect ... that hidden wisdom which God had pre-determined before the ages for our glory Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart, which God has prepared for them that love him, but God has revealed to us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God" (1 Corinthians 2: 6 - 10). He brought the wealth of the inheritance before them in all its attractiveness, and let them know that he held it in his affections for them. It was an incitement to wake up out of their carnal state, and go in for what would make them "wholly joyful". God revealed the blessed things of the land to the apostles by the Spirit, and they have communicated those things in a spiritual way, and if we are spiritual we shall appreciate and discern them. Surely none of us want to be carnal persons, unable to appreciate *God's best*! The enjoyment of those blessed things is the normal communion of the assembly, and it is available for all who appreciate it.

Paul told the saints at Rome that when he came to them he would "come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ" (Romans 15: 29). He would come prepared to open out to them the precious things spoken of in Colossians and Ephesians; "fulness" is characteristic of both these epistles. We have obtained an inheritance in Christ; God has given it to us in love according to His eternal purpose; He would enlighten our hearts as to it. Ephesians 3 tells us how Paul came to have the knowledge of the great thoughts of God "that they who are of the nations should be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus". Paul was illuminated, and he wrote in order to illuminate us. "To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given, to announce among the nations the glad tidings of the unsearchable

riches of the Christ". That is the wealth of the inheritance. These are the things which form the substance of the communion of saints as in the land; they are things to make us "wholly joyful".

And the more we enter into these things, and enjoy them, the more there is to share with others. Instead of a spiritually wealthy brother complaining of the impoverished state of his brethren he looks upon it as a privilege to share what he has with them. We are to look at every saint as a joint heir and a joint partaker. The communion of the joy is a marked feature in Deuteronomy. If our fellow saints could see that we were in the joy of a communion to which they were as much entitled as we are, and that we were going out to them in affectionate desire that they should participate in it, I feel sure it would make an impression on those who love God.

It is striking that from the "first of the fruits of the land" (Deuteronomy 26) to the gathering in the complete produce of the year there is always to be the recognition of the place which Jehovah chooses to cause His Name to dwell there. We are never to be isolated from our brethren, and we are never to lose sight of the fact that God's Name — that is, God known in the light of revelation — is the great rallying point for His people. If we approach God it must be in the light of the revelation He has made of Himself, and it must be in moral suitability to Him, and it must be according to the truth and principles of His assembly and the fellowship pertaining to it, and all these things are universal. We have to take up our local relations with our brethren in the light of what is universal. Any local action, even of a disciplinary nature, must be governed by principles which are universal. It must be taken in the light of what is suitable to the assembly of God everywhere.

We have been told that in decline "the top shoot goes first"; the highest, or brightest and best, that God gives will be the first to be given up. The feast of tabernacles was the first feast to be given up, for it was not held from the time of Joshua until revived in Nehemiah's day (Nehemiah 8: 17). It is doubtful whether during many long centuries after the days of the apostles there was anything really answering to the feast of tabernacles in the assembly. The true spiritual wealth and joy of the inheritance was departed from, and the communion of saints before God in assembly character as in the land was practically unknown. But there has been a reviving, a day of recovery, and God is graciously recalling the hearts of His people to that which was from the beginning. His thoughts of love are unchanged and undiminished, and He is working by His Spirit to bring us back to them, so that the joy of them may characterise the communion of His saints.

The three feasts — the Passover, the feast of weeks, and the feast of tabernacles — are obligatory upon “all thy males”, and “they shall not appear before Jehovah empty”. To be “empty” would deny that we were “full of the blessing of Jehovah”; it would be the sad evidence of hearts unmoved in response to Him.

The principle of “just judgment” amongst the people of God comes before us in verses 18 - 20. It is of God that there should be amongst His people “in all thy gates ... throughout thy tribes” those who can “judge ... with just judgment”. This intimates to us that matters are sure to arise which call for the action of judicial discernment, and it is an exercise that ability for this should be found amongst us. To be without right judgment in relation to matters which need adjustment is unsuitable to God who is “the judge of all”. We learn from Matthew 18 that in all such matters the assembly is the final court of appeal. This will come before us in Deuteronomy 17. But chapter 16: 18 - 20 would shew the Lord’s intent that there shall be provision for the settling of many differences without carrying them to the supreme court. “If then ye have judgments as to things of this life, set those to judge who are little esteemed in the assembly. I speak to you to put you to shame. Thus there is not a wise person among you, not even one, who shall be able to decide between his brethren”! (1 Corinthians 6: 4, 5). Probably the “judges and officers” were there, but they were being disregarded.

Paul does not hesitate to say that it was “altogether a fault” to have suits of this kind before unbelievers; the brethren ought rather to suffer wrong, and to submit, to be defrauded. Indeed those who were doing it were all wrong themselves; he says, “But ye do wrong, and defraud, and this your brethren”. It is almost invariably true that the one who complains of his brother is wrong himself. It is pretty sure that if I see a mote in my brother’s eye there is a beam in my own, and I had better deal with it first. The principle on which we go on together is “with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4: 2). “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any should have a complaint against any; even as the Christ has forgiven you, so also do ye” (Colossians 3: 13). This implies that many things will be treated with forbearance, and quietly passed over, or left with the Lord. It is not supposed in Christianity that every little thing will be brought up for judgment. There are a thousand things which the least bit of grace in our own hearts would enable us to overlook or ignore.

If we bring things to the “judges and officers” we must be prepared to be searched ourselves. Judgment amongst the people of God is, in principle, the judgment of Christ Himself. If saints are going to judge the world and angels

they will do it, as having part with Christ, and being able to view things as He views them. And this is the true character of any judicial function which is exercised amongst the saints now. It is taken up in view of the administration of a coming day; the saints as in the land anticipate the conditions of the world to come in this regard. The offices which are spoken of in this chapter and the next are really offices of Christ; He is the true Judge and Priest and King. But the glory of these offices is reflected in His saints, so that, in measure, they shine in the same glory. Any right judgment is according to the mind of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, penetrating to the inmost recesses of the moral being.

I believe that in every case where the Lord was appealed to for a judgment He dealt searchingly with the conscience of the person who brought the case before Him. He did not adjudicate on the case, but He did on the state of soul of those who brought the charge. We see an instance of this when one came and said, "Teacher, speak to my brother to divide the inheritance with me". That was an appeal to the Judge of Israel. What was the answer? "Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness". It was as much as to say, If your brother is covetous to take the inheritance, you are covetous in wanting your share of it. The Lord disclaimed the public position of "a judge or a divider", but He judged morally the motives at work in each of them. (Luke 3: 13 - 15).

Another conspicuous instance is in John 8. They appealed to the Judge of Israel as to what should be done with a woman taken in adultery. But He replied, "Let him that is without sin among you first cast the stone at her". If I come to the Lord for judgment against my brother He will search my soul, and lay bare what is wrong in me. If I appeal to Him for vindication I must be prepared to have my own motives searched. One who really knows grace, and himself too, does not object to be searched. He knows that all that is contrary to God in him has been judged in the death of Christ, and he is conscious that God has searched him and known him, and he desires that God may still search him, because he has found how wholesome and purifying it is to be searched. See Psalm 139.

The judgment which God sets up amongst His people could not be different, in principle, from His own. What moral elevation, what true lowliness, is required to be able to judge of things and persons as Christ does, and not in a merely human way! It was written of Him, "He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness shall he judge the poor and reprove (or maintain the right of) with equity the meek of the earth" (Isaiah 11: 3, 4). There was with the Lord a principle of judgment altogether different from the sight of His eyes, or the hearing of His

ears. It was in quite a different sense that He said, "As I hear, I judge" (John 5: 30). "As I hear" referred to what He heard from His Father; He judged of everything, and discerned everything, according to what His Father told Him, He said, again, in John 8: 10 "And if also I judge, my judgment is true, because I am not alone, but I and the Father who has sent me". He judged everything in communion with the Father.

Judgment is not to be wrested, nor are persons to be respected, nor a bribe taken to blind the eyes or pervert the words. Things are to be adjusted according to God that everything may be removed that would interfere with the true life of saints, and their possession and enjoyment of the land. A mere legal settlement would not suffice for this; it involves the rectification of soul-condition, and this is the real question at issue in almost every case that calls for judgment amongst the saints.

DEUTERONOMY 17

Deuteronomy 17

The first concern of the judges would be to maintain what is due to God by the exclusion of everything idolatrous or imperfect in His service, and next to that would come the adjustment of all differences, or "matters of controversy", between His people. These are the subjects brought before us in the section from chapter 16: 21 to chapter 17: 13.

God will have His altar safe-guarded from that which would defile it by idolatrous associations. To set up an image or a statue as an adjunct to the altar of Jehovah might not appear so serious as setting aside the altar altogether, but it would associate that altar with things idolatrous and hateful to God. His altar was identified with the revelation of Himself, for it was in the place where He would cause His Name to dwell. All that tends to obscure the revelation of God, or the grace of His glad tidings, is really of an idolatrous nature. Much that has been introduced under plea of helping worship, or making the service of God more attractive, is really idolatrous in the sight of God. There are many things of a material nature which appeal to natural religious sentiment or superstition,

and which men, deceived by Satan, regard as helping to produce feelings of veneration. In practice these things invariably tend to obscure the light in which God has come out in the revelation of Himself in His beloved Son.

Then chapter 17: 1 forbids the sacrificing to Jehovah of that "wherein is a defect or anything bad". Our approach to God is to be in all the precious perfectness of Christ Himself; anything other than this is "an abomination to Jehovah thy God". A wrong thought as to the God whom we approach will always have along with it some "defect" in the apprehension of how we approach. If Christ has been identified sacrificially with us that we might be identified with all His acceptability, this excludes any thought of defect. We approach in the consciousness that we are in the acceptance of a perfect Person and a perfect work. What is defective or bad could only be expressive of what we are according to the flesh, and God has no pleasure in that. It is, indeed, "an abomination" which God utterly condemned in the death of His own Son. The only acceptable approach now for us to God is in the sweet savour of Christ.

We may learn from this section of the book that things are to be judged of in the light of divine revelation, and of approach to God only according to the perfection of Christ. There is to be no toleration of departure from this. The

man or woman who should work abomination by bringing in what was idolatrous was to be stoned that evil might be put away from the midst of God's people (verses 2 - 7). But such a judgment was not to be executed without "thorough inquiry", and the establishment of the truth and certainty of the matter, and this on the testimony of two or three witnesses; one witness was not to be held sufficient. This principle is important, and the apostle Paul told the Corinthians that his judgment of things amongst them would be based upon it. It is a divine principle of judgment in the assembly of God (2 Corinthians 13: 1). There is ever the possibility of *one* witness being mistaken or biased, but we have the Lord's own word that it was written in the law that "the testimony of two men is true" (John 8: 17). If two or more should conspire together to give false witness "thorough inquiry" will bring to light that their testimony does not agree (Mark 14: 56 - 59), so that the matter charged is not really established. If evil is proved, and has to be judged, "all the people" have to put their hands to it (verse 7). It is not to be the work only of the witnesses, or of the judges and officers, but of all the people. It is incumbent on all to clear themselves individually and collectively. All such judgment has in view the preservation of purity in the worship and service of God.

Then verses 8 - 13 shew that there is an ultimate court of appeal for "matters of controversy" which are "too hard" to be settled "within thy gates". "Then shalt thou arise, and go up to the place which Jehovah thy God will choose". The people of God, even viewed as in the land, are by no means perfect, and divine provision is made for judgment in regard to things which may arise as "matters of controversy". It is part of divine assembly conditions that there is ability to declare "the sentence of judgment". The priests, the Levites, the judge, are there, and "the man that shall act presumptuously, and not hearken unto the priest that standeth to serve there before Jehovah thy God, or unto the judge, that man shall die". God commits Himself to the decision, and woe to him who is presumptuous and disregards it!

"If also he will not listen to the assembly, let him be to thee as one of the nations and a tax-gatherer" (Matthew 18: 17). The Lord puts the assembly precisely in the position assigned in Deuteronomy 17 to "the place which Jehovah shall choose". In any case of difference between brethren, the assembly is the ultimate court of appeal on the earth, divinely constituted so. But it is well to read the whole of Matthew 18 in connection with this subject, because it shows the spirit in which brethren are to act towards each other in their own gates before bringing any case before the assembly.

The Lord set a little child in the midst of the disciples as the pattern of greatness in the kingdom of heaven. If I am wronged I am to seek redress in that spirit. If I have a matter of controversy with a brother let me see first that I am converted, and have become in my spirit as a little child — all self-importance gone, and a spirit of true self-humbling in its place. Then let me see that I have got rid of all offences within myself. If my hand or my foot or my eye have caused me to sin have I cut them off and cast them from me? Then have I the shepherd spirit that would go and seek one who has gone astray? What a powerful and touching appeal such a one could make to a brother who sins against him! The brother has to be reproved, but in what a beautiful spirit is it done! The object in it is to *gain* him. He is, for the moment, a sheep gone astray, but this makes him the subject of a special care and solicitude, more than the ninety and nine brethren who have not so gone astray. He is sought diligently. It *may* not be possible to gain him, for here there is a question whether the straying sheep will be found. "And if it should come to pass that he find it". The possibility is implied that he may not succeed in his quest, but he makes every effort to do so. "But if he do not hear thee, take with thee one or two besides, that every matter may stand upon the word of two witnesses or of three". This links Matthew 18 with Deuteronomy 17, and it safeguards the assembly from being appealed to in regard of trivial or imaginary grievances; there must be two or three witnesses to the seriousness of what has occurred. The "one or two besides" would bring an enlarged appeal to bear on the sinning brother — more of the little child humility, and of the evidence of severe self-judgment, more shepherd seeking! What an activity of faithful love in our own "gates" before the case is carried to the supreme court, the assembly! It is when all private appeal fails that the Lord says "Tell it to the assembly".

There is no court on earth invested with such authority as the assembly. "Verily I say to you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on the earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on the earth shall be loosed in heaven". There is no other court which judges in the light of the revelation of God in grace. The assembly stands in the grace of the revelation of God, and it judges in the light of how He has acted, and of how Christ has acted. Everything that is not according to grace comes under judgment in the assembly. The bondman, having been forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents, went out and seized his fellow-bondman who owed him a hundred pence, and cast him into prison. His lord called him a "wicked bondman"! He had not acted according to the grace shewn to himself, and it ended in his being delivered to the tormentors till he should pay all that was owing.

In the place which Jehovah chooses everything will be judged according to the Name which dwells there, and that is the Name of ineffable grace. If one's conduct is not according to grace it will assuredly be visited by God governmentally. One who will not listen to the appeal of grace, as voiced by the assembly, makes himself a spiritual outlaw. He need not be recognised any longer as a brother. Such is the Lord's own word.

It may be asked, Where can we find the assembly today? In the present broken and scattered state of the people of God does there still remain any ability on earth to pronounce on moral questions with an authority which is recognised in heaven? These questions are humbling, for they serve to remind us that the public failure and ruin is deplorable. But in Matthew 18 we see the mind of Christ as to the assembly, and we also see certain additional words which were uttered by the Lord in immediate connection therewith, and which seem to indicate that He had in view — as He surely had — the time when the assembly as a complete entity would not be available to hear things or to speak. He said, "Again I say to you". It is a definite and important addition to what He had said as to the assembly, and it is as authoritative as His previous utterance. "Again I say to you, that if two of you shall agree on the earth concerning any matter, whatsoever it may be that they shall ask, it shall come to them from my Father who is in the heavens. For where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18: 19, 20). In this additional utterance the Lord speaks of "two of you", that is, two *of the assembly*. He brings things down to the smallest possible collective number, and while emphasising the dependence in which such would be found, for all would come to them through prayer, He pledges the Father and Himself to them. Even if only "two" are available for spiritual agreement in the Lord's interests it is possible for them to be gathered together to His Name, and their being so gathered would answer to the chosen place of Deuteronomy. It is still the privilege of two of the assembly to be gathered together unto the Name of the Lord Jesus, and to be agreed in what they ask, so that it comes to them from His Father. Yea, He declares, "there am I in the midst of them". No outward ruin can invalidate this. If such were called upon to express a judgment in regard of matters connected with the honour of the Lord's Name, and humbly and dependently prayed to the Father, an answer would assuredly be given, and one would view with the gravest possible concern any disregard of the judgment at which they arrived concerning matters within their responsibility. One would tremble lest in thinking lightly of such a judgment one might prove to be guilty of that presumptuous acting which Deuteronomy 17 declares was to be punished with death. If the Lord sets in the assembly, or even in two or three of the assembly, what answers to

"the judge that shall be in those days", and "the priest that standeth to serve there before Jehovah", He will not suffer those spiritual elements to be disregarded. One fully admits weakness and failure on the human side, but the truth of God abides, and one part of that truth is that where assembly conditions are found, even though in extreme weakness, He can and does maintain ability for priestly judgment, and faith regards this, and would not decline from it to the right hand, or to the left.

"Matters of controversy" have arisen, and will arise, but we may be sure that upon all such matters there is a divine "sentence of judgment". When that sentence is pronounced it is a most serious matter to disregard it. Much exercise, and priestly nearness, are required to get the Lord's mind, but it is impossible that there could be any "matters of controversy" too hard to be settled in the place which God chooses.

From verse 14 we have the mind of God as to a king. It is not looked at here as being a wrong thought; it is rather God anticipating that His people would take up a thought which was in His own mind. The thought of a king was one of those conceptions of dignity which were created by Christ according to Colossians 1: 16. "Whether thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or authorities; all things have been created by him and for him". It was a dignity created that it might be ultimately taken up as part of the glory of Christ.

Melchisedec was the first type of Christ as King, but historically Nimrod came before him. And there were "kings that reigned in the land of Edom before there reigned a king over the children of Israel" (Genesis 36: 31). But, though kings first appeared in man's world, they had a definite place in the mind of God as that which He would introduce in due time. He said to Abraham, "Kings shall come out of thee", and "kings of peoples shall be of her" (Sarah). And to Jacob He said, "Kings shall come out of thy loins" (Genesis 17: 6, 16; Genesis 35: 11). Jacob declared by the prophetic Spirit that "The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and to him will be the obedience of peoples" (Genesis 49: 10). These scriptures clearly convey royal thoughts. The thought of a king was of God, however wrongly it might be taken up by men, or even by the people of God. We know that the people's state and spirit were wrong in wanting a king in Samuel's day; it was really rejecting Jehovah as their King (1 Samuel 8: 7). But God had His own thought of a King; David and Solomon were typical of Christ as His Anointed One.

The true thought of a king is one who exercises influence over others on God's behalf. It does not seem to me that Christ personally is in view in Deuteronomy 17, but rather those kingly features derived from Christ which

are to be found in rule and leadership amongst the people of God. Christ is the true Judge and Priest and King, but judicial and priestly and kingly features are to be found amongst His people as derived from Him. It is important that kingly characteristics, such as are here described, should be found amongst the saints.

No observant person can fail to notice the immense effect of influence either for good or evil. We all come under influence, and it is of the utmost importance that we should make sure that the influences under which we come are according to God. "Thou shalt only set him king over thee whom Jehovah thy God will choose" (verse 15). The choice of the creature, whether it be our own or that of others, is not to be trusted. We must assure ourselves by every available evidence that the influences which we allow to act upon us are divine and spiritual. Certain persons at Corinth were puffed up, and were getting influence amongst the saints in a carnal way. But Paul called attention to the house of Stephanas as persons who had "devoted themselves to the saints for service", and he besought the brethren to "be subject to such, and to every one joined in the work and labouring" (1 Corinthians 16: 15, 16). There were persons, even at Corinth, who could be looked up to as giving a spiritual lead. It was, therefore, more to their shame that they had set as kings over them men who were not chosen of God, but who were really "false apostles, deceitful workers". We are to look out for such persons as are chosen of God to be leaders of His people, and to welcome their influence. "Be imitators all together of me, brethren, and fix your eyes on those walking thus as you have us for a model" (Philippians 3: 17).

"From among thy brethren shalt thou set a king over thee; thou mayest not set a foreigner over thee, who is not thy brother" (verse 15). How important it is that no alien influence should be permitted to be in leadership! The king must first be a brother; he must be marked by the features of family relationship. John's relations with the saints were of this character, "I, John your brother" (Revelation 1: 9). Diotrephes was of a very different stamp; he loved to have the first place, and he had apparently got it, but he was not a brother; he did not receive the brethren. He had none of the family features of the children of God. How sad that such a man should have got leadership in the assembly!

The king's heart was not to be "lifted up above his brethren". Kingship amongst the saints is not what it is in the world. "The kings of the nations rule over them But ye shall not be thus; but let the greater among you be as the younger, and the leader as he that serves" (Luke 22: 25, 26). It is said of Zion's King that He is "lowly" (Zechariah 9: 9), and all that is truly kingly

amongst the people of God must have this character. If we aspire to exercise influence for God amongst His people, and it is right and pleasing to Him that we should desire to do so, we must see to it that we are with them in brotherly relations and affections, and that our hearts are not lifted up above them.

The saints are going to reign with Christ, and it is fitting that royal features should mark them now. It is written, "And they lived and reigned with the Christ a thousand years" (Revelation 20: 4). If we live with the Christ we shall be able to reign with Him; we shall bring a beautiful and heavenly influence to bear upon our brethren. God would delight that one who is truly a brother, and whose heart is lowly, should have a place of influence amongst His people. Such a one would be kingly, as setting forth the excellencies of God, while having low thoughts of himself. We should be ready to honour all who bring such influence to bear upon us.

"Only he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor lead back the people to Egypt, to multiply horses; for Jehovah hath said unto you, Ye shall not return again any more that way" (verse 16). The horse is a figure of natural strength, and it is identified with the world as the place of human resources. No lead in that direction is to be permitted to have influence amongst saints. It is as true today as it was of Israel, that "the guides of this people mislead them" (Isaiah 9: 16). Human ability, natural wisdom and prudence, things which commend themselves to man as in the flesh, are "horses", but they are vain things for safety (Psalm 33: 17). We must beware of every influence which tends towards the world; such influences are an ever-present danger, as they have been in all past ages. There is no more solemn warning in Scripture than the history of Solomon. Beginning in a lowly spirit, seeking wisdom from God, highly favoured by Him, and yet drifting into every snare against which Deuteronomy 17 was designed to safe-guard him! Do not let us think that we are in no danger of going back to the world out of which we have been delivered. If the secret history of souls were laid bare it would be found that many were moving in that direction. With some, alas! the public course is the plain evidence of it. Every worldly-minded Christian more or less influences others in the same direction. It is therefore of the utmost importance that we should not allow ourselves to fall under such influence. It is directly contrary to all that is kingly in a spiritual sense as suited to be in leadership amongst saints.

"Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away; neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold". It is necessary for us all to take heed to the word, "Keep thy heart more than anything that is

guarded; for out of it are the issues of life". (Proverbs 4: 23). But this is especially needful for those who exercise influence over others. The affections must be guarded. There must be vigilance lest anything turn the heart away. "Silver and gold" tend to make one independent of God, and make it easy to live a life of self-pleasing. Paul had truly kingly features; he lived to Christ and for the saints; he could say, "I have coveted the silver or gold or clothing of no one" (Acts 20: 33).

None of us can influence others beyond the measure in which we are influenced ourselves. Therefore the king is to "write for himself a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests, the Levites; and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear Jehovah his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them" (verses 18, 19). The king was to be a model of subjection and obedience for all the people. He was to be the expression of God's will, as carrying it out himself. The best way to write a copy of what is in God's will for His people is to become the living transcript of it ourselves. I doubt whether we have any true influence for God beyond the measure in which we are a model for others to imitate. The Lord has Himself left us a model (1 Peter 2: 21); He was altogether that which He said (John 8: 25). Paul tells us that he was a model (Philippians 3: 17), and he exhorts Timothy to be "a model of the believers, in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4: 12). He says that the Thessalonians became models to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thessalonians 1: 7). That is how to have true kingly character amongst the people of God; we cannot exercise influence for Him in any other way.

DEUTERONOMY 18

Deuteronomy 18

We have seen in chapters 16 and 17 that God sets up amongst His people ability for spiritual judgment, and that He has also in mind that kingly rule and leadership should be found amongst them. Chapter 18 brings before us the portion of “the priests, the Levites”,

and speaks of the Prophet whom God would raise up to Israel. All these features have been seen perfectly in Christ, and they are presented here as characteristic features of the people of God viewed as in the land.

“The priests, the Levites, and the whole tribe of Levi”, represent the saints as occupied in ministering to God in a priestly way, or as engaged in furthering His service amongst His people. *As such* they have their part with God; they share in God’s inheritance, and, indeed, God Himself becomes their inheritance.

We do not see here the official service of the priest or Levite — there is hardly anything of that in Deuteronomy — but their personal portion; that which as food gives them constitution and strength. There are no official garments here, but the nourishment that will give personal vigour for holy service. A well nourished priesthood is essential if the service of God is to be carried on in suitability to Him. And the sustenance of the priests depends on offerings, tithes, and first-fruits being brought by the people. We have previously considered the import of this. Have we cultivated and gathered the produce of the land so as to be able to contribute spiritually to the nourishment of what is priestly? I do not mean the priest as another person, but what is priestly in ourselves. If I minister to what is priestly in myself I shall minister to what is priestly amongst the brethren.

The holy service of God must not be allowed to get feeble. The decline of priestly vigour led to the setting up of a formal order of service in Christendom. A formal order can be carried on without spiritual power, but true priestly or levitical service cannot. The maintenance of vitality and freshness in that which ministers to the pleasure of God should be our chief concern.

“Inheritance with Israel” would be to have part in what, God has given *to men* in Christ. Life eternal is truly blessed as God’s gift to men, but this scripture calls our attention to the fact that as a result of men enjoying their God-given portion in Christ there is a portion *for God*, which He can speak of as His inheritance. What was given to the priests and Levites was in a distinct way

God's portion. It indicates that out of the wealth of their inheritance the people were able to minister to the pleasure of God. The priests and Levites lived on *that*. The saints, viewed as the priestly tribe, are privileged to have what is for God as their portion. They share it with Him; they have ability to appreciate and appropriate what is for God. As "the people of the land" we live upon what the love of God has given *to men*; as priests we live upon what is *for God*. We feed on Christ in relation to the delight which God has in Him. All His perfections have come out as a sweet odour to God in "Jehovah's offerings by fire"; and the tithes are God's inheritance as expressive of what He has reserved to Himself while bestowing upon men with a bounteous hand His wondrous gifts. Priests are nourished on what is for God; their very constitution is formed by the appropriation of Christ from that stand-point. How such food would make it characteristic of us to consider for God! This distinguishes the priestly tribe.

Then "the priest's due from the people" in regard to a sacrifice of ox or sheep is "the shoulder, and the jaw-bones, and the maw". The priest is to be nourished on the strength of Christ's walk for the pleasure of God — the unswerving and unfaltering character of that blessed pathway in which He moved steadily and undeviatingly on in entire devotion to God. What a firm and unwavering step was His! Never halting between two opinions; never turning to the right hand or the left; going straight on; never slipping or faltering. "I have set Jehovah continually before me; because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16: 8). Man, from innocence onward, had been marked by weakness, his steps always sliding; but One came in with divine strength, who never deviated from the pleasure of God. "I do always the things that are pleasing to him" (John 8: 29). The strength of the shoulder was there.

It is the function of the jaw-bones to masticate food, so that it is not swallowed whole, but broken up by a chewing process, so as to be prepared to be digested in the maw. However rich the pasture in which an ox or sheep may be, it is only by the action of its jaw-bones that it obtains food or nourishment. There is much food available in ministry, but it is only what we appropriate that nourishes us. There is a spiritual process which answers to eating and chewing our food. We must not be content to hear things, or to memorise them, but we must be concerned to understand spiritually what they mean. The Lord has given us a word which applies to other parts of Scripture as well as the one He was referring to. "He that reads let him consider it" (Mark 13: 14). "Consider" is explained in the note to the New Translation as being to "weigh with intelligence so as to understand". Divine things have to be "apprehended by the mind" (Romans 1: 20), and this

involves a masticating process. It is said of the blessed man that "his delight is in Jehovah's law, and in his law doth he meditate day and night". Jesus as a boy of twelve heard the teachers and asked them questions. He was not a passive listener; there was active interest in what He heard. Every word of God was food for Him, passing into His moral being through intense personal interest. Many scriptures speak of intense interest in the word, and personal appropriation of it. "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy words were unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jeremiah 15: 16). There needs to be an active and intelligent exercise on our part to masticate what is put before us as teaching. There is an abundant supply of food, but how much of it have we eaten?

Eating is the first essential in view of spiritual food being digested and assimilated. The "jaw-bones" would refer to that part of the process which lies in our responsibility. I think the Bereans were using their jaw-bones; they were deeply interested in what they heard and received, and they daily searched the Scriptures to see if these things were so; they diligently applied their minds to the understanding of what they heard.

Then the priest has before him in "the maw" the thought of digestion and assimilation. It is important that this should have place with us. No doubt all believers appreciate the features of Christ, in some measure, but many of us would have to admit that we are not what we appreciate. It has not been assimilated so as to become part of us. But as saints we must accept that things which are true in Christ are to become true in us, and our prayers should be to this end. "The shoulder, and the jaw-bones and the maw" are nourishment for the priestly constitution; they are essential for the discharge of priestly service in vigour. If we are to be "nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching" (1 Timothy 4: 6) it must be the result of God's word working in us who believe. There is an inward process of assimilation, the activity of which depends on spiritual health being maintained. Then God gives the increase, and fulfils "all the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power" (2 Thessalonians 1: 11).

"The first-fruits of thy corn, of thy new wine, and of thine oil, and the first-fruits of the shearing of thy sheep" would indicate that the priest is to be nourished upon that which is new and fresh in the soul. The things which we enjoyed twenty years ago could hardly be "the priest's due" now. Each succeeding year is to bring new stores of spiritual wealth, and the first-fruits of them are for the support of what is priestly. I suppose we can all remember when we had some first-fruits! Spiritual things came freshly to us, precious thoughts of Christ and products of the Spirit such as we never had before!

Things came into our souls in holy freshness. What joy they kindled in our hearts! But is that long ago? Such is not God's thought for us; first-fruits are to come in "all the days" (verse 5 margin). One likes to hear people say that they have had thoughts of Christ such as they never had before. Every fresh spiritual apprehension of Christ is a bit of first-fruits; it is something to nourish the priest and to promote the service of God.

The first-fruits of the new wine and the oil would refer to the Spirit as known in fresh and living activity, giving joy and power. To accept the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit is one thing; to have first-fruits of His presence and indwelling is another. It is the latter which invigorates what is priestly. "The first-fruits of the shearing of thy sheep" would have reference, I think, to the product of the divine nature in the saints. Shearing suggests that it might be yielded at personal cost. Wool formed no part of the official priestly garments, but it might be warming and comforting to the priest personally, and it is from this point of view that "the priest's due" is presented here. It is the nourishment and comfort of what is priestly rather than its official exercise that is before us. The first-fruits of every apprehension of Christ, of everything acquired of the Spirit, and of all that is the outcome of the divine nature in saints, go to make up "the priest's due". If the first-fruits are not there the priest cannot have his due; there will not be support for the service which is especially for the pleasure of God.

We are apt to think that first-fruits belong to early days, when things are first apprehended and appreciated, and that we must not expect to find that they will ever be quite like that again, and we do not, perhaps, look for fresh crops every year! But first-fruits are to be ministered to the priest "all the days". Diligence in the land will result in first-fruits coming in continually. It is encouraging and stimulating to know that this will be the sure accompaniment of spiritual prosperity.

Then (verses 6 - 8) we see that the Levite has the privilege of coming "according to all the desire of his soul unto the place which Jehovah will choose". This contemplates a movement in the liberty of spiritual affections. The coming up of the Levite is not a matter of obligation like the keeping of the feasts in chapter 16; it is the movement of "a willing spirit" (Psalm 2: 12). I think it suggests a way of coming to assembly conditions and service which is peculiarly characteristic of the present time. Assembly obligations exist, and always have existed, but that does not secure an answer to them. The answer is secured through the promptings of individual exercise and desire. All the truth and principles of the assembly remain as at the beginning, but they are reached now through desires of soul. The Levite seen here is a man whose

soul gets a great sense of the holy privilege attaching to the place chosen by Jehovah, and to the service carried on in His Name. Spiritual desire brings him to that place. It is a principle which could always operate, but it is admirably suited to a day of general departure.

If the truth of the assembly is generally departed from, or practically ignored, as it is today, we shall only come to its privilege and service through personal desire. Whatever privilege is enjoyed by the brethren who serve in the Name of Jehovah is open to any Levite whose soul desires it. He can have "like portions to eat" with them, he can serve as they serve; there is a precious and holy fellowship open to him. The circumstances imply that he has come there at some personal sacrifice, because "he hath sold of his patrimony". He has given up something which he might have retained without reproach in order to serve in the most privileged way possible, and he gets ample compensation. This is how assembly privileges and service can be taken up today. Have we got desire of soul in that direction? It is there to be taken up by every one who desires it. The Lord in John 14: 21 - 23 reserves most wondrous privilege for the individual lover, and it is by personal love and obedience, and keeping His word, that all can be secured now that answers to the place which Jehovah chose.

There is personal desire and movement, but if two or more move with like desires of soul they will find themselves in a real and blessed fellowship in which divine Persons will be honoured and served according to divine pleasure. We have often been told that we can have as much of Christ as we want, and I believe it is also true that we can have as much assembly privilege as we have desire for. There is an opened door set before us to devote ourselves to assembly service according to the desire of our soul. Assembly conditions and privileges are available, through the grace of the Lord, for every one whose soul desires to take them up. The Levite coming may serve and eat "as all his brethren"; he may have the gain of all that is there.

From verse 9 to the end of the chapter God's Prophet is introduced in contrast with all the abominations which have come in through men listening to communications from beneath. The eight things mentioned in verses 10, 11 refer to communications from the unseen world. There are many avenues through which Satan influences men. All these things are coming in again under new names, and people hearken to them, but they are all opposed to God. "Thou shalt be perfect with Jehovah thy God" (verse 13) means that we are not to listen for a moment to any communication which is not from Him.

God ever had before Him to communicate with men. He spoke to Adam and Eve in innocence (Genesis 1: 28 - 30), and afterwards they "heard the voice of

Jehovah Elohim, walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3: 8). It was His pleasure to be near to man and to communicate with him, and it grieved Him to find that distrust and distance had come in on man's part. Another communication had been listened to, a communication from beneath. Every abomination has come in that way, but deliverance is found in listening to God's Prophet. "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1: 1) is a statement which carries us farther back than any other statement in Scripture. It tells us plainly that from the beginning God had in mind to speak to men. But the serpent has been speaking also, so that there are two kinds of speaking, as we see in the verses before us — the first in verses 10 - 14, the second in verses 16 - 19. Men have opened their ears to communications from the power of darkness, but it is blessed to know that God has not left men without communications from Himself. Man is God's intelligent creature, and God speaks to him intelligibly. All darkening influences in the world have come from beneath, but all illuminating influences are from above, they come down from "the Father of lights".

Divination, auguries, enchantments, sorcery, charms, a spirit of Python, soothsaying, consulting the dead, are all found today in Christendom. But they neither convict men of sin, nor give the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins. They darken men as to the true knowledge of God. The communications which come from God are not dark and mysterious; they are light, and they make known that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all, and that He is now in the light as having fully revealed Himself in a Man, His own beloved Son.

"Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee ... like unto me" (verse 15). That this refers directly to Christ is proved by Peter's quotation of it in Acts 3. It declares unmistakably the true humanity of Him whom God has sent, and who has spoken the words of God. He is "from the midst of thee, of thy brethren". The full communication of God's words, of all that He would have made known to men, has come in One who is truly Man. The One who was "over all, God blessed for ever", came of Israel as according to flesh. (Romans 9: 4). He took part in blood and flesh, He took hold of the seed of Abraham; "it behoved him in all things to be made like to his brethren" (Hebrews 2: 14 - 17). He was not an angel or a spirit, but a Man; God speaks to men by a Man. He was so truly Man that the Samaritan woman could say, "How dost thou, being a Jew", and on His part He did not refuse to speak as one of the Jews in saying, "We worship what we know, for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4: 9, 22). Yet was He the true Prophet of God, of whom the woman could say, "I know that Messiah is coming, who is called Christ; when *he* comes he will tell us all things".

God has come near to men, and put Himself into communication with them, by Christ. To receive His communications is the greatest privilege and favour. It means that God is known, and if He is known He is loved, and if He is loved He is worshipped.

"Like unto me" emphasises the mediatorial character of God's speaking. Moses was great as having features which made it possible for Jehovah to say that Christ as the Prophet would be like him. God invested Moses with extraordinary dignity in view of Christ being like him. "If there be a prophet among you, I Jehovah will make myself known to him in a vision, I will speak to him in a dream. Not so my servant Moses: he is faithful in all my house. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him openly, and not in riddles; and the form of Jehovah doth he behold" (Numbers 12: 6 - 8). "And Jehovah spoke with Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend" (Exodus 33: 11). God would have us to consider Moses, not merely as representing the dispensation of law, but as having features such as pertain in the fullest way to Christ. Moses had a unique place, and he could speak as one with whom God was on terms of peculiar intimacy. And the "like unto thee" suggests that the promised Prophet would speak as One with whom God was known directly and personally, and not by dreams or visions. But the fact that God spoke to Moses, and Moses spoke to the people, of Another Prophet yet to be raised up clearly intimated that the speaking of Moses was not final. Indeed, as we know, Christ as Son is contrasted with Moses as a servant. When the truth came fully out what marked the speaking of the Prophet was that it was the speaking of *the Son*. See Hebrews 1: 1, 2. It is the speaking of One of whom the Father could say, "This is my beloved Son; hear him" (Luke 9: 35). It has been well said, Who can speak after the Son? The speaking of Christ, of the beloved Son in the bosom of the Father, is final.

Christ was like unto Moses as being the true Deliverer and Mediator. He inaugurated in grace and truth all that was typically set forth in Moses. The covenant, the service of God, and all that is suitable to the inheritance, were made known by Moses, and Christ is like unto him in relation to all these blessed things, giving the fulness of them according to all that is in the mind of God. What a Prophet we have! "Unto him shall ye hearken".

All this was in the minds of the disciples, and it was in the light of it that they hearkened to Jesus. As the Prophet God's words were put in the mouth of Christ, and He spoke what God commanded Him to speak. Hence He could say, "My doctrine is not mine, but that of him that has sent me" (John 7: 16). And again, "The words (the divine communications) which thou hast given me, I have given them, and they have received them, and have known truly that I

came out from thee, and have believed that thou sentest me" (John 17: 8). The One who was raised up "of thy brethren" so near to men as being truly Man, was "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father;" it was He who "came down out of heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven" (John 1: 18; John 3: 13). He was therefore able to declare God in a way of unmeasured fulness, and to speak of heavenly things as knowing them and having seen them. All has been told out now; there is no reserve in the divine communications; "all things which I have heard of my Father I have made known to you" (John 15: 15).

Not everything that the Lord said and did has been recorded in the Scriptures. The Gospels are a divine selection by the Holy Spirit, and they are fully adequate to set forth all that was spoken by the Son of God when here. His works spoke volumes as well as His words. Every utterance of the Lord has a fulness which is immeasurable. There are some verses of which Christians have been speaking and writing for nearly two thousand years, and fresh beauties and glories are being disclosed in them every day. The Holy Scriptures are the greatest marvel in the world, and the Gospels are the greatest marvel of the Scriptures. The four Gospels are a little book which could be read in a day, but there is concentrated there what will fill eternity with its blessedness.

John supposes that if all the things which Jesus did were written one by one, "not even the world itself would contain the books written". If men had written these narratives in their own ability they would never have known when to stop. But the Holy Spirit has given all that was necessary for us in words marked by simplicity and dignity. As we read we are in presence of the ineffable majesty, and yet infinite grace, of *the Word*. There is fulness of divine communication, constraining the soul to worship as it is realised that God has made known in His beloved Son all that was in His heart and mind manward.

The assembly of God is to be characterised by speaking which is of God as to its origin and its power. See 1 Corinthians 14. The speaking there is to take character from Christ's speaking; indeed He is now speaking from heaven in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit speaks in the house of God, bringing out in detail what God has communicated by Christ, and giving it application to the needs of souls and of the assembly. Such prophetic speaking has peculiar value in a day of departure, as reviving in spiritual power that which was from the beginning, and exposing the departure by bringing out the mind of God as it was originally made known. The assembly is God's house; it is the pillar and base of the truth, and the way to speak in it is "as oracles of God" (1 Peter 4: 11). Such speaking would be the speaking of Christ continued in intelligent

communications from God. Not new revelations, but every word in accord with what God has spoken by Christ. In presence of difficulties the prophetic word would exercise consciences so that the moral state might be put right. Whatever matter occasions difficulty the real question is the moral state of saints, and if this is judged in the light of communications from God, difficulties melt away.

I "will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him". Nothing is held in reserve now, save judgment. The Spirit has come in witness to the fact that all the mind of God is out; there is nothing further to be looked for. "As for you let that which ye have heard from the beginning abide in you; if what ye have heard from the beginning abides in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father". There can be no advance upon this; any going forward from it must be apostasy (2 John 9).

It is a serious thing not to hearken to Christ. "And it shall come to pass that the man who hearkeneth not unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him" (verse 19).

With reference to the closing verses of the chapter we may note that God is sometimes pleased to demonstrate that what is professedly spoken in His Name is not really His word at all. Many prophets have fixed dates for the Lord's return, but some of us have lived long enough to see many such prophecies falsified. They were really spoken presumptuously (verse 22). Fifty years ago people told us that the great pyramid made known that the Lord was coming some time between 1880 and 1890, and many are still measuring its dark passages and prophesying. Certain minds are attracted by this kind of thing, but it is not the speaking of Christ. The word from the excellent glory is "Hear him".

DEUTERONOMY 19

Deuteronomy 19

God gave great prominence in the land to the cities of refuge. They had a great place in His heart as a provision of mercy for "every slayer" who should "unwittingly" smite his neighbour. There is no doubt that in this the Spirit of God had in view the slaying of Christ. The Prophet of chapter 18 would become the slain Neighbour of chapter 19. And the issue of this would depend on how the slayer could be regarded by God. If the act was done "unwittingly" cities of refuge were available for the slayer; if done out of deliberate hatred there was no escape from the avenger of blood. The Spirit's testimony to a risen and exalted Christ would manifest in every case whether the slayer was of the one class or the other. On God's part He answered the intercession of Christ on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do", by taking account of the deed as done in ignorance, and by His Spirit in Peter He said, "I know that ye did it in ignorance, as also your rulers" (Acts 3: 17). Peter addressed the Jews in Acts 2 and 3 as slayers of Christ, and offered them mercy in His Name, but when the Spirit's testimony to Christ was rejected Stephen addressed the whole council of the Jews in Acts 7 as the murderers of the Just One. Standing deliberately to their act and deed, in presence of the testimony of the Holy Spirit to Jesus glorified, they became wilful murderers for whom no city of refuge was available. Saul of Tarsus persecuted Jesus in His saints, but he says that mercy was shewn him because he did it ignorantly in unbelief.

The actual result of the coming in of Christ was that Israel was found in the position of the manslayer, and as such forfeited all right to live in the inheritance. So that none of those who came into blessing at Pentecost and the following days could boast of their pedigree, or assert any claim to their assigned inheritance; they could only live as refugees from the avenger of blood. The cities of refuge suggest a character of dwelling in the land which greatly magnifies the sovereign love and mercy of God. The "heirs of promise" got the good of the unchangeableness of God's purpose, and the unchangeable character of His promise and oath, but on their part they came into it purely as refugees, for they had been verily guilty of crucifying and slaying Jesus. All the blessedness of God's purpose was there to be known and enjoyed — all that He had promised to the fathers — but on their part they were simply refugees from the avenger of blood.

The cities of refuge are a special divine provision for cases when the normal enjoyment of the land is no longer possible. They contemplate an end

governmentally of normal conditions. They represent what God had in reserve, in the supremacy of His mercy, when the promises had been forfeited as a result of the slaying of Christ. In making this provision God had in view the true Israel, the children of the promise (Romans 9), in regard to whom He could and did account that they slew Christ "unwittingly". But even for such the inheritance as on earth was forfeited; there was no reinstatement in it, no restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Another place of blessing became available of which the cities of refuge were typical. No place of earthly blessing remained even for Israel; they must either live in the cities of refuge or be destroyed under the judgment of God. God opened up to them what was holy and heavenly as a refuge when everything on earth failed. It is this which the Spirit of God refers to in Hebrews 6: when He speaks of the "strong encouragement" which those have "Who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us; which we have as anchor of the soul, both secure and firm, and entering into that within the veil, where Jesus is entered as forerunner for us". This was what the believing remnant of Israel did; Judaism failed them, for as connected with it they were guilty as Man-slayers, but all that was unseen and heavenly, connected with a risen and heavenly Christ, was made available for them as a city of refuge.

Now if Israel, to whom earthly blessing pertained, have lost all title to it through the slaying of Christ, and have to flee for refuge to lay hold on a hope which is heavenly, it is beyond all question that we of the nations cannot look for inheritance here. The slaying of Christ has rendered that as impossible for us as for Israel. We have to take up the inheritance as enjoyed in the cities of refuge, or we shall not possess it at all. And this is of immense importance for every Christian to apprehend. The people of God at the present time must not look to live in any inheritance on earth. We must flee for refuge to those things which lie within the veil. To want place, popularity, power, or influence on earth at the present time is, in principle, apostasy. The finer the buildings, the more attractive and beautiful in an earthly way the services, the nearer do Christians come to those "earth-dwellers" who are so soon to fall under the long-announced judgment of God. We are in the midst of a Christian profession that has, more or less, taken up the position of having what is earthly as its object. But the end of those who mind earthly things is destruction (Philippians 3: 19). We only live as having fled to heavenly things, as having set our minds on the things above, where the Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. The things that are on the earth are not the sphere of our life. "For ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God" (Colossians 3: 1 - 3). We are partakers of heavenly calling, and as Christ is the heavenly One those quickened by Him are heavenly ones. God has prepared the way for

us; He has made what is heavenly accessible. Let us see to it that we flee thither.

The public Christian profession is as great a failure as Judaism was; it has practically set aside the Holy Spirit, whose presence here is characteristic of the period during which Christ sits at the right hand of God. Not giving the Holy Spirit His place is the great outstanding sin of christendom, but when this is felt and owned the unseen and the heavenly are there for saints to flee to as a refuge. 2 Timothy is, in principle, on this line. The state of the Christian profession is such that enjoyment has been forfeited, but all that is spiritual and heavenly, and of God's purpose in Christ, remains as a refuge for those who have a sense of what has happened. It is there for those who are in the spirit of refugees.

God distinguishes between what is done in deliberate hatred and what is done unwittingly, even though in both cases the result may be fatal to what, has divine value. But He does not allow the seriousness of what is done "unwittingly" to pass without the fullest recognition. For the slayer it changed all the conditions on which he could live in the land. Much that has happened in the Christian profession has been done "unwittingly". The gravest errors have been introduced, or furthered, by men who truly loved the Lord Jesus. The whole episcopal and clerical system which is around us today developed under the influence of men who were personally devoted to Christ. Some, at least, of the sects were formed with true desire to be more consistent with the truth. But these things have proved *fatal* to much that is of God, and have had the effect of depriving the saints of the true privilege and gain connected with the assembly. So that now if saints would live in the divine inheritance they can only do so by withdrawing from iniquity, by purging themselves from vessels to dishonour, and by pursuing righteousness, faith, love, peace with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. This is the prepared way by which persons may flee for refuge today.

It is a mercy that God takes account of a great deal as being done "unwittingly". Many offences against Christ and against His people are committed through ignorance or inadvertence. In the midst of energetic service there may not always be sufficient care to provide against injuring or destroying something that is of Christ. The man with his axe in verse 5 might illustrate this. He is intent on his work, and zealous in it, but he kills his neighbour. Much labour of earnest men has had the effect of destroying life in the land rather than ministering to it. Not that this has been deliberately intended, but it has actually been done.

We learn from Joshua 20 that the three cities of refuge in the land were "hallowed". They were priestly and levitical cities (Numbers 35), and they were all "in the hill-country" (Joshua 20). When the conviction is brought home to us that we are exposed to the consequences of serious departure from what is of God, even though it may have been "unwittingly" so far as we are concerned, it is very blessed to know that what is set forth in these cities has such a great place in the ways and ordering of God. It is on this principle that God has placed amongst His people in these last days a spiritual ministry of the truth, and has called attention to the hallowed conditions in which alone He can be served in a priestly way. The "hill-country" has its counterpart in the heavenly elevation of much that the Lord has given to attract the hearts of His saints and to form them in their affections. The best and the richest and highest that God has to give is available as a city of refuge today. There is a prepared way for any who have desire to flee from what they find in themselves, and from what is of man in the Christian profession. They may find what is holy and elevated and satisfying, so that, notwithstanding all that has come in, they may *live* in the very best of the wealth of the inheritance. One comes as a refugee, indeed, and with no other title, but through infinite mercy and grace one is permitted to have place and part in what is holy and heavenly and spiritual, and to be the associate of those who are conversant with holy and heavenly and spiritual things. The priests and Levites held the three cities for the benefit of such, and whatever the man-slayer enjoyed there he enjoyed in the spirit of a refugee. This makes the inheritance available in a peculiar way under abnormal conditions. One may live on the best of its wealth even when the normal enjoyment of it is no longer possible. For the refugee must have lived on tithes, first-fruits, etc. with the priests and Levites amongst whom he dwelt.

The cities of refuge do not strictly represent a divine provision for perishing sinners, but a provision for people of God who have realised that there has been terrible departure from the normal conditions in which the land was originally held. It is such a provision as is indicated to us in 2 Timothy — a provision for conditions which are wholly abnormal, but which enables life in Christ Jesus to be known and enjoyed by those who avail themselves of the prepared way of escape. It is a special instruction for those who are conscious that privileges have been forfeited. God is not less gracious to saints of the assembly than He was to Israel. The whole spiritual order of things connected with God's purpose and grace is available as a refuge. He had in view from the beginning all that would occur that would be fatal to life in the land, and He has ever distinguished between what was done deliberately and what was done "unwittingly". There have been those in the Christian profession who

have been deliberately adverse to what was of Christ and of the Spirit, but many blows have been struck against the truth and against the brethren "unwittingly". When conviction of this is brought home to the conscience the city of refuge is ever available.

The thought of "three cities more" being added when the border was enlarged would shew that spiritual enlargement would ever be accompanied by increased provision for refugees. The more we are enlarged spiritually the more shall we be capable of holding what is spiritual and heavenly as a refuge for all those who are conscious that they can only live in the land as refugees. As regards the public position things have been forfeited, but the inheritance can be enjoyed still in this peculiar way. Everything that is hallowed, all the wealth of spiritual ministry, and holy associations that are suitable to God, are available now on the principle of refuge. How many are feeling the deplorable state of things in the Christian profession! Groaning over the fatal blows that are being struck against what is vital, and feeling that they are implicated by their associations in the consequences of many things which they truly deplore in their hearts! Oh, that such might know that there is a prepared way of escape for them! All that is of God and for God, all that is holy and heavenly, can be enjoyed in the "hill-country" in the appointed place. It is there for all in Israel who feel the need of it, and whose hearts value it.

"Thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have fixed in thine inheritance" (verse 14) shews that there is a divine apportionment which is not to be interfered with. The inheritance is common to all; all are sons, children, brethren, and have a common portion in Christ and in the Spirit,. But in detail each has an assigned portion, and it is to be our care, according to Deuteronomy, that our neighbour has his full portion. This is in keeping with the spirit of grace and consideration for the good of others which marks the book. We have no daughters of Zelophehad here desiring inheritance for themselves; our care here is that *our neighbour's* inheritance shall not be infringed upon. The inheritance is enjoyed in a neighbourly way; I can only enjoy your bit of it as you enjoy it, and therefore if I remove your landmark I really defraud myself! It is our interest to see that our neighbours enjoy their full assigned portion. In great part we enjoy the inheritance through our brethren; it is blessed to see them enjoying their portion; no one moving spiritually would wish to curtail it in the least degree. This stands in marked contrast with slaying our neighbour, even though such a thing should be done unwittingly. It emphasises the neighbourly character in which the inheritance is taken up. We get on together by fully recognising the portion assigned to each.

If any one's landmark is removed it is not only a wrong done to him, but it tends to impoverish all by interfering with the way in which God has given things. The clerical principle has greatly tended to remove landmarks, and has deprived the people of God of what divine favour would have made available in the brethren generally. The arrangements of men, and human order, are simply a removal of landmarks "which they of old time have fixed in thine inheritance". The commandments of the Lord (1 Corinthians 14: 37) are fixed landmarks, and are not to be disregarded; they would give to each one his true spiritual place amongst the brethren for the benefit of all. Many of our neighbours have had their landmarks removed, and we all suffer from it, but our care should be to give full place to what is assigned by God to each. The inheritance will only be truly and spiritually enjoyed as we are set together in affection, and each holds his portion in relation to the common joy. To be self-centred, or to move independently of one's brethren, is really to lose the good of what God has given to others for our benefit as joint-heirs with them.

Paul would not "overstretch" to boast in "other peoples' labours", or "in another's rule of things made ready to hand" (2 Corinthians 10: 13 - 16). He respected the divine allotment even in spheres of service. The apostles had their assigned portions; James and Cephas and John recognised that the glad tidings of the uncircumcision were confided to Paul (Galatians 2: 7 - 9). It is "as the Lord has given to each" (1 Corinthians 3: 5). There is a sovereign distribution, in keeping with "he gave them their land by lot" (Acts 13: 19), and this is to be regarded. "But to each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ" (Ephesians 4: 7). The grace given to our brethren is for our enjoyment and increase through them; so it is truly our interest to safe-guard our neighbour's portion, and not to encroach upon it. So we are exhorted not to regard "each his own qualities, but each those of others also" (Philippians 2: 4). We desire that all the brethren shall be possessed of what is assigned to them. It is narrowing to lose sight of the fact that it is largely through the brethren that we get the gain of the inheritance. On the other hand it is important to remember that whatever we hold is for common and neighbourly enjoyment with our brethren.

Another important principle in connection with our going on together in the land comes out in verses 15 - 21. Evil is to be dealt with on adequate testimony; one witness is not sufficient to establish any matter. The Lord's own words in Matthew 18: 16 and the apostle's words in 2 Corinthians 13: 1 and 1 Timothy 5: 19 shew how this principle is distinctly set up in relation to the assembly. Nothing is more serious, or more fatal to the enjoyment of the inheritance together, than to believe evil reports as to brethren without adequate testimony. There are often instances of strong personal feeling being

aroused by reports or suspicions for which there is really no foundation. The testimony of one unrighteous or mistaken witness has been listened to, and the matter regarded as proved when it has not been substantiated at all.

There are means available for testing the evidence of an unrighteous witness — one who is moved by the desire to damage his brother, a witness of violence, as it is literally. It is a solemn thing to “stand before Jehovah”, and He is with “the priests and the judges”. A merely human scrutiny might be baffled or evaded, but no man can lie to *God* with impunity, and God is in the assembly of His saints. See Acts 5: 1 - 6. The unerring government of God will ensure that an unrighteous witness will reap what he has sowed, and the priests and judges will act in accordance with that holy government, that “those that remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil in thy midst”. No false pity is to lead any eye to “spare” what is definitely under judgment before God.

DEUTERONOMY 20

Deuteronomy 20

This chapter would teach us that the inheritance can not be held without conflict. There are enemies great in resources and numbers but they are not to be feared, "for Jehovah thy God is with thee". We can only avoid conflict by giving up what is of God, but all spiritual war is approached with priestly encouragement. God gives His people the assurance that He is with them in the battle. In all times of conflict we should listen to the voice of the priest; he represents that element among the people of God that has clearness of spiritual vision, and that considers for God. Any conflict that has not the support of the priestly element will not be "the battles of Jehovah", but some battle of our own.

Then "the officers" lay down certain conditions that must be fulfilled before one goes to battle (verses 5 - 8). The builder of a new house must have dedicated it; the planter of a vineyard must have eaten of it; and one who has betrothed a wife must have taken her. These things seem to imply making good one's place in the inheritance. If the conditions suggested here have not been secured we had better leave fighting to other people.

Until a man has dedicated his new house he has not, reached the end in view in building it. To dedicate a new house would suggest taking up one's place definitely in the inheritance, and holding it in a spirit of dedication to God for His pleasure. I think the Ephesians were regarded as having built and dedicated their houses. They could be addressed as "fellow-citizens of the saints;" they had definitely taken up the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship. They were settled in, so to speak, in house conditions amongst the saints. This is a necessary requisite if we are to fight the Lord's battles as in Ephesians 6. We must first secure a definite place which we can hold as from and for God.

Then the vineyard in verse 6 would speak of the joy yielded in the inheritance. A certain time was reserved for cultivation of the land, and for securing the joy of it, before one was called upon to render military service. If Leviticus 19: 23 - 25 would apply to a vineyard there would be five years, occupation of the land before going out to battle. It suggests that one has been long enough in the land not only to get its fruit, but to distinguish between what is uncircumcised and what is holy. The joy of the inheritance has been tasted without any admixture of unspiritual elements; it has had to be regarded as "holy for praise to Jehovah" before it could be eaten as yielding a pure and holy joy. There would be a certain immaturity about a man who had not eaten

of his vineyard; he had not tasted the joy of the inheritance as a fruit of his own cultivation of it. I am afraid we often contend for things which we do not enjoy, or which are yet — to use the language of the type — uncircumcised in our souls. But the mind of God is clearly that we should enjoy things before we fight for them, and that we should enjoy them in a holy and spiritual way. The two and a half tribes were prepared to *fight* for Canaan, but they did not want to *live* there.

Then the betrothed wife would, in this connection, suggest the bringing forth of a generation to occupy and enjoy the land. That she should be taken would be the way of Israel's increase. We are to be, first of all, concerned to make good what is for internal prosperity before going to battle. There is divine order and instruction in this; we must not think of it merely as consideration for natural feelings. These are conditions which in God's ordering precede conflict; if we have not qualified in the way which is here intimated grave danger will be attached to our going out to battle. It would perhaps be wise and advantageous for us to leave the fighting to others!

Then the "timid and faint-hearted" are bidden to return from conflict (verse 8). They will only make others as weak as they are themselves. What a sad thing to be disheartening to others in a time of conflict! How often this has been the case! If I am timid and faint-hearted I must listen to the priest. When Paul exhorted Timothy to "rekindle the gift of God which is in thee ... For God has not given us a spirit, of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion" (2 Timothy 1: 6, 7), he was giving him priestly encouragement, and emboldening him to go on with the battle. In large measure we get support and encouragement through the brethren, but the Lord's personal succour is ever a great reality; He will stand by His faithful servants in conflict even if every one else fails them. See 2 Timothy 4:16,17. Paul with Timothy was filling the place of the "priest" in Deuteronomy 20, but in relation to Mark (Acts 15: 38) he was acting as an "officer". He perceived that Mark was not fit at that time to go to the battle, and he would not take him. There would have been an element of danger to himself and to others if he had gone.

There are some enemies to whom peace is to be proclaimed; they may make an "answer of peace", and become tributaries, and serve the people of God. There is an evangelical touch about this. It would seem that service generally is regarded as a warfare. Levitical service is spoken of as a warfare (Numbers 4: 3 margin), and Paul speaks as a soldier when he says "I have combated the good combat" (2 Timothy 4: 7). If a city very far off will not make peace the males are to be destroyed, and the rest become a spoil; there is booty and food as the result of the conflict. Cities afar off would seem to represent what

is opposed to God and to His people, but not viewed as in hopeless evil and needing to be exterminated like the old inhabitants of Canaan. It is that which *may* become tributary, or when the males are smitten — that is, when the energy of opposition is destroyed — may become a useful spoil, and add to the wealth of God's people. It is a kind of warfare which has in view the addition of something of value, so that it would represent gospel activities, or the subduing to God of those in whom there has been opposition, but who may in result have a place amongst His people.

But the nations of Canaan represent that which is abominable, and under judgment with God, and which has to be utterly devoted to destruction without mercy. It is really diabolical in character, and hopelessly evil.

Trees which bear fruit were not to be cut down even in war. They could be eaten of. In conflict we have not to be indiscriminate; there may be something which is of God even amongst adversaries and we must be careful not to cut that down; it has abiding value.

DEUTERONOMY 21

Deuteronomy 21

There is a wide scope of spiritual instruction in the chapter now before us. The one "found slain in the land" has, no doubt, reference to Christ. His death could not be attributed to any particular person; it was something which had to become the occasion of deep exercise for all the people as represented by their elders and judges. "Thy people Israel" were all involved, and had to clear themselves of blood-guiltiness in a righteous way.

The heifer that had not been wrought with, and that had not drawn in the yoke, was a type of Christ in the character in which He needs to be apprehended in order to the expiation of the guilt of slaying Him. He never came under man's influence in any way, nor did He serve man's purposes at all. He came according to God's will, by God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge. On the side of man's responsibility He was found slain, but on the divine side He was the Heifer brought down into the "ever-flowing watercourse" of God's blessed activities in grace. That is a stream which has been ever flowing independent of man altogether, flowing in spite of man's wickedness.

Peter in Acts 2 brought upon consciences the slaying of Christ, but he also took his hearers into a region which was quite apart from any actings of man. This may be suggested by the watercourse being neither tilled nor sown. It is in such a region that Christ can be apprehended as having died to accomplish expiation according to God's purpose and grace, in view of those who were under blood-guiltiness having remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Such could only clear themselves of the guilt of innocent blood by washing their hands over Christ as the One whose death had wrought expiation. Pilate washed his hands, and this was a solemn testimony permitted of God against the Jews, but it did not expiate Pilate's guilt, for he did not do it with the slightest apprehension of Christ as making expiation by His death. He did not wash *his* hands over the Heifer. But those convicted under Peter's preaching, and who repented, did clear themselves of the blood of Christ, and they recognised that expiation had been made on God's part, according to His determinate counsel, in the very act that spoke of their violence against His Anointed. Peter called upon them to be saved from the perverse generation that was under blood-guiltiness, and as so separated morally from their act and deed they were cleared, and could "answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood". They learned the death of Christ, not as bringing blood-

guiltiness upon them, but as the righteous ground of forgiveness, redemption, and expiation.

The elders and the priests were there, in a spiritual sense, for Peter and the eleven were men who had ability to take knowledge of what had transpired, and to bring home the conviction of it to those who lay under responsibility. They were also able to bring Christ into their view as the Heifer whose death was the only divine ground of expiation. Guilty as the people were, through infinite mercy and grace they could righteously wash their hands over the Heifer and clear themselves of blood-guiltiness. The nation will yet do so when they take up the language of Psalm 2, and when Zechariah 12:14 to Zechariah 13:1 is fulfilled. The slaying of Christ will then be estimated in a priestly way, and also its precious import as making expiation for sin. In principle every convicted sinner does so when he is brought to see the expiatory value of the death of Christ. The measuring to the nearest city, from this point, of view, would indicate a bringing home of responsibility to those who may have been previously unaware of it. It is a deeply serious matter that, the innocent blood of Christ has been shed; and the only One entitled to live here has been slain. It is in God's sight the most fearful thing that has ever happened in the world, and the Spirit of God would bring home to every man's conscience the necessity for clearing himself in regard of it.

But "the scope of no prophecy of scripture is had from its own particular interpretation". As being spoken under the power of the Holy Spirit Scripture has a very wide bearing. I have no doubt that principles are brought out here which were intended of God to be instruction for us when conditions are found "in the land" which are abnormal. The principle here enunciated would have some bearing on "every controversy and every stroke" (verse 5) which raises a question in regard to which all God's people have to prove themselves to be clear. If something fatal to the enjoyment of the land takes place it is a serious matter; it affects the whole of God's people; all have to prove themselves to be pure in the matter. The elders and judges universally have to concern themselves about such a matter; its gravity demands that some action shall be taken; and the wisdom of God assigns responsibility for such action to the nearest city.

This is a divine principle to which we do well to take heed. It is not a question here of the responsibility of each local assembly to deal with matters that arise within itself. That would be established by 1 Corinthians. But here responsibility is assigned on the ground of proximity, indicating that in abnormal circumstances we may be called upon to take some action by reason of nearness to the place where such circumstances have occurred. The man

found slain being "in the land" and "in the field" gives the circumstance a universal bearing. The holiness of God, and the purity of His land generally, are involved, and the gravity of the case requires that it shall be taken up somewhere. When moral questions arise, and things take place which are not according to the mind of God, it is not His way that they should be left undetermined. It cannot be regarded as nobody's business if something has happened that is contrary to the character of "the land" as the sphere of life. All Israel is concerned in such a matter, but responsibility is definitely fixed in "the city that is nearest". It is not left to be taken up voluntarily by any city that thinks fit to do so. If something not strictly local has to be taken up, in view of universal assembly conditions, the elders and judges should be careful to observe this rule. "The priests the sons of Levi" will come near when the right city takes the matter up, but they could not be expected, according to divine order, to come near if another city intervened. One would confidently look for light and spiritual discernment to be given where responsibility lies according to God's mind.

"And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near; for them Jehovah thy God hath chosen to do service unto him, and to bless in the name of Jehovah; and according to their word shall be every controversy and every stroke". When that element comes near there is priestly discernment, and things are determined according to God.

The "heifer" and the "ever-flowing watercourse" would indicate that all such exercise as is contemplated here is to be taken up in the light of the death of Christ, and of the unceasing activities of divine grace. It is a question of doing what is right (verse 9) not merely in a legal way, but in consistency with the grace of the dispensation, so that God's people generally may be relieved of implication in wrong-doing, and may continue under priestly blessing. "Every controversy and every stroke" is to be righteously determined in view of this. But responsibility to take action is definitely assigned to the "city that is nearest".

In the next two sections of the chapter we have, first, a relationship which is probational, and which may be disowned if the requisite conditions are not fulfilled; and then a relationship which is unalterable, the rights of which are inalienable. If we would understand the ways and grace of God, and learn how to distinguish between things that differ, we must pay attention to what is here before us.

The captive woman of verse 11, is, no doubt, a figure of Israel. Ezekiel 16 and Hosea may be compared. Jehovah had desired Israel, and proposed to have her for Himself in definite separation from all that marked her origin in a

natural way. He would have her in covenant relations with Himself. But the thought is suggested here that, after having got her, He might "have no delight in her"; He might have to "let her go according to her desire". How truly does this depict what actually occurred! Jehovah did not have delight in Israel, and she went voluntarily away from her blessed relations with Him. He did not treat her as a slave, He would not retain her against her desire; He did not "sell her for money" as giving any other a *right* to her; He has "let her go according to her desire". How sad is her position as being thus let go!

The solemn lesson of this is as much for us as for Israel. Those in the Christian profession have been called to be in suitability to Christ, and for His delight, as having laid aside all that pertained to our former state. But does the present state of the church yield delight to Christ? I speak of the church now as that which stands professedly for Christ in the world. Alas! it is far otherwise. Long ago Paul had to say, "For all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ". Early in the church's history the Lord had to say, "I have against thee... I have a few things against thee... But I have against thee" (Revelation 2:4; Revelation 2:14; Revelation 2:20). To the last phase of the church He says, "I am about to spue thee out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:16). Public and collective departure is the result of private and individual departure, so let us see to ourselves in this matter. It is a searching question for each one of us; are we ministering delight to Christ, or are we hankering after other things! What are the desires that really govern us in a practical way? Perhaps some of us would be ashamed to say? Suppose we were let go according to our desire, where should we go to? The Lord does not retain people unwillingly; if my desire is to go He may let me go. Many disciples went away from the Lord (John 6:66), and he let them go. He said to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" If I desire to be spiritual, and to minister to the delight of Christ, He will grant it. But if I want the world He may let me have it. "Demas has forsaken me, having loved the present age" (2 Timothy 4:10); "All who are in Asia... have turned away from me" (2 Timothy 1:15). With sorrow of heart he had to let them go. Judas had been in service and apostleship, but he "fell to go to his own place". John says of some that "They went out from among us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have surely remained with us, but that they might be made manifest that none are of us" (1 John 2:19). People sooner or later go to their own place; they go into associations that correspond with their inward condition and desires. But even apostates carry the evidence that they have once been positionally near to Christ; they carry into the world elements which it could never have derived from men like Buddha or Confucius. But it is intensely solemn to be let go because Christ has no delight in us, and because our desires are not really for

Him at all. Such will be the fate of that great body of profession which bears His name only to dishonour it. May each one of us heed the warning!

The subject of verses 16 - 17 is the inalienable right of the firstborn, This has reference to the saints as being the fruit of divine working, and not merely as being in a place of outward privilege. The two wives here would represent, I think, the outward human conditions in which God works, whether in Israel or among the Gentiles, but the firstborn in either case is the fruit of the operation of divine power. At the present time God's firstborn for heavenly blessing is being brought forth among the Gentiles; the firstborn for earthly blessing will be brought forth by Israel; but in either case "the right of the firstborn" is inalienable. The firstborn represents what is of God — "the first-fruits of his vigour", to use the language of the type — and a "double portion" of the inheritance is secured to such by His appointment. We were all by nature in the state described in Ephesians 2. Yet divine power wrought, and a firstborn has been brought forth, and is being brought forth, to inherit with Christ who is the true Firstborn.

Israel is today in the position of the hated wife. God has no complacency in her. He has had to say of her, "Not my people ... not beloved" (Romans 9: 26). But His divine power will work, and Israel will yet bring forth a firstborn for earthly blessing. But at the present time the firstborn brought forth amongst the Gentiles has taken precedence by divine appointment, and has obtained an inheritance that Israel will never have. There is nothing probational about this; "the heirs of the promise" get their portion according to the unchangeableness of God's purpose.

That which has been outwardly in relation to God without any true subjection to Him is set forth in the "unmanageable and rebellious son" of verses 18 - 21 . This was Israel's case, and it is very largely the case in christendom also. God's election in either case obtains blessing (Romans 11: 7) as the firstborn, the fruit of His own gracious work, but the rest disclose their true character, and will eventually come under His unsparing judgment.

Then the closing section of the chapter (verses 22, 23) has touching reference to Christ as taking up vicariously the sin, death, and curse of His people. To be hanged on a tree is to be publicly in the place of curse, and Christ was found there in infinite grace. All that stood connected with sin, death, and curse was defiling, and the body of one who had been in that place was to be buried that day. The man under curse was to be buried. In the light of this we can understand the significance of the place which Scripture gives to the burial of Christ. See 1 Corinthians 15: 4. The man under curse has gone out of God's sight in the burial of Christ, never to be seen again to defile God's land.

The "night" is suggestive of the present period, which so far as believers are concerned is to be marked by burial. "We have been buried therefore with him by baptism unto death, in order that, even as Christ has been raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6: 4.). "Buried with him in baptism" (Colossians 2: 12). If we are not in accord with the burial of Christ we shall defile the land by keeping the man in view who has been publicly seen in the cross of Christ to be "a curse of God". It is a matter of righteousness now that we should accept the place of burial with Christ. The Ethiopian eunuch said, "What hinders my being baptised?"; his desires went that way.

DEUTERONOMY 22

Deuteronomy 22

This section of the book brings out principles which are very important in relation to the "labour of love" which is to go on in the land. The first feature of it is care that our brother shall not lose anything that belongs to him. It is very noticeable throughout this book how often the thought of caring for the good of others is brought in. How often we find a large circle of beneficiaries brought in to share the good of the land — the Levite, the poor, the stranger, the widow and the fatherless. Spiritual blessings are to be enjoyed in such a way that others get the benefit of them. If I am thinking of myself, I am not serving in love. It was very sad when Paul had to say, "All seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ".

The opening verses of this chapter suggest that we are to think of what pertains to our brother, and have a care that he shall not lose the gain and enjoyment of it. The care and service of Christ is with a view to our getting the good of all that belongs to us through the all-blessing grace and love of our God, and we are to have a like care for our brother. In Exodus it is our enemy's ox or ass that we are to bring back to him, as having come under a teaching of grace which leads us to seek the good even of one who hates us. But in Deuteronomy it is our brother's ass we are to look after, or anything else that belongs to him. *Our brother* has lost it, and it becomes our concern that he should have it back so as to have the good of it.

There is a constant working of the enemy to deprive the people of God of what belongs to them, and their own carelessness and want of watchfulness greatly contributes to the success of his efforts. But we are to care for our brother so that anything which has strayed or been lost shall be restored to him if it comes into our possession. Our brother's ox, or sheep, or ass, etc., would represent apprehensions of Christ and spiritual qualities by means of which the inheritance can be cultivated or enjoyed. We are not to be satisfied to have these things for ourselves; we are to be concerned about our brother. As we look around on our brethren we can see many who have lost spiritual property that really belongs to them by the gift and calling of God. If certain things which are essential to the enjoyment of the land have come into our possession we should bear in mind that they belong also to our brethren, and it should be a matter of active concern to us that they should have the good of them. We are not to hold spiritual blessings as if they were exclusively our own; they belong to the brotherhood; and as loving the brotherhood we desire and labour that they should have what is truly their own. Much spiritual good

is practically at the present time lost to its rightful owners, and if any of that good comes into our hand it is well to recognise that it is our brother's, and to be concerned that he should possess and enjoy it. The joy of being able to say that a spiritual blessing is *mine* is enhanced by recognising that it is also my *brother's*. When I recognise this I come under obligation to serve him as far as possible that he may have the good of that which perhaps his own carelessness may have allowed to go astray from him.

If we made the impression on our brethren that we had got something of great value that belonged to them,

and that we were holding it with intense desire that they should have it, it would have the effect of drawing them to us. They would surely come to "seek after it". If our brother is near, and we know him, we are to bring back to him that which he has lost. That supposes there might be brethren within our reach who have lost the good of things; our service is to bring back to them what they have lost. The brother not near, and unknown, would represent brethren that are out of our reach, as alas! so many are at the present time. Many of our brethren are not near to us; it is very difficult to find them out; but it is well to hold any spiritual good that we have as their property, and with the sense in our hearts that it belongs to them. How far do we hold the precious things of God with a deep sense that they are the property of all saints? Many of the people of God have lost valuable property at the present time. If a little bit of it has come into our possession, there should be the feeling that we hold it on trust for those to whom it belongs; it is our brother's. Service amongst the brethren has this as a prominent feature. Certain things are discerned as belonging to our brother, but which he has lost the good of — perhaps through his own carelessness — and it becomes our concern that they should be secured to him by all possible means that he may have the benefit of them. It is just the opposite to self-consideration; it is active care for the good of the brethren. Paul in writing to the Philippians had to lament that the spirit of service had almost universally gone out. "All seek their own things".

The effort of the enemy is to deprive the people of God of their portion as in the land, or of what would contribute to their enjoyment of it, and I am afraid our own unwatchfulness often leads to things being lost. Whether it is an ox or a sheep or an ass or raiment, it pertains to the people as in the land; they are things which are essential for the enjoyment of the land. It suggests a large scope of service, whether for brethren near to us or for those far off. Those we can walk with are near to us; we can get at them more directly; but there are many not near and unknown. It is good to be in that spirit of care and

service that would desire that they all should have full enjoyment of what pertains to them. It is a question of the brotherly spirit towards all saints.

"It shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it" (verse 2), would imply that there would be some exercise on his part about what he has lost. If that which has been lost is with us there must be the consciousness on our part that we hold it as upon trust, but on the part of those who have lost things there must be a seeking after them. I think we might say that in some measure things are in the "house" at the present time if our brother will come and fetch them. If the brethren saw that we held something of value which they have lost, and that we held it with brotherly care that they might have it back, they ought surely to be moved to seek it. The Lord would have us to entertain a hopeful spirit about the brethren, and to look for them to come and get their lost property.

The practical difficulty is largely that the brethren often do not realise that they have lost any property. There must be divine awakening as to this, and we can pray for it to come about. The Lord can bring home to His saints that they have lost something valuable, but that it is available if they will only seek it. They will find it in the house of their brother. One feels sure that if we held things with brotherly care that all to whom they belong should enjoy them, there would be something attractive that would encourage the brethren to seek their property. We do not appropriate to ourselves exclusively any of the precious things;

we hold them as our brother's property as well as our own.

The ox would represent strength for labour (Proverbs 14: 4); the sheep ability to suffer uncomplainingly (Isaiah 53: 7). Both would be suitable for offering to God, so that for our brother to lose them would diminish his ability for sacrificial service Godward. The thought of being ransomed is connected with the ass as well as with man (Exodus 13: 13). As ransomed it is fitting that we should be lowly and unpretentious, and thus have features suited to carry the testimony of God at the present time (Zechariah 9: 9). Presently the Lord will ride on a white horse (Revelation 19: 11) to judge and make war, but His riding on the lowly ass characterises the present period. To lose such features is a serious loss indeed. Our brother's "clothing" would represent all that in which he is to appear at the present time as invested with righteousness and salvation; it would include the beautiful features of Christ as seen in Colossians 3: 12 - 14. It is not a question here of apprehending these things as our own, but of apprehending them as pertaining to our brother, but at the moment lost by him. It is to be our jealous care that he should have them again, for only

thus can he be adorned becomingly, or have the true privilege of the inheritance. What a "labour of love" does this entail!

"There shall not be a man's apparel on a woman, neither shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever doeth so is an abomination to Jehovah thy God" (verse 5). Divine order is ever to be observed, and it is most important to have regard to this in a day when every feature of that order is being so largely set aside. In Christianity the man and the woman each have their distinctive clothing, and are only suitably adorned as they appear in it. The whole tendency of things today is to subvert divine order, but that order is to be maintained in God's assembly. Nature itself teaches a woman to be retiring and modest. Her glory is her long hair which is "given to her in lieu of a veil". Her distinctive glory according to nature suggests what is her true moral glory. Her "clothing" would represent her whole deportment and appearance, not excluding her actual dress. It is to be suitable to the place which she has of expressing in her own person how the assembly is subjected to the Christ. So Paul, representing the authority of the Lord, says, "Let a woman learn in quietness in all subjection; but I do not suffer a woman to teach nor to exercise authority over man, but to be in quietness" (1 Timothy 2: 11, 12). He also says, "Let, your woman be silent in the assemblies, for it is not permitted to them to speak; but to be in subjection, as the law also says ... it is a shame for a woman to speak in assembly" (1 Corinthians 14: 34, 35). There might, be cases where sisters were more spiritually intelligent, than brothers, but they are not to teach. It, is sure that in such cases the saints would be more edified by the observance of divine order than they could possibly be by the superior intelligence of the woman.

I have no doubt that the disordered state of the church is reflected in the uncomely behaviour of women at the present time, one feature of which is the hideous fashion of cutting their hair short. It is a, reproach to see women preaching, or putting themselves into prominence; it is a setting aside of their true glory — a putting on of man's apparel.

But then, on the other hand, "neither shall a man put on a woman's clothing". The men are not to retire from the place accorded to them; they are to "pray in every place (that is, not only in the assembly, but at home, or wherever occasion arises), lifting up pious hands, without wrath or reasoning" (1 Timothy 2: 8). The public expression of praise or prayer, the setting forth of things in ministry, and the responsibility for order and edification in the assembly, rests with the men, and it is well for all believing men to see that they do not retire from the responsible service of the house of God. It might be as uncomely for a brother to be silent in the assembly as for a sister to

speak there. It is well to reflect upon this, and to see to it that we appear in the habiliments which are suitable.

It is a day in which women are taking a prominent place in public religious activities, but it seems to me that this is a reproach upon the men. If the men had been wearing their proper apparel, and filling up their responsibility according to divine order, there would not have been occasion or room for the women to take the place which they have taken. But to violate divine order in regard to these things is serious; it has the character of "abomination to Jehovah".

The question might arise in some minds, Why should there be a divine enactment with reference to such a small thing as a bird's nest? I think it indicates that when we come into the land the smallest detail embodies great and divine principles. The smallest things teach valuable spiritual lessons. For example, in chapter 25: 4 we read, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn". And with reference to that very scripture Paul says, "Is God occupied about the oxen, or does he say it altogether for our sakes"? (1 Corinthians 9: 10). He shews what a lesson there is in it for us. This enactment as to the bird's nest (Chapter 22: 6, 7) is evidently of special import, for a definite promise is connected with it — "That it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days". It is not a casual matter, but one which has an important effect on spiritual prosperity. The "dam" represents an element amongst God's people which is to be "let ... go"; it is to remain active and free, and not to be brought under restraint. God would teach His people to regard the maternal instinct, even in a bird, as something to be respected. He would teach us, even by a bird's nest, what He would have to be preserved amongst His people, viewed as in the inheritance. We are familiar with the fact that a bird's care for its young is one of the most touching figures that Scripture presents of God's care for His people. (See Exodus 19: 4; Deuteronomy 32: 11; Ruth 2: 12; Psalm 17: 8; Psalm 36: 7; Psalm 57: 1; Psalm 61: 4; Psalm 63: 7; Psalm 91: 4; Matthew 23: 37.)

I think "the dam" represents the kind of spirit that was seen in Paul amongst the Thessalonians. "We ... have been gentle in the midst of you, as a nurse would cherish her own children. Thus, yearning over you, we had found our delight in having imparted to you not only the glad tidings of God, but our own lives also, because ye had become beloved of us" (1 Thessalonians 2: 7, 8). It was seen also in Timothy of whom Paul says that he had "no one likeminded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on" (Philippians 2: 20). It is suggestive that we read in another place, "Our brother Timotheus is set at

liberty" (Hebrews 13: 23). God would have the spirit represented in Timothy to be free amongst His saints. "Thou shalt in any case let the dam go".

"The dam" sets forth the spirit of Him who would have gathered the children of Jerusalem as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings. The devotion of a bird to its young is very great; it will untiringly care for them. I saw a young bird picked up which had fallen out of its nest, and it was carried into a house, and the mother bird followed it in a self devotion that did not regard any personal danger, but was set on caring for her off-spring. God would not have that spirit brought under restraint. "That it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days" depends on the injunction being carried out, shewing that it is a matter of great spiritual importance. I take it that if maternal interest and care are not free and active amongst the people of God it will not be well with us, nor will our days be prolonged. Our prosperity depends on that spirit being at liberty.

The young being taken would suggest, I think, that *the product* of maternal care becomes available for the advantage of those who leave that care at liberty. The assembly benefits by the product, and fresh broods come along.

Then in building a new house there must be a parapet for the roof (verse 8). Building is an important aspect of service, but we must build with care. See 1 Corinthians 3: 10 - 15. We must not forget to safeguard what we build so that there may not be a point of danger, and one would gather from this verse that it is the high parts of the building which most need safeguarding! It is possible for true building in the land not to be sufficiently safeguarded, so that there may be a point of danger from which unwary persons may fall. I think it will be found that if there is such a point of danger the Spirit of God will provide "a parapet". He will bring something out that will give security at that point. But each individual builder is called upon to regard this regulation.

We have been warned against being "ecclesiastical", but those who have so warned us have been the very ones who have most strongly insisted on the maintenance of assembly truth and principles. They have made "a parapet" which would preserve us from thinking that they meant we were to disregard the truth of the assembly. If such statements were used to weaken assembly truth, or to bring in laxity as to assembly principles, it would be an entirely wrong use of them.

A great object of service in the land is to preserve an unmixed and uncontaminated character of things, so that personally, and in their associations and affections, the people of God may be marked by "uncorruptedness". There is a strong warning in the next section of the chapter (verses 9 - 11) against unsuitable mixtures. All that is in the world is

corrupting, and it is very largely so now because there is a certain admixture of good with it. In Christendom, at any rate, it would be hard to find unmixed evil, and that adds to the difficulty of the present time. God would have His people preserved from that which has a mixed character. The New Testament warns us not to be carried away with "various and strange doctrines" (Hebrews 13: 9) — things that are mixed. The most damaging things in christendom are a mixture of grace and law and human philosophy; and the little in them that is of God only makes them more dangerous, for it is deceptive.

The first injunction here is that the vineyard is not to be sown with two sorts of seed. That is, we are to look well to the kind of seed from which we expect to derive joy. The vineyard has in view that which makes glad the heart of man, and it is important to look for a joy that is unmixed in character. In Leviticus 19: 19, "thy field" is not to be sown with seed of two sorts. That would refer to service in general. There is an immense amount of sowing with two sorts of seed in service generally. I once heard a man speaking beautifully of Christ in the open air; he was evidently a true believer; but the next week I heard him again, and he was preaching temperance! To preach Christ, and to be labouring for the improvement of the man after the flesh, is to sow with seed of two sorts. The religious world is full of that kind of thing, and the power of Satan is behind it. Whatever may be of God in it is neutralised by mixture with what is of man.

In sowing our vineyard we have to be careful that we do not look to "seed of two sorts" for a yield of happiness. It is not to be a little of what is spiritual and then a little of what is fleshly or merely natural; not a little of Christ and then something of the world; not a little of what is heavenly and then something that is altogether of the earth. To sow on that principle is to forfeit all. That is a serious consideration. "Lest the whole of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the produce of thy vineyard, be forfeited". One might almost say that if we go in for what is spiritual we get something, and if we go in for what is natural we get something, but if we go in for both we get nothing.

The result of mixture is an entire breakdown of testimony, because true testimony depends on light being kept separate from darkness. There needs to be more distinctiveness. There is some good about all true believers — something of Christ — but Satan works by mixture to take away its distinctive character, and to bring in elements that are not of Christ and not spiritual, that there may be no pure fruit for God or unalloyed joy for His people.

We see great distinctiveness in Paul's life and service; he was an absolutely separated man — he was "separated to God's glad tidings" (Romans 1: 1). In

going to Corinth he determined to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He warned the Galatians against what he calls "a different gospel"; he warns them against "two sorts". Christ crucified is the complete public rejection of man after the flesh, and that man having been convicted and publicly rejected it is impossible to make anything of him for God; he cannot be taken account of as having any spiritual value.

Believers are looked at here as in the land, and as in the land having a vineyard, having that to which they look for joy, and they have to be careful that they do not sow it with "seed of two sorts". The recognition of the Spirit is most important; if we sow to the Spirit we reap eternal life. That is a fine vintage-wine on the lees, well refined. It is open to us all to be as happy as John was. He wrote his Gospel and epistle for that purpose. Paul too, had not been sowing his vineyard with "seed of two sorts"; he had been looking for his joy entirely in the spiritual direction.

Our vineyard has to do with securing our own joy, but ploughing raises the question of fellowship in service, and an unequal yoke is to be avoided. We are not to plough with an ox and an ass together. Some might think that if one had not two oxen an ass was better than nothing! No! They are not to plough together. An ox and an ass, however excellent the ass might be in itself, could never pull evenly together. I think it was on this principle that Paul would not take Mark with him on his missionary journey. It was not that Mark was not a Christian, but he had proved himself to be one who could not pull evenly with Paul. It is utterly impossible to work together with even true believers unless they are governed by the same principles so that they can pull evenly. It is often assumed now that one can join in Christian work with any true believer. People who differ as much one from the other as the ass does from the ox suppose that they can plough together. But it is not of God. I think it would be very difficult for an ox and an ass together to plough an even furrow. And if we take up associations in service with those who cannot pull evenly with us the work will be spoilt.

Was it not wonderful that Paul could address some brother in Philippi as a "true yoke-fellow"? Perhaps it was the jailor! But, whoever he was, he was one who could pull evenly with Paul. He must, indeed, have been an ox! Paul might have been the bigger and the stronger of the two, but whoever the "true yoke-fellow" was, he would not have been so spoken of if he had not been capable of ploughing with Paul. Paul delighted to have yoke-fellows, and though it does not follow that they all had the same degree of spiritual strength, they could pull evenly with him. He speaks of Timothy as one who

had served with him as a son with a father — they had pulled beautifully together.

Then “Thou shalt not wear a garment of mixed material, woven of wool and linen together”, would suggest how we are to be clothed for the pleasure and service of God as in the land. “Wool” would speak of natural warmth and energy, while “linen” would set forth a spiritual restraint upon nature. We gather this from Ezekiel 44: 17, 18. “And it shall come to pass when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall come upon them, when they minister in the gates of the inner court, and towards the house. They shall have linen tires upon their heads, and shall have linen breeches upon their loins; they shall not gird on anything that causeth sweat”. The warmth of nature has its proper sphere in natural affections, and the like, but it is not to be “mixed” with that which in its character should be wholly spiritual. The priestly garments being of linen suggests a character of deportment that is free from elements which take their rise in the warmth of mere nature, and which would excite, or minister to, what is fleshly or merely of nature. How necessary it is to see that there is no mixture in regard to how we are clothed for service! The natural characteristics of the vessel remain, but they are all to be subordinated to what is spiritual. Almost the last word of the risen Lord was, “And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but do ye remain in the city till ye be clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24: 49). It is right to be fervent; the more fervent a man is in his spirit the better, but it is to be spiritual fervour, and not merely the warmth or eloquence that may be natural to the man. The “wool” and “linen” each have their place, but they are not to be mixed. All service should have a purely spiritual character. The “linen” suggests the fine texture of what is spiritual, a character of things which does not minister to what is natural, either in the one who speaks or in those to whom he speaks.

“Tassels shalt thou make thee on the four corners of thy clothing, wherewith thou coverest thyself” (verse 12). The “tassels” would imply something distinctive as marking the people of God from every point of view, for they are to be on “the four corners of thy clothing”. Believers may be viewed either personally, or as in business life, or as in household relations, or as of the assembly. These might answer to the “four corners”, and each is to be marked by spiritual ornamentation. I understand that the word translated “tassels” has a reference to flower buds, and if this is so it would have something to say of the energy of spiritual life coming into manifestation. There is no mention here, as in Numbers 15 of the “lace of blue”, for this book regards the people of God as being wholly on heavenly ground, but they are to be invested with this distinctive ornamentation. It is good for us to be exercised that our

“clothing” should not only be without spot, but that it should have ornaments which evidence the energy of divine life in our souls. Outward correctness can be imitated, but the spontaneity of life cannot. We gather from 1 Peter 3: 3, 4 that ornamentation in a spiritual sense lies in the way our spirits are adorned, so that not only are right things done, but the spirit in which they are done gives them a grace and comeliness that is to God’s glory and praise. All that is uncomely should stand rebuked by the excellency and divine adornment seen upon the people of God. The “tassels”

speak, surely, of this, and of how God would have His people to be distinguished from all others as having spiritual adornments.

From verse 13 is obviously a new section, and it concerns the “virgin” character amongst the people of God. It is of the utmost importance that this character should be preserved without reproach. A “chaste virgin” might be charged with “things for scandalous talk”, and be given an evil name in Israel. This is what the enemy has been seeking to do all through the history of the church. He would, if possible, bring in reproach on the fair name of that which is espoused to Christ, and he can only be silenced by the maintenance of true “virgin” character, and by the undeniable evidence of it. The true tokens of virginity are hearts uncorrupted from simplicity as to the Christ. Paul was anxious as the father of the Corinthians that the tokens of virginity should be forthcoming. “For I am jealous as to you with a jealousy which is of God; for I have espoused you unto one man, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craft, so your thoughts should be corrupted from simplicity as to the Christ” (2 Corinthians 11: 2, 3). The whole of Paul’s two epistles to them had in view that the enemy, who was seeking to fasten an evil name on them, should be silenced and condemned, and that they might be truly presented as a chaste virgin. Otherwise they could only be condemned as having yielded to the world’s corrupting influence. If we yield to the corrupting influence of that which has no title to us it really means spiritual death. The enemy is at work to bring reproach on our virginity, but we see the energy of divine love in Paul, and his faithful labour that we may be clear of that reproach, and that it may become manifest that we have chaste virgin character as maintained in true-hearted devotedness to the One to whom we belong. The saints at Corinth had, to some extent, yielded to the corrupting influences of the serpent and his world. But Paul laboured to free them from all those influences by presenting Christ to their affections as the One who alone was entitled to those affections.

This is how the Spirit works to secure the tokens of virginity in the saints. The Lord said of the Spirit, “ye know him”. How do we know Him? By the way in

which He presents Christ to us, and glorifies Christ in our affections. If we yield ourselves to His precious ministry we shall be preserved in true virgin character. Christ will, ere long, present the assembly to Himself "glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things". She will be presented without a mark of decline or decay. That is viewed in Ephesians 5: as brought about by Christ sanctifying the assembly, purifying it by the washing of water by the word, that it may answer to all that it is according to divine purpose. All His service of love has that in view. One can understand how incessantly the adversary would work to bring in elements of unfaithfulness, so that "an evil name" may attach to that which bears the name of Christ. He will do this either by subtle craft or by violence; he is as intent upon corrupting the affections of the saints as Christ and the Spirit are intent upon preserving their simplicity and integrity.

I have heard of a father compelling his converted child to go to the theatre that Christ might be driven out of her mind, but he did not succeed in his object. Under pressure of this kind it is our privilege to cry and be delivered. "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of trial". But woe be to us if we do not "cry" under such circumstances. The latter part of the chapter would suggest that there is a security in the "city" which may not be found in the "field". To keep near to our "fellow-citizens" is a great safe-guard; the companionship of the saints is full of preservative influence. To get away from it often leads to falling an easy prey to what is corrupting.

DEUTERONOMY 23

Deuteronomy 23

"The congregation of Jehovah" is necessarily exclusive of what is unsuitable to Him. The word translated "congregation" is only used before in this book with reference to the assembly at Horeb; the Greek translators rendered it *ecclesia*, and the fact that the Lord used this word to designate *His* assembly gives it deep interest for those who love Him. It generally refers in the Old Testament to the actual gathering together of the people of God for His service, though it is sometimes used of them in a more general way. Psalm 22: 22, 25; Psalm 35:18; Psalm 40: 9, 10 shew that it is the place of holy activities on the part of Christ both Godward and manward. "The congregation of Jehovah" when the Lord was here consisted of those to whom He could make God known, and in the midst of whom He could praise, though this could not be realised in a full sense until redemption was accomplished and He was risen from the dead. The congregation is spoken of in Psalm 149: 1 as "the congregation of the godly". The effect of its true character being realised in Nehemiah's day was that "They separated from Israel all the mixed multitude" (Nehemiah 13: 1 - 3). It was a grievous offence when Eliashib the priest allowed Tobijah the Ammonite to have a chamber in the courts of the house of God. It shewed a complete absence of the exclusive spirit which can alone maintain holy associations. There is no such thing contemplated in Scripture as God's service or worship being carried on by a "mixed multitude".

The eunuch, the bastard, the Ammonite, the Moabite, would represent what is unsuitable to God, and therefore cannot have any place in His congregation. This does not mean that any individual is excluded from the blessings of grace, whatever may be his condition or birth. The Ethiopian eunuch, Ebed-melech in Jeremiah 39 and Ruth the Moabitish woman shew this clearly, and Isaiah 56: 3 - 8 is a beautiful word in this connection. Grace can, and does, remove every disability where there is turning to God in repentance. But the moral character represented figuratively here can never be in the congregation of Jehovah.

A eunuch represents that which has lost its original and God-given character and energy, and has become like a sapless and fruitless tree. How much in the Christian profession is like this! Such a condition is ready for complete apostasy. It is like the dried up fig-tree (Matthew 21: 19), or the dried up branch of John 15: 6. Jude refers to some as being "trees without fruit"; they were outwardly amongst the people of God as "spots in your love-feasts", but

they had no place truly in His congregation; God will not have such an element there.

The bastard represents one who has not come legitimately amongst the people of God, and not having a true pedigree has never been a partaker of the chastening to which all God's sons are subjected (Hebrews 12). An Ammonite or Moabite, being descended from Lot, represents those who have had some connection, according to the flesh, with the people of God. It is to be noted that Ammon and Moab are regarded much more severely than Edom and Egypt. They originated in the moral abasement of a true, but failing, saint, and when what is of God is corrupted it is worse in His sight than that which is purely natural or worldly, and it results in greater hostility to His people and testimony.

Those who have departed from the truth are more hostile to it than those who have never known it.

Neither an Edomite nor an Egyptian were to be abhorred. They were both to be regarded, in the light of this chapter, as in the view of God for blessing. "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob *and Esau* concerning things to come" (Hebrews 11: 20). Edom represents those whom we are to regard as brethren, and who have an assigned portion from God, which, nevertheless, stops short of His full thought for His people. The Egyptian would be rather the man of the world as such, living on his own resources and without the knowledge of God, but not viewed as an adversary. This scripture supposes that of such there might be some who would desire to share in the privileges of the land and the congregation of God, and "in the third generation" they might acquire a new status whereby they might be qualified to do so — typically as on the ground of death and resurrection. The spiritual privileges of the congregation are exclusive of elements contrary to God, or unsuitable to Him, but they are open to those who through godly exercise desire them, and who recognise that they can only be taken up as of a new generation and on spiritual grounds. In the congregation of God things are maintained in spiritual vigour, and in the true and holy affections of sons, and elements of departure and fleshly pride are not admitted. The congregation is holy because it is "the congregation of Jehovah".

The "congregation" is the place of privilege, but there is also the "camp" — the place of conflict; there will not be the enjoyment of the one without taking up the strenuous exercises of the other; and holiness is necessary in both. As in the land we have to face many subtle foes, and we shall not be able to overcome them save as God is with us. The enemy has ever been attacking those who have in any measure occupied divine territory,

but when holiness has been maintained God has walked in the midst of the camp to deliver His people. Hence it is of the greatest importance to "keep thee from every evil thing ... and thy camp shall be holy, that he see nothing unseemly with thee, and turn away from thee" (verses 9, 14). If we lose the presence and power of God we shall have no true power for conflict, and to secure His presence there must be holiness which removes every unseemly thing.

Then verses 15, 16 are a beautiful touch of evangelical grace. Any runaway slave is to be received; "he shall dwell with thee, even in thy midst". God's people are to give refuge to any fugitive from the bondage of sin, the world or Satan. It supposes that he has heard a report of the grace that reigns amongst God's people, and has escaped from his old master unto them. He appreciates a place amongst them, and chooses it as seeming good to him, and what he desires is to be freely accorded. He is to have the liberty of the land, and to dwell "in the place that he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it seemeth good to him". Onesimus being sent back to Philemon is quite in keeping with this scripture, because he was sent back to be received "not any longer as a bondman, but above a bondman, a beloved brother". He was to be received, not to be in bondage, but with all the welcome that Philemon would have accorded to Paul, his beloved father in Christ, God would have His people to be known as liberators. How beautifully the Spirit of God has put together the holiness of the congregation, and of the conflict which will maintain what is due to God, and the compassionate mercy which will freely open its doors to receive a poor runaway slave, and which will put no burden of oppression upon him.

Verse 18 contains the only mention of the house of God which is found in this book, and it is here seen as the place where vows are paid; that is, where the devoted affections of His people find expression. It is blessed to consider that God looks for movements of devotedness to Himself that will find expression in His house. This is a very distinct feature of the house of God, characterising it from Genesis 28 onwards. See Genesis 28: 17, 20. A vow is the fruit of exercise God-ward, and the scripture before us shews that what is unclean cannot be dedicated to God. Everything that has the true character of a vow must be spiritual and not fleshly.

Jacob's vow was that of one who was small in divine things; he was spiritually immature, for he was thinking of himself and his own needs. There is a great contrast between the free and magnificent commitment of God to him in grace and faithfulness (verses 13 - 15) and his conditional commitment to God (verses 20 - 22). But still in the sense of dependence upon God he vowed; he

felt it was due that there should be something for God. And no doubt his vow was acceptable so far as it went. If we are only prepared to give a tenth to God He values that; the purpose of heart that there should be *something* for Him is very precious in His sight. Jacob had to go through a great deal of discipline to prepare him to pay his vow. If at any time we have purposed in our hearts any true dedication to God, and afterwards let other things hinder it, it is very likely that He will bring us back through His chastening ways to pay our vows.

Hannah's was a more advanced exercise (1 Samuel 1). She was godly, but was under reproach from an adversary, and the reproach intensified in her soul the spirit of a vow. If all had gone smoothly, and she had had "ten sons" she might never have vowed at the house of Jehovah, and for the house of Jehovah. Thanksgiving has not the same character as a vow (see Leviticus 7: 15, 16);

it has not the same intensity of devotion. Sometimes the ways of God with us seem to leave us under reproach. We do not appear to have the same manifestations of divine favour as others. There may be that which the adversary uses to provoke us. It is well if such an exercise develops in us the spirit of a vow — an intense desire and purpose to bring forth something that shall be entirely for God. Hannah's thought went far beyond Jacob's; he would give one-tenth to God and retain nine-tenths for himself; but she would give *the whole* of what He gave her back to Him for the service of His house. Hannah overcame the wicked one, and thus shewed that divine strength was with her.

In Psalm 116 there is a further experience. Here is one who can perform his vows. He loves Jehovah because his voice and his supplications have been heard. He has known a full deliverance; he has believed, and he is full of Jehovah's benefits; he returns to his rest, and knows the bountifulness of God's dealings with him. He is really in the blessedness of life, walking before Jehovah "in the land of the living". And, in result, he performs his "vows unto Jehovah, yea; before all his people, in the courts of Jehovah's house". It is touching to see that "Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints", stands in immediate connection with the performing of vows. It seems to intimate that their very lives are given up in the spirit of a vow, and this would be in keeping with Romans 14: 8. "For both if we should live, it is to the Lord we live; and if we should die, it is to the Lord we die; both if we should live then, and if we should die, we are the Lord's". Paul's readiness to be poured out (Philippians 2: 17; 2 Timothy 4: 6) is a beautiful example of one prepared to die in the true spirit of a vow.

One would desire to think more of the house of God as the place where there is something for God. It is noticeable that when the house of God is spoken of there is a tendency to dwell upon what is there for men, but Deuteronomy only presents it as the place where vows are paid — the place where there is something for God. God has enriched us with precious thoughts of Christ which have become, to some extent, the wealth and joy of our hearts. But do we think sufficiently that God would have such things to be dedicated for His pleasure? The result for God is, after all, the most important thing. We have the privilege of bringing our vows to His house. Their being paid "before all his people" gives them assembly character; all are to be refreshed and stimulated by them. If we are conscious that we are possessed of something which God can delight in, let us not be behind in the purpose of heart that will devote it to His service in His house.

Jephthah's vow (Judges 11: 30) is a warning against vowing unintelligently, and saying more with our lips than we have thought of doing. Such a vow might not really be for God's pleasure at all. I am afraid that most Christians are guilty of having said more in their prayers or hymns than they are prepared to carry out practically. If all believers had performed the vows thus uttered there would have been a very different result for God. Those who vow and do not pay their vows are regarded by God as fools, and He has no pleasure in them. (Ecclesiastes 5: 1 - 5). See Deuteronomy 23: 21 - 23.

The fullest exemplification of One with the vows of God upon Him was the Lord Jesus Himself; He was the true Nazarite, and His self-dedication in love as the Hebrew Servant (Exodus 21: 5) was in the true spirit of a vow.

Then verses 19, 20 shew that amongst the people of God there is to be found a kindly affection which acts without thought of any gain for self, and on different lines from what is legitimate in our commercial dealings with men. Our brother has need, and we do not shut up our bowels from him, nor do we use his need to secure any gain for ourselves. It is the true spirit of "the brotherhood" (1 Peter 2: 17). The principle of it would apply both to "the world's substance", and to the spiritual wealth gained in the inheritance. Both are to be used in grace for the benefit of the brotherhood with no self-advantage in view such as place, reputation, or the praise of men. The taking of "interest" in that form would be displeasing to God. But it is always right to seek "the glory which comes from God alone", or, as we read here, "that Jehovah thy God may bless thee in all the business of thy hand in the land".

The grace in which the inheritance is held makes us welcome to go into our neighbour's vineyard or cornfield and eat our fill of his grapes or corn. But the same grace would restrain us from appropriating them in a wholesale way as if

they were our own (verses 24, 25). The "vessel" and the "sickle" are for use in our own vineyard or cornfield, but not in our neighbour's. The fruits of our neighbour's labour, and of God's favour to him, are not to be dealt with as if they were our own produce. We have liberty to enjoy personally the good of our neighbour's spiritual fruits. Whatever he has of joy in the Holy Spirit, or of the preciousness of Christ, we may freely appropriate for our own joy and nourishment. But we must beware of using the "vessel" or the "sickle". The apostle's words in Galatians 6: 4 are in keeping with what is here before us: "But let each prove his own work, and then he will have his boast in what belongs to himself alone, and not in what belongs to another". We are welcome to get the good for ourselves of the spiritual thoughts of others, but it is unlawful to use them as if they were the fruit of our own exercises. One might pass off thus as having a good vineyard or cornfield, when in truth all belonged to another. And "if any man reputes himself to be something, being nothing, he deceives himself". A man may get a reputation by repeating the thoughts of others as if they were his own, when he only has them in his "vessel", and not as masticated and assimilated food, but it is not the kind of reputation to be coveted.

DEUTERONOMY 24

Deuteronomy 24

The first section of this chapter contemplates an action which is not according to the heart of God. He says, "I hate putting away" (Malachi 2: 16). And the Lord Himself said, referring to this scripture, "Moses in view of your hard heartedness, allowed you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not thus" (Matthew 19: 8). Divine thoughts were disclosed at the beginning, and they will ultimately be established and secured. But God has often to take a course governmentally which is not at all according to His heart. He does it reluctantly, as the glory went away in Ezekiel. In Hezekiah's day He asked His people, "Where is the bill of your mother's divorce? ... for your transgressions is your mother put away". (Isaiah 1: 1 and see also Jeremiah 3: 8). First Israel and then Judah were sent away; their going into captivity was their public divorce from Jehovah; and yet His heart followed them, as we see so touchingly in the prophets, and Jeremiah 3: 1 intimates that there was grace in His heart that would, in case of repentance and returning to Him, rise above all that was governmental and receive them again.

Unseemly things in God's people may necessitate His publicly disowning them; and the assembly has to act in harmony with God's government as well as with His grace. There is binding as well as loosing, retaining of sins as well as remitting (Matthew 18: 18; John 20: 23). But it is always after much long-suffering that God disowns what has stood in relation to Him; He lingers over it in the reluctance of love. The secret of all departure is getting away from the consciousness of divine love; then unseemly things come in; leaving first love opens the door for other things to come in. As we read Revelation 2, Revelation 3 we see how one unseemly thing after another came in until in the end the Lord had to say, "I am about to spue thee out of my mouth". But His appeals to the assemblies shew the reluctance of His love to break off relations; even to Laodicea He says, "Behold I stand at the door and am knocking". He may be compelled to remove the lamp out of its place, or to spue the assembly out of His mouth as nauseous to Him, but there is no "hard-heartedness" on His part. Persistent evil, unrepented of, eventually necessitates this action of holy and righteous government.

Jehovah called the attention of Jeremiah to the fact that He had given "backsliding Israel" a bill of divorce, and that "treacherous Judah", had not taken warning from this. I think that Protestantism is very much like "treacherous Judah", not having taken to heart the Lord's dealings with that

part of the Christian profession which answers to Israel, where the woman Jezebel is permitted, who teaches and leads astray the Lord's servants to commit fornication and to eat of idol sacrifices (Revelation 2: 20). The fact that the Lord owns a remnant in Thyatira is really a disowning of the public body, and in that sense a removal of the candlestick; this, I believe, has taken place as regards the Papal Church. But Protestantism, though having peculiar privileges, has not answered to the Lord's mind any more than Popery, and is in imminent danger of being also sent away as divorced. But a door of repentance is still open for all in the Christian profession, if they will avail themselves of it. Judah had a privileged place, and yet turned out to be worse than "backsliding Israel"; the fact that she had more light and privilege than Israel made her more culpable and more distasteful to God. If unseemly things are found in those who have greater privileges than others they are so much the more offensive to God. It therefore becomes us not to be high-minded but to fear; if we continue in the goodness of God we shall not be cut off.

The prophets shew what a great place the thought of recovery has in the heart of God. See Isaiah 54, Jeremiah 3, Hosea 2, etc., etc. Israel and Judah went after "many lovers", but the faithful love of Jehovah yearned for their return to Him, and He will yet bring it to pass in His mercy. Becoming "another man's wife", would, I think, imply the formation of a definite bond like the covenant of Daniel 9: 27, or Isaiah 28: 15. This would indicate a state of complete apostasy, from which there is no return to divine favour. The scriptures in Hebrews 6: 4; 10: 26 refer to definite apostasy. But there may be sad departure, and great unfaithfulness in going after "many lovers", which has not the character under God's eye of apostasy, and from this there may be recovery through the faithfulness and mercy of God. It will be so with Israel, and saints of the assembly have proved recovering mercy in a remarkable way, if we consider what Church history has been. In christendom today there is not only gross departure, but the air is full of the spirit of actual apostasy. Let us beware of decline in the appreciation of divine love, and the weakening of affectionate fidelity to Christ, for if we begin to slip away there is no telling how far we may go! On the down grade the tendency is ever for movement to be accelerated rather than arrested.

The man having "newly taken a wife", or, as it is literally, "having taken a new wife", in verse 5 has, I believe, specific reference to Christ and the assembly. Verse 1 would have a bearing on the Church, as well as Israel, viewed as in responsibility, and finding no favour because of "some unseemly thing". But verse 5 views the assembly as the product of the work of God and the subject of the complacent love of Christ — His blest companion, gladdened by Him. It is the assembly viewed as the fruit of divine purpose and spiritual formation;

as such she is His own flesh, and there are no unseemly things in that. Think of Christ being *entirely* for His house and His wife at the present time! This present period answers to the "one year". He is not going out with the army to subdue His enemies now; He will do that presently when the year has expired. The "one year" is a kind of parenthesis in the ways of God; it is a special period during which the service of Christ towards the assembly is going on. *God* is at the present time ordering and over-ruling providentially in the world, and keeping doors open for His glad tidings, but *Christ* is entirely devoted to the assembly; no kind of business otherwise is imposed upon Him. Jehovah has said to Him, "Sit at my right hand until I put thine enemies as footstool of thy feet" (Psalm 110: 1). Christ is exempted from every business; He is in restfulness at God's right hand to be free for His house, and to gladden the wife whom He has taken. His undivided attention and affection is given to her to gladden her; He is wholly for the assembly. Our response in affection to Him will be commensurate with our apprehension and appreciation of His love and service. That service is very effective, for it eventuates in the assembly being presented glorious, "having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things". The assembly is subjected to the Christ as her Head; she is subjected to His love and to love's service and gladdening; she appreciates and enjoys it. The world is not getting the attention of Christ today either to judge things or to put things right; He said expressly, "I pray not for the world"; He is not occupied with nations and their ways. The world is going on with what it thinks great, but Christ is occupied with "his own flesh" down here. His "house" is the circle of His interests, but His "wife" is the delight of His heart, His comfort as He is hers.

God's thoughts were "from the beginning", and in the end they will be brought to fruition. The assembly will be presented glorious, and Israel will be clothed with the comeliness of Christ, and will be Head of the nations. But between the beginning and the end there come in the divine ways governmentally with reference to what stands responsibly in relation to Christ. In that connection unseemly things may be found, and a letter of divorce may be given.

Faithfulness on the line of responsibility and the working out of things according to divine purpose will ultimately blend. When the assembly is caught up everything that has been the fruit of exercise and faithfulness in the responsible course will be found eternally secured in the condition of purpose. The undivided attention and love of Christ for the assembly could never be without spiritual result. I do not doubt that through the dark ages there have been those whose hearts have been kept in the consciousness of the love of Christ, and who have proved the fidelity of His service.

If we are not gladdened as the result of the activities of the love of Christ towards us it intimates that there may be some unseemly thing with us; it raises a serious exercise.

There is that in the public profession which has been, or will be, sent away as divorced; but there is something which will not be sent away, but which will be cherished and gladdened by the love of Christ through time and to eternity. An individual appreciation of the love of Christ prepares us to appreciate His love for the assembly. We learn to take account of the whole company that stands in relation to Him as Head, and is His counterpart, His own flesh, the subject of His love and service.

Then neither the handmill nor the upper millstone are to be taken in pledge (verse 6). To put our mills into pledge would mean that we should be left without ability to grind our corn. There is plenty of corn today, even the finest of the wheat. Those who minister the word are the oxen who tread out the corn (see chapter 25: 4); they thresh wheat as Gideon did in the wine-press. But before it can become bread it has to be ground in the mill, and this is an individual exercise of vital importance. Probably the small result from much ministry can be accounted for by the mills not having been used. We must do our own grinding; the ministers of the word cannot do that for us. We have to apply our understanding to what we hear, and not be content to hear precious statements without putting them through a process by which we apprehend in detail what they mean. I am afraid that many statements which we are constantly hearing really convey very little meaning to us. We often say that we have had a good word, but do we grind the corn? If we do not it will not become life to us. A statement of Scripture is not food for me until I understand spiritually, at least in measure, what it means, and understanding does not come apart from the exercise of which grinding the corn is a figure. It would appear to have been woman's work to use the mill, for the Lord speaks of "two women grinding at the mill", which would suggest typically its subjective character, and it would also intimate that two might co-operate in such exercises with mutual help and benefit. And this is important, not only for our life but for God's pleasure and service, for if we do not use the mill we shall have no "fine flour" for oblations (Leviticus 2). In result the priests will not be fed and the service of God will go down to a low level.

To steal a brother or to sell him (verse 7) is a very serious matter; it is a capital offence, punishable by death. There is the possibility that it may be done, or there would not be legislation against it. One may use one's personal influence over a brother in such a way as to get an undue hold upon him, so that he is no longer in spiritual freedom in the inheritance. A brother might be

stolen by personal kindness which brought him unduly under influence, like Absalom kissing the people and attaching them to himself; we are told that he "stole the hearts of the men of Israel". "The thief comes not but that he may steal"; he would have the sheep for himself not for Christ. Paul warned the elders of Ephesus, where there was the greatest light, that "from among your own selves shall rise up men speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them". That would really be stealing the brethren. A heretic is one who attaches people to himself by some particular view, and thus steals them away from the unity of the faith, and sells them into bondage to something that is not of God. Men-stealers had been at work both in Galatia and at Corinth; self was their object, not Christ nor the good of the brethren. How different were the motives of Paul! "We pray to God that ye may do nothing evil; not that we may appear approved, but that ye may do what is right, and we be as reprobates" (2 Corinthians 13: 7). This is the spirit of a true servant; he does not want the brethren for himself, or his own gain, but for Christ and for the pleasure of God. Paul was willing to be regarded as worthless if what was right could be promoted in the saints.

In immediate connection with this is a three-fold "take heed" as to the plague of leprosy (verses 8, 9). Having self as an object is very likely to result in what is leprous. It is a warning against the will of the flesh coming into evidence even in the land. Priestly teaching as to this is to be heeded. Nothing of the will of the flesh is to have place, Miriam is brought in as a warning, as one who had a very distinguished place in the testimony, but in whom the flesh came out in spiritual assumption, and an unwillingness to take a subordinate place when the sovereignty of God had given the chief place to another. It was flesh in a very religious form, able to criticise the conduct even of Moses, and to claim that Jehovah had spoken to them. We may learn in this the danger of the will of the flesh coming out in speaking against servants to whom the Lord has given a special place. In principle this is speaking against Christ. Indeed Christ is in the saints, and if we thought of this we should be very careful how we speak against them. The leprosy of the Jew came out in his reproaching Christ for taking up publicans and sinners, and now the Gentile, and also in claiming to be the one God had spoken to. Miriam had to learn how dependent she was for cleansing on the intercession of the one she had spoken against.

The divine nature would lead us to respect our brother even if he is poor in Israel. If a brother comes under any obligation to us we must take care that it does not become the occasion of any arbitrary exaction. The giving of his "pledge" (verses 10, 11) is to be a perfectly free act on his part; we are only to want from him what he is prepared to render in liberty; there is to be nothing compulsory about brotherly actions in such a case.

Then if he is needy his pledge is to be returned at the going down of the sun. Our brother's comfort is to be more to us than our own interest; his upper garment would be his comfort by night, and he is not to be deprived of it. It shews the magnanimous spirit which is to govern our brotherly relations. We should not like the help we have given him by our loan to become an occasion of discomfort to him.

But some one will say, What about righteousness? Well, if your brother blesses you that is better than having his pledge or your money! And God says, "It shall be righteousness unto thee before Jehovah thy God". We are very slow to learn that righteousness is to act like God! Then, on the other hand, as to what is due to a poorer brother we are not to delay to render it (verses 14, 15) "Neither shall the sun go down upon it". Is any one crying against me to Jehovah because I have not rendered to him what is in any wise due? That will be sin upon me, a very marked contrast to the action of grace in verse 13 being righteousness to the one who performs it.

Consideration for the poor, the widow, and the stranger is a marked characteristic of this book. See verses 17 - 22. The wealth of the land is to be enjoyed in a spirit of consideration for those who are less favoured. We are to remember that we were bondmen in Egypt, and that we have been redeemed in God's love and pity from thence, and that is to have such an effect upon us that the same spirit in which God has acted towards us becomes active in us towards others.

DEUTERONOMY 25

Deuteronomy 25

The subject of judgment in any controversy is now introduced; such judgment is to be marked by righteousness. So long as we are here we are under grace, but we are also under government. The joy of the house of Jehovah, and the peace of Jerusalem, are secured by the presence there, according to Psalm 122, of "thrones for judgment, the thrones of the house of David". It would be a mistake to suppose that Israel was, or will be, better furnished with "thrones of judgment" than the saints are today.

But all must be judged now according to the principles of the kingdom — the new kind of righteousness introduced by the reign of grace. "They shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked" (verse 1). A man is "wicked" now who does not judge himself, and act in grace towards his brother. The principles of grace which God has set up in His kingdom become the standard by which everything must be judged. That which is inconsistent with the present ways of God, and the character of the dispensation, is unrighteous.

There is a tendency to become legal in our thoughts of righteousness. The man in Matthew 18 had a righteous claim, but he exacted it in such a way as to constitute himself "wicked". The Lord acts retributively in regard of anything ungracious in our spirits or ways; there is still such a thing as beating with stripes, and this for one who is "thy brother". There are three different classes of bondmen in Luke 12: 42 - 48. There is a "faithful and prudent steward" who, in result, is set over all that his lord has. There is a wicked bondman who has his portion appointed with the unbelievers. But there are others who are beaten with either many or few stripes according to their deserts. The latter represent true believers who come under the Lord's chastisement as members of His household, and that is in keeping with Deuteronomy 25. The Lord's retributive ways are very equitable; *many* stripes for one who knew his lord's will, and did not prepare himself nor do it; *few* stripes for one who knew not that will, and did ignorantly things worthy of stripes. The fact that in "the land" there may arise necessity for "judgment" and "stripes" shews that responsibility continues. That being so, there is always the possibility of wrong-doing which will, in the divine government, meet with its just deserts. "For he that does a wrong shall receive the wrong he has done, and there is no respect of persons" (Colossians 3:25).

Paul contrasts the "rod" with "love and a spirit of meekness" (1 Corinthians 4: 21). He preferred not to "use severity", but he had authority which might have to take this form. He said to the Corinthians, "If I come again I will not spare"

(2 Corinthians 13: 2, 10). He did not say exactly what he would do, nor did John as to Diotrephes, but the "rod" was there, and, in case of necessity, would be used. The brethren have not the rod of apostolic authority, but there is with them ability to judge in a way that corresponds with Deuteronomy 25: 1 - 3. If the brethren have to administer stripes it is well to receive them in the spirit of the psalmist who said, "Let the righteous smite me, it is kindness; and let him reprove me, it is an excellent oil which my head shall not refuse" (Psalm 141: 5). Any such rebuke is the Lord's, though it may be inflicted by the brethren. A sense of disapproval has sometimes to be brought home, "according to the measure" of culpability.

But "stripes", as administered by the brethren, are restricted in number; there is a point beyond which we are not to go. And the reason for this is not lest he should be killed, or have more than he deserves, but lest "thy brother become despicable in thine eyes". What is to be avoided is the effect *upon our own spirits* of undue severity; we are not to lose brotherly respect. A disobedient man is to be marked and shunned, but he is still to be admonished "as a brother" (2 Thessalonians 3: 14, 15). There is to be a brotherly spirit even in what is a righteous discipline. To withdraw, or shrink from, a disorderly brother is right, and with the object in view "that he may be ashamed of himself", but it is done for his good, and in a spirit that holds him in brotherly respect. John speaks of one seeing "his brother sinning a sin not unto death". Even his sin is to bring out the true character of righteousness and love in the brethren; they are to pray for him in view of his having life given to him. So that for one under rebuke there continues earnest desire that self-judgment and restoration should come about.

The principle of recompense runs through this chapter. If we do what is inconsistent with the principles of the kingdom we shall get stripes (Colossians 3: 25); if we engage in the patient labour of love, like the ox treading out the corn (verse 4) we shall not go unrecompensed. Every bit of true labour for the saints has its present recompense, and the one who renders it is a comfort to the brethren instead of a trial like the one who deserves stripes.

Paul uses different figures in 1 Corinthians 9 — carrying on war, planting a vineyard, herding a flock, ploughing, treading out corn, sowing — and he tells us expressly that Deuteronomy 25: 4 was written, not because God was occupied about oxen, but "altogether for our sakes". It is a divine principle that all labour is entitled to recompense from those who benefit by it. Paul had not used this right at Corinth, that he might put no hindrance in the way of the glad tidings of the Christ, but he asserted the right as an unquestionable

divine principle. In a spiritual sense there is always recompense for the ox who treads out the corn; he himself enjoys what he treads out for others.

Then Jehovah foresaw that death would come in, even in favoured Israel, and that if names were not to be blotted out from the inheritance they must be secured by one who would in unselfish love build up a house and raise up a name on behalf of the dead. It was a figure of what Christ would do for Israel, who, as being under death, could bring forth no seed for life eternal in the inheritance. The wife would represent those in Israel who, through a divine work in their souls, felt what it was to be bereft of all hope according to the flesh, death having come in to blight all prospects of the inheritance being enjoyed or maintained on the natural line. All such had the sense that grace alone could meet the case.

The one who liked not to take his brother's wife would typify that self-centred and ungracious spirit which was found in scribes and Pharisees, who thought only of themselves and their fancied righteousness, and cared nothing for the state and sorrow of Israel, and were unwilling, as well as unable, to do anything for the godly remnant who felt it. God would cover such a spirit with disgrace and infamy; this answers to the woes pronounced by the Lord upon that class of persons.

In the book of Ruth, Boaz is seen as taking Ruth "to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren and from the gate of his place" (Ruth 4: 10). This is connected, as we know, with the right of redemption, and it is typical of what has been taken up by Christ as the Kinsman-Redeemer. The kinsman nearer than Boaz, who declined to redeem lest he should mar his own inheritance, represents the legal principle that can do nothing to save the situation when death has come in. But Boaz, in the spirit of Christ, thinks of "our brother Elimelech". Israel's name would have perished if Christ had not taken up the remnant and secured a seed to inherit. The maintenance of the inheritance was hopeless on man's side; Israel nationally and responsibly was dead; there was no possibility of fruit for God, or of the inheritance being held according to God's thoughts. But Christ was not careful as to marring His own inheritance, for He was cut off and had nothing, but at all cost to Himself He exercised the right of redemption. He secured the inheritance, and brought in a generation to stand in its privileges and blessings according to God. Israel's name and house will be secured, not on the line of nature — death is on all that — but by Christ coming in as the true Kinsman, and in principle it is thus that all is secured for the saints of the assembly.

The spirit of all this is intended to influence us in our brotherly relations. Our brother's name in Israel is to be maintained even at some personal sacrifice; his house is to be built up. Even if he has come under some governmental dealing of God we are to be concerned that his name shall not be blotted out. We are not to be like the Pharisees, scribes, and doctors of the law who taught in Israel, but who had no brotherly spirit. They were not prepared to make any sacrifices for their poor, afflicted, distressed and sinful brethren suffering under the government of God. But Christ came in to do a true Kinsman's part for those who were resourceless, and who needed Him. Boaz made himself a name in Bethlehem by acting as a kinsman. This honour belongs in a superlative degree to Christ as the true Boaz, but it will surely rest in measure on those who act in the Spirit of Christ towards their brethren.

Verses 13 - 16 remind us that God Himself has balances and weights; He weighs persons (Daniel 5: 27), and actions (1 Samuel 2: 3), and spirits (Proverbs 16: 2). And He is "the God of measure" (2 Corinthians 10: 13). He looks also that His people should weigh and measure things in a "perfect and just" way. He would not have us to judge by appearances. Some matters are weightier than others, and there is no more serious symptom of moral perversion than to attach undue importance to the small while leaving aside "weightier matters" (Matthew 23: 23).

There must be with us a divine standard of moral values if days in the land are to be prolonged, and this does not admit of variation. No "divers weights" are permissible; they are not to be "a great and a small" according to circumstances. Our brethren are to have all that is due to them, and no unjust self-advantage is to have any place in our dealings with them. Thus every one is assured that his interests are carefully safe-guarded by his brethren! "We are members one of another"; then why should I deceive my brother, or wrong him in any way?: He is part of myself.

Personal feelings, either favourable or unfavourable, are very apt to lead to our weights being tampered with, and this has to be guarded against. Perfectly equitable dealings are essential to mutual confidence, and without this there can be no enjoyment of the land. Righteousness has a great place in John's epistle, and it is largely a matter of weight and measure; that is, of each receiving what is due to him.

The man who was concerned about the mote in his brother's eye, while ignoring the beam in his own, had evidently a different standard for his brother than he had for himself. He had "divers weights". The Lord calls him a hypocrite. And in this connection He says, "With what measure ye mete, it

shall be measured to you" (Matthew 7: 1 - 5); the government of God will certainly recompense any unequal or unrighteous dealing.

The chapter closes by speaking of retribution on Amalek, the first wilderness enemy of the people of God. There was peculiar audacity in an attack upon them at such a time; it was, as seen in Exodus 17, the hand of the adversary on the throne of Jah. But as referred to in Deuteronomy 25 what marked Amalek was smiting without fear of God the hindmost and feeble of the people when they were faint and weary. The flesh instigated by Satan would seek to destroy at the very outset what is of God in feebleness here. This brings out the true and pitiless character of what is opposed to God and to His people. It is to be remembered; there is to be no weakening in our souls of the sense of the deadly character of the opposition that has had to be encountered. There is to be no thought of any truce in this war, or of any terms with a relentless and unchanging foe. The power of evil which first assailed us as redeemed is ever to be in our thoughts as an enemy to be utterly destroyed. The saints are ever to hold themselves in this attitude of mind. The blotting out of the remembrance of Amalek is looked at in Exodus 17 as done by Jehovah, whose throne had been assailed, but it is viewed in Deuteronomy 25 as done by His people who had suffered. Their time of rest and full blessing will be the time when the remembrance of Amalek will be blotted out from under the heaven.

DEUTERONOMY 26

Deuteronomy 26

This is the only chapter in the book which speaks of the people as worshipping Jehovah, and it is the only chapter in which there is any priestly service Godward.

In verse 4 of this chapter the priest serves Godward in presenting the basket of first-fruits before the altar. It is not placed on the altar; the service here is not sacrificial, as so often in Leviticus; it has not to do with sin or acceptance, but it is the presentation of that which bears witness that the brethren are in the possession and enjoyment of the inheritance which God has given them. It thus throws light on the character of assembly worship which is proper to saints as in "the land".

Man after the flesh — the man that Satan can work by — is known typically as the subject of divine judgment in the destruction pronounced on Amalek at the end of the previous chapter, for Amalek represents the flesh as the vessel and tool of Satan's inveterate antagonism to what is of God. But those begotten of God come into the land as their divinely given inheritance, and as they come into possession and cultivate their lots the fruits begin to be gathered (verses 1, 2). When this comes to pass we are not to settle down as if they were given entirely for individual enjoyment, or to be shared with friends of our own selection. They are given to put us in motion towards God in the place of His selection, that common centre of service and worship for all His people where He causes His Name to dwell.

It is God's thought that all the fruit of the land should minister in the first place to assembly service. He claims priority in this matter. How can we be content, in the light of this chapter, to enjoy spiritual good in an individual or sectarian way? "The *first* of all the fruit" must be carried to "the place" that God has chosen to cause His Name to dwell there. This character of service is to mark the assembly in addition to the features we have considered in looking at chapters 12, 14, 15, 16. In this way continued freshness in the service and worship of the assembly is maintained,

so that it truly ministers to the pleasure of God. According to the mind of God, full provision was made for the worship of the assembly to be maintained in living freshness right through its history from Pentecost to the rapture. This would be secured by the *first* of the fruits of the land being continually presented as fresh crops matured through God's blessing and the spiritual diligence of His saints in the land. It suggests that fresh elements will be

continually forthcoming to impart their peculiar grace and value to the worship of the assembly.

How different is this from the formal order of the religious world, or from the routine into which we are all apt to fall! When the headship of Christ and the presence of the Spirit were lost sight of, men cast the public service of God into fixed liturgical moulds to preserve order, but there is no spiritual freshness in that. However many first-fruits may have been given there is no room for them; the service still retains the form into which men cast it centuries ago! The truth of God's assembly and its service, as set forth typically in this scripture, sets free from all such human restrictions upon spiritual liberty in the service of God. They are indeed a trespass upon His rights, as well as a restraint upon the affections of His people.

"The first of the fruits" would suggest a new spiritual acquisition that has not been known in the soul in quite the same way before. It has not only been in the purpose of God to give it to us, but we have now got it, by His favour, in our hearts. It is in our affections and intelligence in such a way that we can bring it to His assembly for His pleasure, and we can speak to Him about it in the fresh joy of it, and not as something we have had in store a long time. We can speak, too, of the sovereign love that has wrought so wondrously to secure it to us, and to secure us for it. The instruction here is for each individual, but it is to be carried out by all, so that a coming to one centre the service and worship has united assembly character. The spiritual accessions of the individual lead him in the first place, according to this scripture, to the assembly as a contributor to its worship and joy.

"I profess this day unto Jehovah thy God, that I am come unto the land that Jehovah swore unto our fathers to give us". The Yea and Amen of every promise is in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and nothing can be more acceptable to God than that we should be able to profess to Him that we have come into this "good land". It is all His gift, and He gets the glory of it "by us" (2 Corinthians 1: 20); He claims the "first" of its fruit for His own delight, so that we may know how pleased He is that we have come into what was in His heart for us. Our first acquisition of its fruit qualifies us to approach Him with joy as those who can say, "For all is of thee, and of that which is from thy hand have we given thee" (1 Chronicles 29: 14). What a blessed thought this gives of the service of God in His assembly! No false humility that thinks to please God by asserting its own unworthiness and emptiness. No efforts to bring what we have not got. But the simplicity of hearts that have come, by divine grace and power, into that which God has given in Christ, and can "profess" this to Him in the consciousness of its reality. We can bring "fruits" of

spiritual exercise in deep joy, as owning that it is God's due to have the first since He has given all. It is a wondrous thought that the blessed God should find His happiness in seeing us happy before Him in conscious possession of what His love has given. And the divine thought is that all should be intensified by being brought and presented before His altar in that common centre of which His assembly is the antitype.

Then what is to be said before Jehovah is such as He will delight to hear. "A perishing Aramaean was my father". This does not go back to Abraham or Isaac, but to Jacob. Abraham would remind us of the sovereignty of divine purpose and calling. Isaac would, in figure, express the resurrection power by which God will give effect to His purpose. But in Jacob and his sons we see men in danger of perishing, taken up in grace by God, protected, cared for, disciplined, exercised under oppression, but delivered from the world, and brought into a rich land of purposed and promised blessing. There is nothing said here of the exercises of the wilderness. In chapter 8: 2 - 6 wilderness leadings and experiences are the great subject, but the exercises dwelt upon here are such as bring us into the knowledge of the greatness of God's saving power, His complete deliverance in bringing us out and bringing us in.

There is a wondrous history behind the fact that saints are found together in God's assembly, and it is not to be out of mind. But it is viewed from the standpoint of present blessedness in "a land flowing with milk and honey". It is what God has done in grace and faithfulness for "sons of Jacob". In Ephesians 1 our history is traced back to eternal purpose in Christ, and God's resurrection power in Christ is seen as towards us for the effectuation of His purpose. But in Ephesians 2 our history goes back to how we once walked, and what we were by nature, and we see what the work and grace of God has effected for such. This latter is in correspondence with the worshipper's utterance in Deuteronomy 26. From the low depth of "perishing" to the height of blessing in the land all has been of God. "Ye are saved by grace". We often delight to sing together:

"Father, Thy sovereign love has sought
Captives to sin, gone far from Thee;
The work that Thine own Son hath wrought
Has brought us back in peace and free",

This gives its own peculiar note to Deuteronomic worship; and there cannot be joy in all the good that God has given to us apart from the recognition and consciousness of how all has been brought about by grace and sovereign love. It is good to retrace before God His spiritual dealings; He has completely

delivered us, and brought us to "a land flowing with milk and honey". Nothing is more nourishing than milk; it speaks of that which ministers to growth, and of the love in which Christ nourishes the assembly. While honey would suggest the activity of divine love in the saints promoting mutual and collective labour to secure what is sweet and refreshing so that it may be available for all. And all contributes, as is typically set before us here, to the worship and joy of the assembly. Christ as our blessed Instructor would impress our hearts with all this as proper to "the land".

Then "the year of tithing", like the bringing of the basket of first-fruits, is an occasion of speaking before Jehovah, the only two instances of this in the book. The one is saying before God what *He* has done for us, and the other is saying what *we* have done according to His commandment. It is as much His will that we should say the one as the other, and the one is as essential to our true happiness and blessing as the other. The former is said when the first-fruits of the land are gathered, and the latter is said at the end of the third year. So that the one represents an early, and the other a more mature, experience in the land. After three years' occupation of the land, and acquisition of its wealth, a special "year of tithing", peculiarly imbued with a spirit of grace, can be observed. The first of the fruits are for God in His assembly, but His complete thought according to this chapter is not realised until His people become expressive of Himself in activities of grace "to the Levite, and to the stranger, to the fatherless,

and to the widow". He designs that our "gates" shall be so filled with plenty that there is an abundant supply to be administered unselfishly according to His good pleasure. We think from the very first of what *He* has given, and bring the fruit of it to Him in a spirit of worship. Then after three years' experience of His bounty we become qualified to give in a way and spirit that is the fruit of His giving, and that corresponds with it.

This is the climax of the instruction as to "the land". Not only is God known and responded to as the Giver, but His sons, enriched by matured experience of His bounty, become givers also. They are formed in His blessed nature, and express it in gracious ways which are the reflex of His own. This requires a certain spiritual development; it is hardly what Paul would look to find in those whom he calls babes; it is a privilege for which we are fitted by being established and enriched in the land. There is no higher point of experience contemplated in this book; it is the crown and climax of the work of grace — the character of the blessed God reproduced in His children according to Ephesians 5: 1; 1 John 4:7,8; 1 John 4:11,12.

As walking in love, in deed and in truth, we can say before God that we are doing so; He loves that we should be able to say it. It is, in a typical form, what John says; "Children, let us not love with word, nor with tongue, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we shall know that we are of the truth, and shall persuade our hearts before him — that if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness towards God, and whatsoever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments, and practise the things which are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3: 18 - 22). We not only walk in love, according to God's commandments, but we can *say* before Him that we are doing so, and count upon Him for blessing. "I have brought ... and also have given I have done according to all that thou hast commanded me. Look down from thy holy habitation, from the heavens, and bless thy people Israel, and the land that thou hast given us as thou didst swear unto our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey". This is blessing conditional upon the obedience of love.

Nothing is to be allowed to interfere with this gracious activity; neither sorrow, nor uncleanness, nor any claim of the dead (verse 14). The mention of such things shews that this has its application at the present time, while there is the possibility of forgetfulness, sorrow, or uncleanness interfering with the unselfish activities of grace. It is the *same kind* of administration as will mark the holy city when she comes down out of the heaven to bring the glory of God into the world where every kind of need has been. Those who are seen worshipping within the heavenly courts in Revelation 4, Revelation 5 come out in divine administration in Revelation 21. This is in keeping with what we see in type in Deuteronomy 26, but the latter scripture typifies it as carried out, in the spirit of it, before the day of manifested glory. It is while the effects of sorrow, uncleanness, or death are yet present, and may have an effect in diminishing the activities of grace, that the saints, as answering to this beautiful scripture, are privileged to say before God that they have not done so.

The Lord had deep sorrows, but His ministry of grace went on in undiminished fulness; no circumstance of sorrow ever checked its outflow. He felt His rejection by the cities where His mighty works had been done, but His heart still found expression in the words, "Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11). Passing on as One whom the people would have stoned He saw a man blind from his birth, and wrought the works of God by giving him sight (John 8: 59; John 9: 1). Amid the unfathomable sorrows of the cross He answered the petition of the penitent

thief by saying, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise". He allowed nothing to diminish the activities of grace.

"A holy priesthood" ministers to God, and "a kingly priesthood" sets forth to men His excellencies as known in grace. He secures worshippers for Himself, and then He constitutes them administrators of His gracious bounty. In the sphere where God's will operates He would not have any need unsatisfied. "That they may eat in thy gates, and be filled". But He does this mediately through His people; they reflect His glory as known in grace.

Nothing could be more beautiful than the closing section of this chapter, "Thou hast this day accepted Jehovah to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his ordinances, and to hearken unto his voice; and Jehovah hath accepted thee this day to be a people of possession to him, as he hath told thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments, so that he should make thee high above all the nations which he hath made, in praise and in name and in honour; and that thou shouldest be a holy people to Jehovah thy God, as he hath said" (verses 17 - 19).

If when they went after Him in the wilderness it was the time of espousals (Jeremiah 2: 2), surely the scripture before us would indicate the consummation of the marriage bond between Jehovah and His people which is so often referred to by the prophets. "Thou hast this day accepted Jehovah to be thy God ... and Jehovah hath accepted thee this day to be a people of possession to him". It is the blessed place of Israel as married to Jehovah, to be fully realised in that coming day when the words of Isaiah 62 shall be fulfilled: "Thou shalt no more be termed, Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed, Desolate; but thou shalt be called, My delight is in her, and thy land, Married, for Jehovah delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, shall thy sons marry thee; and with the joy of the bridegroom over the bride shall thy God rejoice over thee". This is for Israel the consummation of what love has purposed. A people marked by such features as we have been considering in this book are "a people of possession" to God. Saints of the assembly can take it all up spiritually as the instruction of Christ to us, and thus in a higher and more blessed way than Israel ever will. Deuteronomy is, for us, a book of heavenly instruction.

DEUTERONOMY 27

Deuteronomy 27

"The elders of Israel" are here associated with Moses in commanding the people; they identified themselves with what was enjoined by God. The elders would represent the intelligent responsibility of the people, and it was here seen as in full accord with Moses. Paul's address to the Ephesian elders reminded them of his own faithful ministry, with a view to their being thoroughly identified with it, so that the "inheritance among all the sanctified" might be held according to God. It is this which is in view, typically, in Deuteronomy 27.

Both the first tables of the covenant, which Moses broke, and the second which were afterwards hewn by him, were written with the finger of God. But, as having passed over Jordan, *the people* were to set up "great stones", and to "write upon them all the words of this law". The blessedness of the will of God concerning His people as in the land had been presented to them in the ministry of Moses. Now on their part, having come into the land, *they* had to write it on "great stones" suggestive of their giving expression to it in a stable and permanent way.

Historically this was carried out immediately after the destruction of Ai (Joshua 8: 32). Typically it would intimate that the saints understand the will of the Lord, and are able to give expression to it intelligently. It is written very plainly in Scripture, but one of our first exercises as "over the Jordan" is to write it "very plainly" as giving intelligent and intelligible expression to it. Only as having put on the new man could we do so, but the new man is "renewed into full knowledge according to the image of him that has created him" (Colossians 3: 10), and "according to God is created in truthful righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4: 24). The stable and imperishable character of the new man as a divine creation is set forth, I believe, in the "great stones". There is no looking to the flesh for anything; that has been cut off, typically, in circumcision. We look only to that which is created "according to God" as able to carry "very plainly" what is in His will for His people.

Both Colossians and Ephesians address the saints as having put off the old man, and having put on the new. As having done it, there is material suitable to carry in permanent expression all that is in the will of God. The prayer of Epaphras for his beloved Colossian brethren was that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4: 12), and if we link with this Paul's prayer for them in Colossians 1: 9 - 11 we shall get a good

idea of a company of saints who, as over Jordan, can bring into expression "very plainly" God's pleasure regarding His people.

The stones being plastered is suggestive of the fact that in "one new man" a collective idea comes in; the saints are not in view separately, but as set together to form one great and legible expression of the will of God. In the "one new man" expression can be given very plainly to the spiritual force of "all the words" that have come before us in this book.

It might be well to ask how much of the words of the Deuteronomic law have we written "very plainly"? Some part of that great tablet on which "all the words" are to be written today is, so to speak, under our hand. Are we concerned that the will of God should come definitely and unmistakably into expression in us, and in our relations with His people? It was enjoined that the king should "write for himself a copy of this law", but we do not know that any king of Israel ever did it. In Josiah's time "Hilkijah the priest found the book of the law of Jehovah by Moses" (2 Chronicles 34: 14), and it was quite new to the king. It was probably the original copy written by, Moses. The kings had not written it for themselves, and hence their grievous failures. But we, like them, may fail to write the law. We have to write it by becoming ourselves the expression of what is in God's mind concerning His people; it is to be seen in us in a practical and legible way. Then we can take up happily our place of acceptance with God in offering burnt offerings, and we can also take up happy relations with our brethren in sacrificing peace-offerings, and eating together with joy before God.

It is a beautiful touch of divine grace that on mount Ebal, where the curse was to be put, according to chapter 11: 29, we see the great stones, the altar, burnt-offerings, peace-offerings, and eating and rejoicing before Jehovah. It indicates clearly that conditions have come in which are exempt, from curse. Viewed as in the flesh "the handwriting in ordinances ... stood out against us", and "was contrary to us". But as such it has been "effaced" — a legal term used for annulling a decree of law (see Colossians 2: 14 margin). But we should not like to think of the Deuteronomic law, expressing the good pleasure of God for His people as in the land, being "effaced"; on the contrary it is to be written "very plainly" by a people who delight in it, and love to give It abiding expression. Many believers are so accustomed to think of the law in its condemning relation to man as in the flesh that they do not regard it sufficiently as the expression of God's will, in answering to which His people can be before Him in liberty and joy for His pleasure. The answer in Israel was only in type; the spiritual reality of it awaited new covenant conditions, which have not yet, for them, come to pass. But, typically, we see in Deuteronomy

27 a people risen with Christ, and quickened together with Him, and able to set up all that is in God's will for such a people, as having intelligently apprehended it, and being identified with it in their affections. They can give permanent expression to it "very plainly".

We may remark at this point that, in Joshua 8: 30 - 35, where we read how Joshua carried out what is here enjoined, we find an added feature of the greatest spiritual importance. "And all Israel, and their elders, and their officers and judges, stood on this side and on that side of the ark before the priests the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of Jehovah". They all stood, whether towards mount Gerizim or mount Ebal, "on this side and on that side of the ark". They were, typically, identified with Christ in the most blessed way as risen and quickened together with Him. It is only as being so that we can truly carry out Deuteronomy 27. As having passed over the Jordan we are identified with a risen Christ, who has rendered null the power of death that we might be for the pleasure of God as risen with Him.

The "altar of stones" — whole stones on which no iron tool was to be lifted — indicates how such a people regard their whole position and blessing as having been secured without any works of theirs, without a touch of the strength of nature, on the ground of the death of Christ. We are not viewed here as needing to bring sin-offerings or trespass-offerings, but as in conscious acceptance, and in the communion and satisfaction of what has been effected in the death of Christ.

In verses 9, 10 it is no longer Moses and the elders who speak, but "Moses and the priests, the Levites", The elders giving commandment in conjunction with Moses indicate that the people, as identified with their elders, are now intelligently committed to the responsibility of carrying out what was enjoined. But *the priests* speaking along with Moses typifies priestly concern that those who have definitely taken the place of being the people of God should hearken to His voice and do His commandments. Such a concern was found in Paul and Epaphras about the Colossians. See Colossians 1:3; Colossians 1:9-11; Colossians 2: 1; Colossians 4: 12. The elders without the priests will not secure the abiding pleasure of God in His people. To take things up responsibly without prayerful priestly exercises will only result in failure. The prayers of Paul and Epaphras for Gentile believers are intended to impress us with the urgent necessity that we should "persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4: 2). Only thus can the will of God be secured and maintained in His people.

Then Moses speaks alone from verse 11 onwards, and the instruction is as to the government of God. That government involves curse upon what is contrary

to His will as surely as it secures blessing where there is obedience to Him. The fact that six tribes stand to bless and six to curse shews that both sides are to be held in even balance amongst God's people. It was so with the Lord Jesus. He loved righteousness, but He also hated lawlessness, and on account of this He was anointed with the oil of gladness above His companions. He has companions who also, like Him, love righteousness and hate lawlessness, and true gladness is found on this line.

God will surely bless His people on condition of obedience, but He will ever disapprove in the strongest way of what is contrary to His will. What is abhorrent to God should be also abhorrent to His people. If we do not say Amen to His curses we shall not be morally qualified to say Amen to His blessings. It is a mistake to suppose that the principle of curse has no place in Christianity, and it leads to laxity. Perhaps the most solemn curse in Scripture is a peculiarly Christian curse. "If any one love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema Maran-atha" (1 Corinthians 16: 22). And Hebrews 6 speaks not only of blessing, but of being "nigh to a curse". If I am bringing forth thorns and briars — things which are a source of trial and suffering to the people of God — I am "nigh to a curse".

Blessing and curse are everywhere in Scripture, in the New Testament as well as the Old. We get them, in principle, in such scriptures as, "For if ye live according to flesh, ye are about to die; but if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8: 13). "For he that sows to his own flesh, shall reap corruption from the flesh; but he that sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit shall reap eternal life" (Galatians 6: 8). These are unchanging principles in the government of God. The Lord's woes are to be taken account of as well as His beatitudes.

In "the land" the curses were to be uttered with a loud voice, and twelve times it is said, "And all the people shall say, Amen". God would have all His people in full accord with Himself in detesting and repudiating everything that is contrary to His mind, as well as in communion with the altar in the joy of obedience and blessing. Indeed it is essential to our communion with God and with one another that we should reprobate everything that is displeasing to Him.

It has often been observed that the blessings upon mount Gerizim are not given. Israel under divine government as in the flesh never did, nor could, on that ground inherit blessing, and no doubt the Spirit of God in Moses, who was about to declare prophetically that the curse would come upon them, had this in mind when He gave the curses, but kept silent as to the blessings. But the fact that the great stones, and the altar, and the burnt-offerings and peace-

offerings were on mount Ebal declared plainly that where disobedience and curse had been God would secure through the death of Christ, and by His working in His people, a full answer to all that was in His mind concerning them. But this was as yet among the hidden things which belonged to God. Publicly and dispensationally He was dealing with a people in the flesh, and on that line His blessing could not be secured. But He gave at the same time an intimation of what was in His mind, which we can read clearly now that His thoughts have been revealed. And the instruction is most helpful to those who are now spiritually in the position over Jordan where they were typically when they came to Ebal and Gerizim. As on the principle of works of law, a people in the flesh, they were under curse, as all are who are on the ground of their own works for righteousness before God. See Galatians 3: 10. We must distinguish between what they were in themselves and what happened to them as typical of what is true now on a new ground and in a spiritual way.

DEUTERONOMY 28

Deuteronomy 28

The previous chapter refers to what was to be done at mount Ebal and mount Gerizim after the people had passed over Jordan. But the chapter now before us contains further speaking of Moses in the land of Moab as to the government of God. He continues to present in sharp contrast the blessings which will attend obedience and the curses which will follow disobedience. Christ as our divine Instructor would call our attention to these things in a very definite way.

Blessing in the city (verse 3) has typical reference to our enjoyment of those common and mutual interests which we have as "fellow-citizens of the saints". As walking by the Spirit in obedience our relations with our fellow-citizens will be happy. There will be no discord, and the interests which we are all set to promote will prosper under the good hand of our God, so that we shall realise divine favour in our "city" conditions. In Ephesians 2: 19 - 22 our "city" relations are mentioned first; then that we are of the household of God; then that all the building increases to a holy temple in the Lord; and, finally, that we are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.

Then from "the city" we go to "the field", and are blessed there. The "field" is the place of labour, where ploughing, sowing, planting, watering, reaping are carried on; it is where "the labourer awaits the precious fruit of the earth, having patience for it until it receive the early and the latter rain" (James 5: 7). It is where "The husbandman must labour before partaking of the fruits" (2 Timothy 2: 6), and where "each shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1 Corinthians 3: 8). In "the field" we have ever to remember that God is "the giver of the increase", and therefore to labour without His blessing is to labour fruitlessly. Continued labour is needed if success is to attend operations in the field, but the blessing of God is the supreme factor, and to secure this the labourer must ever be in that spirit of obedience which says, "What shall I do, Lord?"

Verse 4 pledges every kind of increase, so that where spiritual conditions are maintained it is right to confidently expect spiritual increase. Not that this could be measured by mere increase of numbers — though we would love to see this in a godly way — but by spiritual fruitfulness which yields increasing pleasure to God. Paul tells us that all the body, as ministered to from the Head, "increases with the increase of God". This is true blessing. Not an outward increase which results — as it may be feared is sometimes the case

— in there being less for God than there was before. An increase which lowers the spiritual tone of things is to be deprecated rather than desired.

The “basket” and the “kneading-trough” (verse 5) have to do with the food supply. It is good to come across saints who have a full basket brought back from the field! Such have always something newly gathered up; we do not hear them complaining that there is no food. Then the “kneading-trough” indicates one phase of the diligence by which corn is made available as bread. It is, in its place, as important as the use of the mill, to which our attention was called in chapter 24: 6. All the operations that result in the corn becoming bread are necessary; they represent spiritual exercises that have to be taken up. The first mention of “kneading” in Scripture is when Abraham said to Sarah, “Knead quickly three seahs of wheaten flour, and make cakes” (Genesis 18: 6). It would suggest the putting of things into definite shape, so that they become available in a suitable form for intelligent appropriation. Many try to live on isolated texts which comfort them, but this rarely results in growth. Edification is brought about by the truth being apprehended in a definite way. Paul exhorted Timothy to “Have an outline of sound words, which words thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1: 13). He was to hold the “sound words” in a definite form. To be blessed in the ability to conceive of what relates to Christ, so that it is before our minds in a definite shape, and can be set before others so as to be apprehended by them, is a distinct mark of divine favour.

Then whether “coming in” for the enjoyment of privilege, or “going out” in the mission here (John 20: 17, 21) how good to move in spiritual liberty, and to be blessed in both! But time would fail to speak of the detail of these blessings. They are summed up in being established unto Jehovah a holy people, so that all see that the Name of Jehovah is called upon His saints (verses 9, 10).

The blessings attached to walking in God’s ways are rich and manifold, but those who forsake Him will assuredly be pursued and overtaken governmentally by the curses. We do not need to dwell upon them in detail. The literal accomplishment of all that is written here upon disobedient Israel is a terrible witness that the government of God cannot be trifled with. “God is not mocked; for whatever a man shall sow, that also shall he reap”. That is as solemnly true for us as it was for Israel.

But the thoughts of God in connection with His people are very blessed, and most attractive to every heart that loves Him. To be established to Himself a holy people (verse 9), to have His Name called upon us (verse 10), to serve Him with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything (verse 47)! Such are His thoughts and as we are found in

correspondence with them His government secures to us every blessing. It ensures that we shall be great gainers by affectionate obedience. Faith rejoices in the government of God because it is ever favourable to those who walk rightly. Even eternal life, as well as being the gift of God, is secured for present enjoyment on the line of His government, for it is written, "He that sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit shall reap eternal life" (Galatians 6: 8).

DEUTERONOMY 29

Deuteronomy 29

The covenant as made in the land of Moab is additional to the covenant made in Horeb. See chapter 28: 69. And even that first covenant was based upon what the people had previously known of God. See Exodus 19: 4, 5. God does not introduce the thought of a covenant without first making Himself known in grace and delivering power so that His covenant proposals may be attractive and acceptable. There is a bond of covenant character which is connected with our first knowledge of God in grace. The covenant in Horeb is said to have been made "in the day of my taking them by the hand, to lead them out of the land of Egypt" (Jeremiah 31: 32). He had no other thought from the outset than that we should be for Him to be His own possession. And He looked that, as knowing Him in grace, we should readily commit ourselves to His covenant. The yielding ourselves to God (Romans 6), and the being "to another, who has been raised up from among the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God" (Romans 7) would answer to the covenant as made in Horeb. What *we* can say and do under grace, as seen in Romans 6, signifies definite committal to God.

In writing to the saints in Rome Paul assumes that they were on this ground.

Then after forty years of proving how faithful God had been in relation to wilderness necessities and exercises, and after proving that in His strength they could smite Sihon and Og, He proposed to make another covenant in the land of Moab which should have immediately in view their entering into the land. And Moses, in this chapter, recalls the whole history — what He did in Egypt, what He had done forty years in the wilderness, and what He had enabled His people to do to Sihon and Og (verses 1 - 9). It was not an *unknown* God who was proposing that they should enter into His covenant. His wilderness wonders were "that ye might know that I am Jehovah your God" (verse 6). The covenant would be of no value to Him unless it were intelligently entered into by a people who have learned to know and love Him. All that He has permitted us to see and experience before we reached Moab is brought to bear upon us to influence us powerfully to enter into this new and blessed bond.

It is quite possible that all these things may have been seen without being really understood. It was so with Israel. "But Jehovah hath not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, to this day" (verse 4). It had all been before their eyes, and yet they had not seen it in any true sense, so as to be rightly affected by it. How often is this the case! But even if it has

been so with us in the past this need not continue. There is here a call to all Israel as standing "this day all of you before Jehovah your God" (verses 1, 10). There is another opportunity — another day in which it is possible to definitely enter into the covenant.

The covenant made in Moab has its anti-type in the dedication for which Paul appeals so powerfully in Romans 12: 1, 2. The presentation of our bodies a living sacrifice,

holy, acceptable to God, our intelligent service, is essential as preparatory to our entering into all that is in the will of God. "The good and acceptable and perfect will of God" would include all that is brought out in Colossians and Ephesians. This covenant is made in Moab, but it is designed to qualify us for the possession and enjoyment of "the land". If we have not yet taken it up the blessed God would set us before Him "this day" that we may do so. He would appeal to us in regard of all that in which He has made Himself known to us. Whatever in the past has been the witness of His grace and His faithfulness is brought together by our blessed Instructor as powerful leverage to move our hearts to the definite entering into this covenant. It is, to us, a direct appeal of Christ, in view of our affectionately and intelligently entering into all that divine love has purposed for us.

The book of Deuteronomy supposes that a certain point in soul-history has been reached, and that there have been past experiences of God's actings for us of which He can remind us. And all are made the ground of an appeal on His part that we should keep the words of this Deuteronomic covenant, and do them, that we may prosper in all that we do (verse 9). "That thou mayest enter into the covenant of Jehovah thy God, and into his oath, which Jehovah thy God maketh with thee this day; that he may establish thee this day for a people unto himself, and that he may be to thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (verses 12, 13); God loves to verify to His people all that is in His mind for them, and He would have us to be definitely in that spirit of covenant dedication in which it can all be taken up.

And this is for *all* the people of God to take up. This is strikingly set forth in the words: "Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath, but with him that standeth here with us this day before Jehovah our God, and with him that is not here with us this day" (verses 14, 15). If any of the people of God, for any reason, are not present on this day of dedication — and it must be sorrowfully admitted that they are not *all* present — they, nevertheless, stand committed to the holy obligation of it. No saint is entitled to say that he is exempted from taking up Romans 12: 1, 2. Through worldliness, or

allowance of the flesh in some form, he may not really, in a practical sense, be present to dedicate himself to God, but the Lord Jesus will not leave him free from the obligation to do so.

The taking up of the covenant, and being true to it, are imperative if we are to be preserved from turning away to what has idolatrous elements in it. That is "a root that beareth gall and wormwood" (verse 18). Satan throws a glamour of imagined sweetness over what is idolatrous; he presents it as agreeable liberty, something to be desired. But getting away from God ever yields bitterness and defilement (see Hebrews 12: 15), and it is assuredly followed governmentally by the curse. Blessed as the covenant is for those who loyally take it up, there are, without question, what this scripture speaks of as "the curses of the covenant". One cannot doubt that Christendom as a whole has turned away from God, has forsaken His covenant and become idolatrous, and is at the present time far from the land of divine purpose. May we take these things seriously to heart! They have most surely a solemn voice for us.

Thank God, there are "hidden things" which belong to Him (verse 29). He has in reserve thoughts of recovery, even when all blessing has been forfeited by disobedience and departure. Israel will yet prove this, and saints of the assembly have proved it already in a remarkable way. Indeed it is on the line of the hidden things which belong to God that, after all the failure here and its governmental consequences, the saints will all come to glory, and be conformed to the image His Son. He will effectuate His eternal purpose in Christ in spite of all that has come out in the responsible history here.

God's purpose and promise and oath *must* ultimately be carried out, and hence if His people turn away and come under His curse, it becomes necessary for Him, in His immutable faithfulness, to follow them with such workings in their hearts that His word once more gets place and power with them. It is thus that Israel will be recovered in the last days. And it is on this principle that saints of the assembly are being now brought back, after long centuries of departure, to that state of heart which truly cherishes, and is set to be in accord with, the precious thoughts of God regarding His people, and the vast and wealthy inheritance which He has given them in Christ. This is largely the subject of the next chapter. It is an abiding principle that we are to be governed by what is revealed (verse 29); we are to go on with it in diligent exercise of heart. But everything that is for the pleasure of God is wrought by Himself. "For of him, and through him, and for him are all things; to him be glory for ever. Amen". It will come to that ultimately; all that abides for God's pleasure will be seen to be the fruit of His work.

DEUTERONOMY 30

Deuteronomy 30

This chapter is of great importance, for it speaks of recovery after all blessing has been forfeited through departure from God, and it shews how the commandments of this book can be returned to after they have been departed from. The people are seen here as having come under the curse, driven from the land and scattered among the nations. This corresponds with the present state of things in the Christian profession. There has been gross departure from what God set up at the beginning, and the mass of those who profess to be His people are scattered; they are not in the enjoyment of the spiritual and heavenly portion of the saints in light. But God is moving in the affections of His people to bring about recovery.

It is noticeable how frequently *the heart* is mentioned in this chapter; three times we get the words, "with all thy heart and with all thy soul", and three times in it we read of loving Jehovah. It is a chapter for the affections; departure began there, and recovery begins there. Conscience is a restraint, but it does not supply motive. "I will arise and go to my father", is a heart movement.

It is of God's favour and mercy when things are taken to heart, and the spirit of obedience revives in heart and soul, so that there is return to Him (verses 1, 2). We then find — just as Israel will find when their heart turns to the Lord — that God has never departed from what He began with; He has not given up one of His precious thoughts. The purpose of His love, and the calling of His people, are just the same as at the beginning. Christ has not left His first love, and His thoughts of the assembly are unchanged and undiminished. When we are brought back to God and to Christ we appreciate the covenant and the inheritance, and God is before us in all the wealth of His imperishable thoughts.

The result of this is a turning of captivity, and gathering (verses 3, 4). If God's thoughts are to have place in a practical way there must be *gathering* of His people in spiritual liberty. His thoughts cannot take form where human arrangements and order hold His people in captivity. Nor can they take form in isolated individuals. The result of returning to God is that His people are gathered. This is a distinctive feature of the present time, and there is nothing which Satan has more sought to hinder by positive opposition, by imitation, and by sowing discord. But gathering goes on because God is doing it, and He is doing it in view of the inheritance being enjoyed collectively in "the land". One loves to think of the saints being gathered from many different points of

scattering by Divine grace and power! Even if only two or three are gathered it is a testimony of recovering grace and power on God's part which is intended to affect all His people. The way is open at the present time to return to God, and to the Lord Jesus, and to the truth of the assembly; we may return with our whole heart and soul to all that we have been considering as typically presented in Deuteronomy. Then our faithful and gracious God will turn our captivity, and have compassion upon us, and will gather us.

Loving Jehovah with all the heart and with all the soul is the result of his circumcising the heart (verse 6). How good it is when God frees the heart from fleshly desires and hopes, so that it may be wholly set upon Himself! This is truly the way of life. If He will do this for Israel we may be sure that He will not do less for those who in the present time return to Him. He will in a coming day put the heart of Israel through deep exercise with regard to the death of Christ. Isaiah 53; Zechariah 12: 10 - 13: 2; Ezekiel 36: 24 - 32 are amongst the scriptures which shew this. And if we are circumcised in heart and spirit — Romans 2: 28, 29; Colossians 2: 11; Philippians 3: 3 — it is by the import of the death of Christ being brought home to us. There is "the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of the Christ". To those truly circumcised the flesh ceases to be of any account, the whole body of it is put off, there is an end of confidence in it. Every phase of departure has been the result of allowing the flesh a place in some way; there are the seeds in our flesh of every corruption that has ever come in. But if the sharp knife of the death of Christ is applied by God to our hearts its effect is to cut off, as regards our affections and our confidence, that which has been the root and source of all departure.

We can only really accept the cutting off of the flesh when we apprehend that God has brought in and secured everything that is for His pleasure in Christ, with a view to it being also secured in those who are Christ's and have His Spirit. The commandments of Deuteronomy would be "too wonderful" for us (verse 11) if God did not connect it all in our hearts with Christ. Indeed the whole book would be spiritually meaningless if we left Christ out. Nothing could more plainly prove the spiritual intent of this book than verses 11 - 14 of this chapter. It is all to come, by God's favour, into the mouth and heart as a "word of faith" concerning Christ. See Romans 10: 6 - 10.

If with heart and soul we turn to God we shall find that the commandment is "not too wonderful" for us, neither is it far off. It is accessible even to the youngest or feeblest. We are not required to do impossible things. The period of divine blessing in which we live began by the establishment of every thought and promise of God in Christ as a risen and glorified Man, and by the

saints being firmly attached to Him in the power of a divine anointing. Recovery is brought about as we return to this. If our hearts are moved to do so we can return to that which was from the beginning.

“For the word is very near to thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it”. Paul has told us by the Spirit that this word refers to Christ. It was He who came down from heaven to bring God’s will in completeness and perfection near to men. It was He who went into death that what was in God’s will for us might be established in Himself as risen from the dead, and that we might be linked with it in a divine way by faith and as having the Spirit. To confess with the mouth Jesus as Lord, and to believe in the heart that God has raised Him from among the dead is the way of salvation and righteousness, but it is also the way of recovery. So that every true believer has in his mouth and in his heart that which would suffice, if fully followed up, to effect his complete recovery to the pleasure of God. For spiritual recovery two things alone are essential: that Jesus should be confessed as Lord, and that God should be known as having raised Him from among the dead. These two things would suffice to recover us from all departure, and to bring us back to all that is in the commandment of God. It may be said that every believer has these two things in his mouth and in his heart. That is true, and therefore he has in his mouth and heart that in which lies the whole power of divine recovery. He does not require any far-fetched help, or any extraordinary ministry; he has within himself, by the favour of God, sufficient to bring about the recovery that is possible in the last days.

The recognition of the Lordship of Jesus, involving subjection to Him, and the confession publicly of His rights, is the way of recovery from all that is lawless and displeasing to God. Then the faith that God has raised Him from among the dead brings into the heart the light of what subsists in resurrection for God’s pleasure. Paul’s word to Timothy in view of the last days was, “Remember Jesus Christ raised from among the dead”. This does not mean remembering the fact of His resurrection, but remembering Him as risen; He is in the condition of resurrection. What stops short of resurrection — however commendable it may be in the eyes of men — stops short of divine pleasure. Israel will be recovered when they see that the sure mercies of David are secured in their long-rejected Messiah as raised from the dead. And recovery for us lies in the heart-apprehension of Christ as risen, so that in spirit and heart we turn from the scene of failure, and from the man who has caused it all, to the faith of what is purely of God in Christ.

The book of Deuteronomy can only be taken up in the light of Christ as risen. Neither the covenant, nor the inheritance in the land, nor anything that is

commanded, can be understood or entered into save as it is seen bound up with Him. There will be no outward restoration of things in the Christian profession; things there will go from bad to worse; but it is open to God's people who take things to heart to return to Him, and to the abiding reality of what He has secured for His pleasure in Christ risen. We can, through infinite grace, come back to the divine thoughts in their unchangeable character, but we hold them all in our affections in relation to Christ. Then every commandment of God gets its place in the heart, and obedience becomes a delight. He will not fail to make it manifest that His blessing is upon His people who have in heart and soul turned to Him (verses 9,10). For they will honour every part of His will; they will find it all to be practicable, and that it is still possible to possess and enjoy the inheritance according to His pleasure. Indeed as divinely recovered we may confidently look for more spiritual good than has ever been known in the church since the days of the apostles.

The word "in thy mouth" implies public confession (Romans 10: 9). Things are not to be held merely in a private way, but one is to be committed to them in public confession. A confessor of Jesus as Lord stands publicly apart from the world that refuses to acknowledge His rights. It was in this way that believers were marked off at the beginning from Judaism and from the heathen world. And it marks off in the last days the faithful ones from all that is unrighteous in the Christian profession. "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2: 19). If I confess Jesus as Lord I cannot go on publicly with what is lawless and insubordinate; that confession involves separation from what is contrary to His commandments; it involves that everything must be taken up now on the principle of obedience. Our associations are now to be "with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2: 22). The mouth that confesses Him Lord is the mouth of one who has come into subjection to Him so that His authority is now supreme, and is acknowledged in a public way by the adjustment of our associations.

Then the faith in the heart that God raised Him from among the dead puts us in spiritual touch with an entirely new order of things. God is operating in the sphere of resurrection, and in that sphere He secures what is pleasurable to Him. When we see that we are no longer held by what has religious status in this world. The fine buildings, the music, the efforts to popularise Christianity, to give it a larger influence as part of the system of this world, are all seen in their true character. It is then apprehended that as risen with Christ we are to "seek the things which are above, where the Christ is sitting at the right hand of God", that we are to have our "mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth" (Colossians 3: 1, 2). As we do so we shall

realise in a spiritual way what it is to be brought "into the land that thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers" (verse 6).

The principles on which God acts are "exceeding broad" (Psalm 119: 96). Whether it be the salvation of an individual Israelite, or that of a poor Gentile, or the recovery of Israel after being driven out and scattered, or restoration in the present day after the greatest departure, all are brought about on the same principles. The departure and its consequences have to be realised; then God's pleasure as set forth in His commandment has to be apprehended and taken to heart as brought in by the Lord Jesus, and substantiated in Him as raised from among the dead. The confession of Him as Lord, the belief that God has raised Him, are righteousness and salvation for the individual sinner. But they are also the great power for recovery when departure and curse have come in. Subjection to Jesus as Lord, and the confession in a public way of His rights, are the divine way of recovery from all that is lawless and displeasing to God.

DEUTERONOMY 31

Deuteronomy 31

The first six verses of this chapter were spoken by Moses "to all Israel". They present what it is important for all the people of God to know. "Jehovah hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan" (verse 2). As regards Moses personally there was a governmental reason for this (see chapter 32: 51), but here he may be regarded as typical of Christ after the flesh. Not even Christ *after the flesh* could bring us into what was in the purpose of God for us. As to His life in flesh He could say, "For also the things concerning me have an end" (Luke 22: 37); "the days of his flesh" terminated in death. He came in infinite grace into a condition which was not that of divine purpose; Himself the all-holy One who knew no sin He took part in the condition of flesh and blood — of which we were partakers — that He might glorify God in it, and be the propitiation for our sins, be made sin for us, and bring to an end the life to which, in us, sin attached. Christ after the flesh is no more; the silver cord has been loosed, and the golden bowl broken. Perfect and blessed as that life was, it was not the life of divine purpose for man, and "if even we have known Christ according to flesh, yet now we know him thus no longer" (2 Corinthians 5: 16). He has been "put to death in flesh, but made alive in the Spirit" (1 Peter 3: 18). As such He is the true Joshua, going over before His people, and with them, to cause them to inherit the land. The destruction of what answers to the nations of Canaan, and acquiring possession of the inheritance, depends on our following Christ as the true Joshua who by the Spirit leads His people in. The faithfulness of God is definitely pledged to Joshua in this scripture (verses 7, 8), and as we follow the spiritual leading of Christ that faithfulness will be our sure resource. "Thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And Jehovah, he it is that goeth before thee: he will be with thee; he will not leave thee, nor forsake thee; fear not, neither be dismayed" (verse 8). Joshua and the power of Jehovah are identified.

Joshua represents that spiritual leading of Christ which began in Himself as "made alive in the Spirit", and was continued in His apostles, and which, in principle, continues in the gifts which have come down from Him as the ascended One. Divine faithfulness is pledged to support all such spiritual leading. It is really the leading of Christ, though manifested through His representatives here. Viewed thus we can see the value and suitability of the call to Joshua in verses 7, 8, and to the "charge" and commandment of verses 14, 23. There is a remarkable contrast between the faithfulness and support of Jehovah fully assured to Joshua, and the unfaithfulness of the people as prophetically declared in verses 16 - 21.

All that Joshua represents has been, and ever will be, supported by God, and it will ever lead the people of God into the inheritance which His love has prepared for them. It is possible that the people may not value the leading, or get the good of it spiritually, but if it is there in divine faithfulness for their good. To whomsoever it may be given to have any part in spiritual leadership the call, the charge and the commandment to Joshua are directly the word of God today. It was never more essential that spiritual leading should be marked by strength and courage, by confidence in God, and by the assurance that He is with those who are set in purpose to cause His people to inherit what He has given. It has been well said, "Our present work and duty, whatever it may be in the church, hangs from the charge, and is sustained by it, whatever we may know of the result as regards man's unfaithfulness". The spiritual leading of which Joshua is a type was seen in the apostles; they were strong and courageous, and God was with them. The public result soon became like verses 16 - 21. I suppose every reader of this chapter has felt how like its closing verses are to Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.

Before Jehovah declared prophetically what the people would actually do in forsaking Him and breaking His covenant He led Moses to express in verses 9 - 13 what was agreeable to His own mind. The Deuteronomic law, written by Moses, was delivered to the priests and to all the elders of Israel. The priests being characterised as bearing the ark of the covenant of Jehovah shews that this law is committed to those who are personally identified in affections and service with Christ. They are in priestly nearness to God, identified with His covenant known as secured in Christ. Then "all the elders of Israel" represent the people viewed in intelligent responsibility. Spirituality is ever accompanied by a deep sense of responsibility that God's mind shall have its influence in a practical way amongst His people. Apart from this there will be no sabbatical "year of release", which indicates that the saints are formed in the divine nature, and are able to express it practically amongst themselves. (See chapter 15, and also remarks in "Outline of Leviticus", chapter 25) And the "feast of tabernacles" speaks of fulness of blessing in the land, and of all Israel coming to appear before Jehovah "in the place which he will choose". See chapter 16. For Israel these are millennial conditions, and they will not be realised until the new covenant is consummated. But, as we have seen, they have a present spiritual application.

The people were to be gathered — men, women, children, and not excluding "thy stranger that is within thy gates" — every seven years at the crown of the festive year, for the purpose of having the law read in their ears, "that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear Jehovah your God, and take heed to do all the words of this law; and that their children who do not know it may

hear it and learn, that they may fear Jehovah your God as long as ye live in the land" (verses 12, 13). This is the last reference in the book to "the place" where Jehovah would set His Name, and it is a wholesome, and not unnecessary, reminder that assembly conditions are not complete apart from a place being given to what answers to the reading of the "law". God would have the feasts to be celebrated, and all other things which are mentioned in this book as to be done at the place where He causes His Name to dwell, but He would also retain a great place in His assembly for the continued communication of His mind in regard to His saints, viewed as in the land. He would give a great place to His word, and to priestly ministry of that word. We may think, perhaps, that praise and worship are more important than having the mind of God communicated to us, but it is not so. There is, indeed, no higher or more glorious feature of God's assembly than that He there makes known the pleasure of His love, and His mind in regard to all that constitutes His glory in that assembly. And even if some feel able to do without this, and to fill up all the time with praise, it is well to remember that there are always in God's assembly those who answer to "the children who do not know".

Verse 14 contains the only mention of "the tent of meeting" which is found in this book, and it is also to be noted as the last occasion on which "Jehovah appeared at the tent in the pillar of cloud". There is peculiar solemnity in this, for He was there to declare how utterly His people would depart from Him, so that His anger would be kindled against them, and He would forsake them and entirely hide His face from them! In view of this He provided a twofold witness for Himself against them in a song and in the book of the law. The "song" corresponds with those parts of the New Testament which plainly declare what the future of the Christian profession would be, as, for example, 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, Jude. The "book" of the law is the will, or pleasure, of God concerning His people in its entirety. In the "song" God anticipates the complete failure of His people to answer to the "book"; He sets out the solemn consequences of that failure; but at the same time He shews that He will not abandon His thoughts, and that He will ultimately secure them in His greatness and immutable faithfulness, on the ground of atonement. The dominant note of the "song" is divine faithfulness, and it ends in divine triumph. It fully exposes the terrible departure, but it leaves the impression that God is great, and that He will ultimately have His way. It is wonderful to think of God taking account beforehand of His people's failure, testifying solemnly against it, and yet giving that testimony the character of a "song!"

Both as to the "book" and the "song" Moses wrote and spoke the words "until their conclusion" (verses 24, 30). The "book" refers to the completeness of the way in which God has made known His pleasure concerning His people. He

has reached the "conclusion" of all that He has to say; there is nothing more to come out. Paul could speak of the ministry of the assembly, which he had according to the dispensation of God, as being given "to complete the word of God" (Colossians 1: 25). One feels that it is a serious thing to be living in a day when the word of God has been completed. It is extreme favour, but it is a grave responsibility. We are in a time of finality as regards the definite and permanent communication of God's mind which *writing* signifies. The book of Revelation is rightly put last in our Bibles, for it is morally the "conclusion" of what God would have put on record. Hence it ends with a solemn warning against adding to the things written.

Then the "song", while fully declaring the evil course of God's people in departing from Him, shews how He will secure them for blessing according to His own thoughts in the end. He will not stop short of a "conclusion", as regards the state and blessing of His people, which will fully correspond with His complete pleasure as set forth in the "book". A "conclusion" will be reached which will be in every way satisfactory to God, and He will reach it by Christ. The book of the law being put at the side of the ark of the covenant, while being a witness against the people, intimated that Christ was God's Resource for the effectuation of it all.

DEUTERONOMY 32

Deuteronomy 32

Heaven and earth being called upon to hear the words of this song intimates that it contains what is instructive and profitable for both the heavenly and earthly people of God, And it is essentially of a refreshing and invigorating character. "My doctrine shall drop as rain, my speech flow down as dew, as small rain upon the tender herb, and as showers on the grass" (verse 2). When there is a work of God in the soul all His communications have that character, however exercising and humbling they may be. We manifest what we really are by the way we receive them, and the effect they produce in us. See Hebrews 6: 7, 8. The more we are searched by the word of God the more shall we be established; we shall judge ourselves, and pass over into the region of His thoughts. See Psalm 139. He brings out what He is, that in the light of it we may learn what we are, and flee for refuge to Him as the Rock of our souls, and rejoice in the stability of His thoughts as established in Christ.

This song celebrates the greatness of God in stability, perfection of working, righteousness and faithfulness (verses 3, 4). He will carry through the purposes of His love in spite of everything. The reminder of this is always refreshing to faith; God becomes the Rock of the soul. Only in the light of what He is could we bear to review the terrible history of failure.

But, in spite of all that God is, flesh remains flesh, and it comes out in "a crooked and perverted generation", notwithstanding much past evidence that God is the origin of all good (verses 5 - 7). How many features have come out in each one of us that are not the spot of His children! God would have us to discern and judge those features under the influence of the pure and uncontaminated heavenly rain and dew that falls upon us, and which has its Source altogether outside the scene of failure. The object of ministry is that Christ may be brought into view, the flesh judged, and that we may have features which are acceptable to God. Have we the spot of God's children, or are we still, in spite of all that we profess to know of God, marked by the crookedness and perversity of the flesh?

But, even if the latter should be the case, how will the blessed God proceed to deal with it? He will, in the first place, do as His servant Paul did in writing to the carnal Corinthians. He will put before us the place which His people have by divine calling, and according to His thoughts and His heart (verses 8 - 14). This might well be called a "song", for it brings out God's thoughts concerning His people, and His portion in them, and that is wholly apart from what is of the flesh.

All God's providential disposition of things in the world has reference to what He has in mind for His saints; *they* are His portion, the lot of His inheritance. Nations rise or fall, kingdoms expand or diminish, but the Hand behind the scenes is moving everything with regard to those who are "called according to purpose". So that, in truth, "all things" are ordered, and made to work together, for their good. How small is man! How great is God! Vast political movements going on, mighty changes being effected, the whole world having its very constitution re-fashioned, man fancying that he is doing it all! But God, the mighty unseen Disposer of all, assigning, separating, and setting bounds with reference to His present or future designs concerning His people, whether heavenly or earthly! Why should Claudius order all the Jews to leave Rome? It was, apparently, an arbitrary act of imperial power, but it was designed, under God's hand, to bring two persons to Corinth just in time to receive Paul, in view of God having an assembly in that city (Acts 18). His providential orderings now are not less real, or less recognisable by faith, than the movements which grouped the nations round Israel.

There is no mention in this song of Egypt, unless it is implied in verses 6, 7. But "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste, howling wilderness". God finds His people when they are entirely shut up to Him, and have no other resource, and He delights to become everything to them there, as we see in verses 10 - 12 — a beautiful and touching picture of God's watchfulness, preservation and leading in wilderness conditions. Paul said, "For a time of about forty years he nursed them in the desert" (Acts 13: 18). What a sweet expression of the tenderness and solicitude with which He had watched over them! And we have all had experience of that loving and faithful care. Then verses 13, 14 describe the wealth of good things which constituted the plenty of the land.

But from verse 15 we have a sad history of departure after proving all this goodness on God's part. And the name Jeshurun — the upright people — is used as though to mark in the strongest way their terrible defection. The tendency to depart had been there all the time. See chapter 31: 21, 27, 28. God knows what the flesh is, how ready it is to give Him up, to lightly esteem Him, to turn to every form of idolatry. We have all had to learn what the flesh is, even since we knew God, or were known of Him. It is evidence of a work of God when we really discern the perverseness and contrariety of the flesh, and begin to appreciate what is of God and His faithfulness. But before we learned the flesh God knew it; He testifies against it, and He shews plainly how His government will operate in regard to it; but He puts it all in the form of a "song", which intimates that He will eventually secure, even through deep

exercise and sorrow, His own happy "conclusion". It will all end, marvellous to tell! in shouting for joy! (verse 43).

The middle part of the chapter is occupied with God's necessary governmental dealings with His people as having departed from Him. There is no excuse for departure; if we act according to the flesh we shall reap accordingly. God will hide His face, He will move us to jealousy by allowing us to see others enjoying what we have missed (verse 21, and see the connection in Romans 10: 19), and His solemn governmental ways will take their course. At the present time departure from God is being visited by His displeasure. The loss of all spiritual blessing through worldliness, so that those who profess to be God's people are indistinguishable from the world, is a sore affliction. Would to God that it were felt to be so!

But while God's government takes its course He does not forget that the ruin of His people has been sought, and brought about, and rejoiced in by an enemy (verse 27). God vindicates Himself by judging the evil that manifests itself in His people, but, having done that, there remains a direct issue between Him and the adversary. Who is, after all, the greatest in power — the enemy who would destroy, or God who would bless, His people? That is the final issue, and the raising of it involves the ultimate triumph of God, and the full blessing of His people *because of what He is*. See verses 39 - 43.

How good for Israel, and for us, to know that God's governmental dealings consequent upon unfaithfulness and departure, severe and inexorable as they are, are not His last word. He uses them to reduce His people, and to bring them to the point of utter helplessness as to themselves (verse 36), and utter hopelessness as to getting any help from the idols to which they had turned aside (verses 37, 38), they are made to realise that their own folly, and all its consequences, are the work of the enemy, that they may turn to Him who says in verse 39, "See now that I, I am *He*". God remains in His own immutability, and He can be turned to in the very last extremity of need and distress. When His people realise their utter helplessness, His governmental dealings have done their work, and reached their end. Divine compassions can then flow righteously forth on a self-judged people; He can act on their behalf, for this is the force of "Jehovah will judge his people". He will see that they are brought into all that His love would give after having been deprived of it by the enemy through their own folly.

"I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal". His killing and wounding are but the prelude to His quickening and healing power being exercised. How many saints have proved this! We do not *live* spiritually without some experience of what it is to be killed; God brings the truth of our condition home to us in a

painful way. But those under such a dealing of His mighty hand need not despair; the issues will be such that His saints can glorify Him even on this behalf. His woundings are the faithful woundings of a Friend, and they give occasion to prove how He can heal. It may be said that there is no *necessity* for saints to have such an experience as is described in this song. That is true. But where is the saint who has lived in unbroken continuity of enjoyment of the land? Who has never deviated from God, or never needed any correction or scourging? The natural tendencies of our hearts have to be learned; they are there; there may be much departure in heart without flagrant misconduct before others. In such a case it is pure mercy when God kills and wounds that He may quicken into true spiritual life, and heal the wayward and wandering heart. Compare 1 Samuel 2: 6.

God will ultimately defeat and destroy all the power of the adversary and enemy (verses 41, 42). The nations will shout for joy with His people (verse 43, quoted in Romans 15: 10 with a present application). He will avenge the blood of His martyred saints through the ages. And He will make atonement for His land and for His people; all will be secured and will stand on the ground of forgiveness through atonement. What a song is this! How humbling to us! HOW glorifying to God! For in all its principles it is as instructive to us as it will be in another day for Israel.

Moses and Hoshea came from the tent of meeting, and from the presence of Jehovah there, to teach this song to all Israel. It is most important that we should set our hearts "unto all the words" (verse 46). "For it is no vain word for you, but it is your life". No part of the Lord's instruction is a "vain word". It is wonderful grace on God's part to communicate His mind to us; now it is for us to set our hearts to His words. Christians are apt to ignore what they do not wish to obey. But "every scripture is divinely inspired"; it is not only absolutely dependable as being of God, but there is the breath of divine life in it. The letter of Scripture may be, in itself, empty of result, but if we set our hearts to the words as having the power of life in them they will convey to us the knowledge of God as revealed in Christ, and that will be life to us. This wonderful book unfolds in a typical way the conditions in which the brethren can enjoy the inheritance together. Let us set our hearts to it that it may not be a vain word for us, but that it may be our life. Our spiritual being needs to be quickened according to God's words, so that they may be worked out in life amongst the brethren. What a conception it gives of the assembly to think of it as a company of persons capable of taking up the mind of God, and answering to it in a living way in collective enjoyment of "the land"!

It is far too often assumed that a great deal of Scripture is impracticable, but that is to say plainly that it is a "vain word". If we do not set our hearts to the words they will be "vain" to us; they will not be our life. This accounts for the fact that comparatively few have the present gain of life eternal. John's Gospel was written that we might have life eternal in the Name of the Son of God, and his Epistle was written that we might know consciously that we have it. This is really "the land ... over the Jordan". Peter realised that Jesus had the words of life eternal; His words were instinct with the power of life.

The closing section of this chapter brings out in a striking way the governmental character which is impressed on the whole of this book. It gives us what is, perhaps, the most solemn and impressive instance of the government of God which Scripture contains. For Moses was a most eminent servant of God, who enjoyed personally great divine favour. But he was not allowed to go into the land because he trespassed in failing to hallow Jehovah at Meribah-Kadesh. The more eminent and faithful any servant of God may be the more incumbent it is upon him to hallow God at all times in the midst of His people. What a discipline for Moses, that faithful servant of Jehovah and true lover of Israel, to be forbidden to enter the "pleasant land"!

But it is encouraging to see that, while the government of God was not relaxed, even in favour of Moses, he got peculiar personal favour from Jehovah which must have been compensation to him in the deprivation which he felt so keenly. He was permitted to behold the land. Jehovah Himself shewed it to him in detail, as we shall see in chapter 34. The government of God may be severe, and its results may never be escaped from down here, but at the same time opportunity may be given to faithful hearts to get what they desire. God regarded,

amidst His governmental dealing, the faithfulness of His honoured servant, and He allowed him to see the land. Those fertile hills and valleys lay outstretched before his undimmed eyes. He had a clear view, in company with Jehovah, of all that was in Jehovah's purpose, and had been the subject of His oath. Publicly he was debarred from entering the land, but privately he saw it all in communion with Jehovah.

This is, in the principle of it, great encouragement for the moment in which we live. Publicly privileges are forfeited; this was largely true before the apostles finished their course; the government of God is dealing out just retribution for many a trespass, and for much that has failed to hallow Him amongst His people. But faithful hearts may still have unique opportunities to see the land, and to know its wealth. Spiritually we may have as full a view of God's purpose and grace in Christ Jesus as ever saints had. John wrote particularly for a day

of public departure when many antichrists should be present. But he brings out the wealth of what can be enjoyed with God by those who love Him. In, his precious Gospel Jesus is seen as in the bosom of the Father, and His loved disciple is seen in His bosom. Personal intimacy remains, and can be enjoyed to the full by faithful lovers. In this connection we may note that the word "loveth" in Deuteronomy 33: 3 — a word which occurs nowhere else — means "to have in the bosom". It suggests peculiar nearness. The faithful need not look to be publicly distinguished — to be anything outwardly — but a poor and afflicted people; that is the position that has to be accepted. But in private intimacy there is not a bit of "the land" that cannot be seen in spiritual vision. What a transcendent, privilege! The sovereign favour of God abounding, and conferring supreme blessedness, notwithstanding all that takes its course governmentally!

There is governmental scattering in chapter 32, but the results of the sovereign favour of God in gathering and blessing are seen in chapter 33. The man of God, who has learned personally the severity of God's government, but also the sweetness of His sovereign favour, can bless the Israel of God according to all that is in God's heart for them.

DEUTERONOMY 33

Deuteronomy 33

This is a chapter of wonderful and unmixed blessing. It brings before us the spiritual features of the Israel of God, and thus it may be regarded as corresponding with the tribes as represented typically in the precious stones of the priestly breastplate. Such features are the product of the work of God.

The introduction (verses 2 - 6) and the conclusion (verses 26 - 29) are general; the one shewing the origin of all blessing in the movements of God in love, and the other giving the result, in security and happiness, to an upright people who know Him as their God.

The movements of God which Moses speaks of in verse 2 are not movements in redemption and delivering power, as seen in Egypt and at the Red Sea; they are movements in regard to a redeemed and delivered people with whom God has established His covenant. He moves from certain points which represent what is in His own mind, and He moves that He may work it all out in result in His people.

"Jehovah came from Sinai". That was the place where He made known the requirements of His love. We are justified in so regarding it, even apart from the direct statement of the next verse, for if He had not loved the people He would not have sought their love,

nor been jealous of every influence that would divert their affections from Him. If God moves from the point of what His love requires, He will not fail to secure it; He moves that His heart may be satisfied by bringing about in His people a full answer to all that He desires.

Then, further, He "rose up from Seir unto them". At the opening of this book we are told, "There are eleven days journey from Horeb by the way of mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea" (Deuteronomy 1: 2). Seir indicates the direct — one might say, the divine — way into the land, by taking which the necessity for forty years in the wilderness might have been obviated. It typifies in this connection the Spirit as that by which what God has before Him for His people may be quickly reached. We may be forty years in coming to it that we can only reach divine things by the Spirit, but God's movements in love began with that as a starting-point, and He will never deviate from it.

Then "He shone forth from mount Paran". Paran was where the cloud stood still when the people made their first journey from Sinai in divine order and under divine leading (Numbers 10: 11 - 13). The tabernacle had been made by a devoted people, had been set up by Moses and its services inaugurated,

and the camp had been ordered in relation to the tabernacle and its movements. All was, so far, according to God; everything corresponded with His mind. It was that brief period, before unbelief had begun to work its mischiefs, when all subsisted and moved in divine order — a period which had its antitype in the days recorded for us in Acts 2 - Acts 4. God shone forth by securing in His people what was in correspondence with Himself. It has been actually seen on earth by the mighty power of His Spirit in conditions which were, as yet, uncorrupted. His shining was distinctly seen upon His people, and their movements and order were correspondent with it. This was how God actually moved when He inaugurated the dispensation in which we have part. He moved in love, with unalloyed blessing in His heart and in His ways.

“And he came from the myriads of the sanctuary (or holy myriads)”. God moves from the starting point of His own thought to have holy myriads before Him. He had purposes from eternity, formed in Christ, to have a vast company “holy and blameless before him in love” (Ephesians 1: 4). He will secure those “holy myriads” by working in sovereign electing love; He moves from that point in such a way as to secure it fully that His love may be satisfied.

“From his right hand went forth a law of fire for them”. God’s own movements become a “law of fire” for His people, for this is probably an allusion to the pillar of fire which gave them light. Spiritual guidance is assured as we move in the light of the movements of God; the strength of His right hand is then for and with us. To have such a “law” is a very definite mark of divine favour, for it is the mandate of a love which delights that we shall move with Him even amidst surrounding darkness.

“Yea, he loveth the peoples” (verse 3) is a precious word, especially for the “other sheep” which are not of the Jewish fold, for it takes in Gentiles, and intimates that God’s movements in love have a wide bearing; they have regard to the many who, through the word of His servants, are invited to the mountain of blessing by the call of His grace (verse 19). They are viewed, too, as gathered together, having come, according to purpose, into the hand of Christ the Mediator. “All his saints are in thy hand”. The Father has given them all into the hand of the Son. What a skilful hand! How gentle and yet how firm! One of the precious things we learn from John’s Gospel is that all the sheep are in the hand of Christ, and none can pluck them thence. The effect of being in His hand is that “they sit down at thy feet; each receiveth of thy words”. How great the change from the waywardness and wilfulness which marked Israel according to flesh! What a joy it must have been to Moses to contemplate before his death that such a result would be brought about by the mighty working of God! As subdued by divine love, the place is taken

which Mary took of sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His word. It is thus that divine impressions are made.

The law, as commanded by Christ, is "the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob" (verse 4), for it expresses the pleasure of God's love concerning us. How often is the word "commandment" used in John's Gospel and in his Epistles! When Israel occupies the earthly inheritance they will be in it as finding heart-delight in everything that God wills. His law will be the inheritance in which their affections live, and its blessedness will be proved in supremely happy relations with God and with one another. What they take up in their affections will be their inheritance in the truest sense; it is that, I am sure, which is greatest in the mind of God. The "land" without the "law" could never be the inheritance in any true or divine sense. It is not of material things that the Psalmist says, "They are more precious than gold, yea, than much fine gold; and sweeter than honey and the dropping of the honeycomb" (Psalm 19: 10). And if we would know what the "law" is to one who has taken God's testimonies as a heritage for ever, we may read it in great fulness and detail in Psalm 119. A psalm which is the more remarkable because it is the language of one who is not in the inheritance as to outward or millennial conditions, but who has found a spiritual heritage in everything that expresses the pleasure of God, and who speaks with ardent affection of His law,

His commandments, His statutes, His testimonies. Eternal life will be the spiritual side of the world to come, and it will be entered into by those who have learned the blessedness of the "law" in Christ.

We are in this most favoured position today. We have come under commandment to Christ as the true Moses, the true King in Jeshurun, and what He enjoins has been perfectly exemplified in Himself. It is not a law as a mere code of rules, but the powerful and affecting influence of a living Person who has acquired kingly rights in the way of infinite love. Jeshurun — the upright people — come to light now by giving Him the place of supremacy. He is "King in Jeshurun", and none are upright before God save those who accord Him this place. We shall only learn the meaning of this chapter as we come under His blessed rule; its spiritual reality can only be known in the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love.

It is in the gathering together of "the heads of the people and the tribes" that Christ gets His true place as King in Jeshurun, and the will of God prevails. It is a great thought of God that His people should be "gathered together" (verse 5). We shall look at each tribe separately as we go through this chapter, but we must do so with the thought in our minds from the outset that they are to be "gathered together". God has given us in detail in the blessing of each tribe

the features which are to mark His people collectively as enjoying the land, but they have to be "gathered together" to get the completeness of His thought. The tribes are not seen here in the order of birth, or according to their order as in the wilderness, but according to a sovereign disposition which assigns to each some particular feature of what is in God's mind for His people, with a view to it all being gathered together in them collectively.

Reuben is to "live, and not die" (verse 6). The thought here is not the positive blessedness of life as fully developed in the sphere of its enjoyments — life "abundantly" (John 10: 10) — but life as contrasted with dying; that is, life viewed potentially. If Reuben died there would be no possibilities, but if he *lives* who can tell what the result may be for himself or for God? The first feature of divine blessing, as seen in this chapter, is a people in whom there are great possibilities because they *live*. It reminds one of the Lord's words to Paul at Corinth, "I have much people in this city". Many of them had, perhaps, not yet been called, but they were in the Lord's view as living "people" — potential material for the assembly of God, with all the possibilities connected with such a privileged place.

"And let his men be of number", as it reads literally (see margin of New Translation). Each one is taken account of; none are lost in a crowd. *Names* were written in the book of life; all written there are the subjects of God's personal election. We read of Jehovah counting "when he inscribeth the peoples" each one born in Zion (Psalm 87); we read also of "every one that is written among the living" (Isaiah 4: 3). Each saint has a definite number, and is known by name; each one is, if we may so say, a distinguished individual. The consideration of this would produce exercise that the possibilities to which we have referred might be fully attained. If I am personally taken account of by God for a place of blessing in His Israel, it is for me to learn what that place is, and to be found filling it by His grace. Each saint should consider that he has his own personal and God-given distinction, and he should earnestly covet that it should come into expression.

Then in Judah (verse 7) we see how those who live come to light, and how they find their place with their people. It is by prayer, as we see in Saul of Tarsus and Cornelius and Lydia. They are not characterised by self-confidence or self-dependence, but by prayer. This separates them inwardly from the world, and it becomes essential to them to find their people. It is a fine moment when the voice of Judah is heard; God hears every voice that is uplifted in true prayer. Every praying person realises intuitively that a people who are altogether different from the world are his people now. Not that things have been explained to him, or taught doctrinally, but as having to do

with God for himself he becomes conscious that those who have to do with God are *his* people now. "Bring him unto his people". Divine intuitions always work in this direction in living souls. They find themselves out of accord with their old worldly associations, and they realise that *their* people now are those who fear and love God, and are under His blessing. Saul and Cornelius and Lydia were brought to their people, and we see how young converts clave to those who were blessed of God (Acts 13: 43; Acts 17: 4, 34). They realised that there was that here which was of God, and that they now, through His grace, belonged to it. The work of God in souls always moves on this line.

But then we are brought to God's people as *our* people not only to share in their blessing, but to take part in conflict and labour for them. "May his hands strive for them; and be thou a help to him against his oppressors". As brought to our people we realise that they are in conflict because they are not going with the stream of this world, and we come to strive for them in their holy war. Judah is to be a good soldier; his people are in conflict, and he must strive for them. The Philippian jailor was brought to his people, but they were in a strenuous campaign; they were all out on military service (see Philippians 1:7; Philippians 1:27-30). Epaphroditus was sent by Paul to them as a "fellow-soldier", and if the jailor himself was the "true yoke-fellow" of Philippians 4: 3, it is easy to see how the blessing of Judah was to be exemplified in him. It is good to be impressed by the fact that we are brought to our people, not simply to have a happy time, but to strive for them in holy conflict. But this militant striving can only be maintained by divine power; therefore the help of God is essential against the enemy. But, with that help, there is nothing in opposers to fear, and the fact that God is with His people is demonstrated (Philippians 1: 28).

Simeon is left out here to make room, as we might say, for the two sons of Joseph. But he would be morally included in Judah as having his portion in the land within the territory of Judah.

Prayer, and identification with God's people in their conflict, as seen in Judah, leads to the development of holiness and priestly conditions as seen in Levi. The word "godly" in verse 8 is the same as "holy" in Psalm 16: 10 and Psalm 89: 19, where Christ is spoken of as God's "Holy One". Trial (Massah) and contention (Meribah) are often God's provings. These were places where the people tempted Jehovah and contended with Him, but on His part He was proving Levi there. The naughtiness of His people generally is often a test for those to whom God is minded to shew peculiar favour. The testings of the priesthood are educational in view of God's intention to give them His Thummim and Urim. I gather from verse 8 that God will not give the

intelligence of His mind to unproved persons. It is not the mind of the Spirit to call attention here to Levi's failure, but to shew that priesthood involves dealings of God which are of a testing nature. His thought is to have a godly or holy one who, apart from natural or fleshly influences, can be entrusted with His Perfections and Lights, as fully known in Christ, and can regard His people according to the place which He has given them in the breastplate of judgment. Levi under divine proving (verse 9) was found free from natural influences. God's word and covenant governed him; he considered only for God; when Moses uttered the challenge, "He that is for Jehovah, let him come to me", the sons of Levi were ready to consecrate themselves, and to move contrary to all that was natural.

The blessing of Levi indicates a great development of spiritual possibilities. The Thummim and the Urim were additional to the law; they were a means of getting the mind of Jehovah (see Numbers 27: 21; 1 Samuel 28: 6; Ezra 2: 63). God makes His mind available amongst His people, and this in connection with all His own Perfections and Lights as they have been disclosed in Christ. How blessed to be possessed of them in such a way that there is present with us at all times the means of knowing how the people of God should act! It is the first great privilege of the priestly tribe. It intimates a spiritual intelligence which is not exactly derived from the Scriptures — though surely ever subject to them — but from personal intercourse with God. There is not always a text of Scripture for every detail, but the priest with Thummim and Urim would always have intelligence in the mind of God. There are principles in Scripture which would guide in every possible situation or difficulty, and the priest would be able to give light as to the principle which should govern in any particular case. They observe God's word and keep His covenant; they always have in view the scope of His revelation. This is a marked advance on the blessing of Judah, for it signifies a nearness to God in holiness which gives access to His secret for the benefit of His people in every crisis and difficulty. How covetable is such a favour!

Those who are possessed of it are the true teachers of God's ordinances and law. They do not teach like the scribes, who know only the letter, and with whom there is no authority, but they teach as those who have as present light, and in present communion, the original mind of God, and can bring it to bear in spiritual intelligence and power. Azariah told Asa that "for a long while Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law" (2 Chronicles 15: 3). Without a "teaching priest" there will be no true knowledge amongst the people of God of that which was in His mind from the beginning. And if this is absent, there will be little incense offered, and few burnt offerings on the altar. The work of the teaching priest as viewed here precedes

that of the offering priest, and this is the right order of Levi's service. Spiritual instruction must precede spiritual offerings; it is only an intelligent people who have capacity to minister to God according to His pleasure. In connection with Levi the thought of spiritual intelligence is prominent; he has the Thummim and Urim; then he teaches; and then he serves Godward in keeping with the spiritual light which he has. The blessing of Levi provides for a service maintained in holy nearness to God, by which His original thoughts are taught to His people, and the offerings suitable to His house are presented before Him. It is as the people of God are taught, in keeping with His original mind, that their prayers will take true incense character. They will bring before God what is fragrant to Him, desires that are in correspondence with His own pleasure. And it is only as thus taught that the praises of the saints will rise to an elevation that corresponds with how they are blessed of God in Christ.

The difference between a teaching priest and a prophet in Israel would be, I think, that the teaching priest brings before the saints all that was the true character of the dispensation from the beginning — the ordinances and the law as originally instituted; while the prophet, generally speaking, arises in a day of departure to set consciences in the presence of God with a view to recovery.

One can understand, in the light of all this, what "substance" (verse 11) Levi has, and how suitable it is to be blessed by Jehovah. "And let the work of his hands please thee". May we know more what it is to have the consciousness of moving in such a holy and spiritually intelligent way that the service rendered manward and Godward is pleasing to Him!

Where priestly conditions are maintained the affections of the people of God will be uncorrupted and in normal activity, and this is seen beautifully in the blessing of Benjamin. It is a lovely picture of complacent and restful love known in the closest intimacy; the language used reminds our hearts of those utterances of mutual and fervent affection which are found in the Song of Songs. Benjamin is "little", but he is Israel's ruler (Psalm 68: 27). God would have all His people to be ruled by what is set forth in Benjamin. Priestly intelligence is great divine favour, but it is to be accompanied by the consciousness of love.

"The beloved of Jehovah, — he shall dwell in safety by him; he will cover him all the day long, and dwell between his shoulders" (verse 12). I do not know that any scripture previous to this suggests such an intimacy of confiding affection between God and His people. Holy conditions having been secured in Levi, there is nothing to restrain the heart of Jehovah; He can convey to His people that they are His beloved, and that they shall dwell in safety by Him.

The more we are conscious of being loved by God the more we shall value preservation from every influence that would interfere with love's complacency. "He will cover him all the day long" shews how He delights to shelter and protect the affections of His saints. The Lord said, "Those thou hast given me I have guarded" (John 17: 12). How precious it is to be guarded in our affections! The "vineyard of pure wine" in Isaiah 27 speaks of the pure affections of God's people which are so delightful to Him. He lavishes care and protection on that vineyard! "I Jehovah keep it, I will water it every moment; lest any harm it, I will keep it night and day". Oh! that our hearts might awake to the precious reality of this! We are "beloved by God!" (1 Thessalonians 1: 4). If He calls upon us to keep our hearts "more than anything that is guarded" (Proverbs 4: 23) it is because our affections are of priceless value to Him. He delights to protect them, to promote their development, to keep them night and day. He concerns Himself about everything connected with us — our circumstances, weaknesses, difficulties, conflicts, temptations — but He has peculiar solicitude over our affections; He says of His vineyard, "I will water it *every moment*". The thought of it surely draws us to Him to dwell in safety by Him, for our hearts are only safe in nearness to His known and trusted love. We think of safety from enemies and evils, but the safety that is most to be desired is that state of heart which ever retains the consciousness that we are beloved by God, and responds affectionately to Him.

"He will cover him all the day long". The lovers of God are under His overshadowing and cherishing continually. We keep ourselves in the love of God as we dwell in safety by Him, but it is by *His* keeping and covering that we are retained for the pleasure of His love. And this is in view of the last wondrous word of Benjamin's blessing being realised: "and dwell between his shoulders". Jehovah would dwell between the shoulders of Benjamin; an allusion, no doubt, to the place which Jerusalem would have in the territory of Benjamin, but suggesting spiritually how God loves to dwell in the strength of His people's affections. The "shoulders" speak of the strength of His people's love as the breasts denote its warmth and tenderness. The bride in the Song, referring to the Beloved as "a bundle of myrrh", says, "He shall pass the night between my breasts" (Song of Songs 1: 13). Tender affections cherish the Lord as known in His precious suffering love. But here Jehovah dwells between Benjamin's shoulders. It suggests a strength in His people's affections that will preserve a place for Him against every aggressor; He is defended by faithful love from every hostile attack. It is peculiarly touching to think of God committing Himself thus to His people that He may have a secure place in the midst of a world that is adverse to Him and to His Anointed. What a privilege, in a day when public opinion is more and more opposed to God as revealed in

Jesus, to hold Him defensively as against every attack! How multiplied and diverse are the attacks on Christ! His Person, His work, His offices all assailed, and even by those who profess to bear His Name! In the midst of such conditions we have the precious privilege of defending His holy Person, and every feature of His glory, not by argument, but in the strength of affection. While the great ones in the religious world are making more and more manifest that they do not love our Lord Jesus Christ it may be ours to maintain for Him a secure place in face of all His adversaries. To have Him dwelling between our breasts refers to the inward and private delight in which we cherish Him through the night of His rejection here. But publicly we are in a hostile scene, and the strength of the shoulders is needed to maintain a dwelling for Him. I remember asking an old man if he would have a gospel book. He looked me straight in the face, and said, "Do you believe that Jesus Christ is God over all blessed for ever?" I said, "Yes, I do", and he replied, "Then I will have your book". Something of the strength of the shoulders was there; his affections would safeguard the Person whom he loved.

The blessing of Joseph (verses 13 - 17) brings the inheritance into view, "for the birthright was Joseph's" (1 Chronicles 5: 2). The wide and varied scope of the "precious things" to be known as the blessings of Joseph's "land" is brought before us here in figurative language of great beauty. It raises the question of what our birthright really is; to what does it give us title? Are our blessings earthly or heavenly? It reminds us that we have to do now with a speaking from heaven (Hebrews 12: 25), and with Jesus as glorified at the right hand of God. Stephen saw Him there, and Saul was converted by hearing Him speak from heaven. The inheritance at the present time is in a heavenly Christ, of whom Joseph is a type.

The "precious things" are connected with "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush", and they are the portion of one who has been "separated from his brethren". God is presenting to us here the "precious things" which have come in as the fruit of His revealing Himself in grace, and which are found in the "land" of the true Joseph as the One separated from Israel according to the flesh. As having been refused by His brethren, Israel, Christ has sanctified Himself at God's right hand. Things have now got great enlargement, and this is strikingly set forth in Joseph's blessing. There are no limitations now, for God's good will determines everything, and that secures illimitable expansion.

The "thorn-bush" speaks of what came in by man's sin (Genesis 3: 18), but it shews that God would use the very consequences of man's sin to make known His good will to men through Jesus in full deliverance and blessing. To be in presence of Him who dwelt in the bush is to stand on holy ground. It demands

the profound reverence of which unshod feet are the appropriate symbol. The secret of all blessing is that God is what He is. "*I am that I am*". That came out when He dwelt in the bush. Then all His blessings at the present time have a peculiar and distinctive character. For the revelation of God in grace has not introduced earthly blessing; it has resulted in Christ being rejected by His "brethren" — even as Joseph was — and His taking a new place as exalted at the right hand of God. The whole character of blessing at the present time depends on this. Christ separated from Israel after the flesh, and from earthly joys, has a portion; He has a "land"; the boundless favour of God is known in a heavenly scene. God has blessed Him for ever there, and has blessed us in Him; our portion is in Joseph's "land". The "precious things" shew how varied is the wealth of blessing which rests upon it. Five times in four verses the Spirit of God has used the word "precious", and He has used a word for this which is only found elsewhere in the Song of Solomon as descriptive of the fruits which are found in the Bride for the pleasure of the Beloved.

There are "precious things of the heavens", and there is "dew" — which falls before sunrise, speaking of the Spirit given as heavenly refreshing before the day of glory dawns. And "the deep that lieth beneath" is surely figurative of the death of Christ as underlying all, and securing all in righteousness and love. "The precious fruits of the sun" would tell of what is brought forth under the shining of Christ (Ephesians 5: 14), and "the precious things put forth by the months" would have reference to the round of the spiritual year with its new and ever varied apprehensions of Christ. Compare Revelation 22: 2. Then "the ancient mountains" and "the everlasting hills" (verse 16) typify the stability of divine faithfulness, and of the promises of God, of which the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is the Yea and the Amen, for all are established in Him (2 Corinthians 1: 19 - 22). "The precious things of the earth and the fulness thereof" (verse 16) indicates that the scope of the inheritance includes the heading up in Christ not only of "the things in the heavens" but also of "the things upon the earth" (Ephesians 1: 10). This is known anticipatively by those who have the Spirit as "the earnest of our inheritance"; it pertains to the time when the true Joseph will be no longer the Nazarite, "separated from his brethren", but as having Israel restored to Him will share with them the joys of the kingdom of God. Every time we eat the Lord's supper we confess that all earthly rights belong to Christ; we shew His death until He comes to take them up.

Joseph's "land", with its present wealth and joy, is the portion of those who obtain inheritance in Christ. For it is to be occupied, according to this scripture, by "the myriads of Ephraim" and "the thousands of Manasseh". It will be remembered that Ephraim and Manasseh were born to Joseph as "separated

from his brethren". In having them he was made to forget his toil and his father's house, and he became fruitful in the land of his affliction (see Genesis 41: 50 - 52). They thus represent those who are given to Christ by God while He is separated from Israel.

And not only is there fulness of blessing for Joseph's myriads, but they have strength for labour and power to overcome all that is opposed to them (verse 17). None are so truly majestic, or have such invincible power, as those who are given to Christ in the present day of His Nazariteship. We may see it exemplified in a Stephen or a Paul. Paul had ox-like strength; he could do all things through Him who gave him power. And Stephen was stoned just because he was irresistible. Such have the "double portion" of Christ's Spirit as having seen Him "taken". See 2 Kings 2:9,10, and compare Acts 1:11. They have the Spirit of an ascended and glorified Man, which answers to the double portion of the firstborn. What an immensity of blessing is involved in this! May we ponder it well!

With such moral conditions, and such a wealth of spiritual blessing, as we have seen in Reuben, Judah, Levi, Benjamin and Joseph, there is a fine basis for evangelical activity, and this is set forth in Zebulun and Issachar. A divine testimony goes forth from the place where full blessing is known and enjoyed. It is an invitation to come to a mountain where they can "offer sacrifices of righteousness". It is, I have no doubt, in the mind of the Spirit, the mountain of God's house (Isaiah 2: 2). Zebulun and Issachar are blessed together, and it is not well to separate them. Zebulun goes out, and Issachar is in his tents. Both are united in inviting the peoples to the mountain, but Issachar has tents in which to entertain them when they come, and it is a serious defect to be without this. "Tents" are provisional; they are not permanent structures; and it seems to me they are suggestive of the local assemblies in which God would provide for the welfare and edification of those who are invited to the mountain. It is to be noted that Paul was a tent-maker, and this is mentioned in Acts 18 when he came to Corinth, in connection with which city God had in mind to develop the truth as to the assembly viewed locally. It is noticeable that two other tent-makers were brought to Corinth at the same time, one of them a woman, which would indicate that women have a definite place and service in view of the well-being of the local "tent". We may be sure that this is not recorded by the Spirit merely as a bit of interesting information about Paul and his fellow-labourers, but in moral connection with what God had in view in bringing them to Corinth. If Zebulun goes out with God's testimony of grace he is linked with Issachar who has tents. Paul was a great tent-maker in a spiritual sense. He set up tents in every city where he laboured in the glad tidings. The converts were housed suitably to God so that they might be cared

for, and might learn the mind of God in His assembly. It is unquestionable that when God's testimony went out at the first those who responded to the invitation were brought together and cared for in local assemblies. There they found "the mountain" — the moral elevation and holy privileges of the house of God, and were able to "offer sacrifices of righteousness".

The result of the going out and inviting is strikingly set forth in the words: "For they will suck the abundance of the seas, and the hidden treasures of the sand" (verse 19). The seas and the sand represent the vast multitudes of human beings on this earth. It is our privilege to contemplate the two thousand millions of the human race with the assurance that there is "abundance", and there are "hidden treasures" there for God. Not that there can be anything for God apart from His own working, but He would encourage us by the knowledge that He has worked, and is working, and will work, that there may be "abundance" for Him. He declares plainly to us that there are "hidden treasures of the sand", and He would have them all to be sucked out for Him. "The abundance of the seas" would suggest "the fulness of the nations" being brought in (Romans 11: 25). James speaks (Acts 15) of God visiting the nations to take out of them a people for His Name. That "abundance" and those "treasures" have to be *sucked*. There is a little more in this than merely inviting the peoples. It implies a power to draw forth what is there, an eagerness of desire to secure it, which has been exemplified in Paul making himself bondman to all, and becoming all things to all, that he might gain men and save some (1 Corinthians 9: 19 - 23). There was in him an intense desire not merely for the blessing of men, but to secure them *for God*. And when they had been sucked out they were set together for mutual profit and for God's glory in local assemblies.

Then God is marked by enlargement. This is the normal result of being brought into assembly conditions, and the evidence of enlargement is that there is spiritual power to act so as to set aside human activities and thoughts. I take this to be signified by tearing "the arm, even the top of the head". He has learned, too, that to provide the first part for himself he must reserve the portion of the Lawgiver. If we are spiritually contracted we may think that "the first part" is to secure our own comfort and benefit, and on that line things will remain contracted. But the effect of enlargement is that we become conscious that the way to truly provide the first part for ourselves is to reserve the portion of the Lawgiver; that is, to maintain what is due to the Lord.

In the New Testament 1 Corinthians would represent "the portion of the lawgiver". It is there that Paul says, "If any one thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognise the things that I write to you, that it is the Lord's

commandment" (1 Corinthians 14: 37). If saints are together in "tents" — that is, in local assemblies — the first thing to mark them is the setting aside of human activities, whether of arm or head, so that the portion of the Lawgiver may be reserved. The maintenance of the rights of the Lord must be the primary consideration. We are apt to forget that there is a Lawgiver; Christians very largely forget it, or practically ignore the fact that He has a portion which is due to Him. Where today do we see the portion of the Lawgiver reserved? We may see people doing much in their own way; the "arm" or the "head" are active in ways that have no place whatever in the statutes of the Lawgiver!

But in the local assemblies each one is by the Holy Spirit to say "Lord" to Jesus. If we all say "Lord" to Jesus there will be only one will. If I have a will and you have a will we shall probably not harmonise, but we can be harmonised by both saying "Lord" to Jesus. Then we have to remember that certain statutes and laws have been enacted; we are not left at liberty to devise things out of our own hearts. If the portion of the Lawgiver is reserved there will be the displacement of all that is insubordinate, and full scope for what is edifying. We shall find that we provide the first part for ourselves by maintaining what is due to Christ as Lord. The effect of subjection to 1 Corinthians was the wonderful ministry of 2 Corinthians; it was the result of the portion of the Lawgiver being reserved. We have to learn to distinguish between activities that are human and those which are spiritual. The latter are invariably marked by subjection to the Lord. There is such a thing as natural religiousness, and some minds have a natural aptitude to entertain religious thoughts. But if we are learning or serving with God there will be ever-deepening self-judgment. What is merely natural, even in a religious way, has to be judged as definitely as gross evils; it is only another form of flesh. It has, to use the figure of verse 20, to be torn in pieces.

Gad "came with the heads of the people; the justice of Jehovah and his judgments hath he executed with Israel" (verse 21). The "heads of the people" represent elements of spiritual leading amongst God's people. The reservation of what is due to the Lord will always carry that element with it; Paul expected it to do so at Corinth. And the result will be that what is right and according to God gets its place with His people; righteous judgments are maintained in His assembly.

"And of Dan he said, Dan is a young lion; he shall spring forth from Bashan". I believe the thought in this is the spiritual energy that will spring forth to possess the inheritance which has been figuratively set before us in the blessing of Joseph. Those who chose to remain on the eastward side of Jordan did not "spring forth from Bashan". Bashan means "the fruitful"; it represents

what is held in the Spirit as the fruit of victory over the flesh according to Romans 8 "Bashan" is the portion of a man who is justified, and has the Spirit, and who has proved himself to be superior to the flesh in the power of the Spirit. Some might be inclined to say, What more do we want than that? Well, in the mind of God that is only the platform from which to "spring forth" to take possession of the inheritance. There is a spiritual region beyond, which is opened to our view in Colossians and Ephesians. Spiritual energy is needed to "spring forth" into it, and that energy comes of love. If Joshua and the Ark have gone over into another region, are we content to remain in Bashan? For true lovers of Christ the decisive question would be, Where is He? Has He gone over Jordan? None of us can have any doubt about that. If He has gone to the other side are our hearts content to have their portion on this side? The ark was with the people for thirty-eight years in the wilderness, indicating how God would make Christ known to us in His greatness and preciousness as the One in whom is secured and preserved every thought of divine love. He has been ministering Christ to us in this way for a long time that He might bind up our affections with Christ so as to prepare us to go over Jordan with Him. It is the present will of God that we should go over in spirit now, and if we do not we miss His full thought for us in the inheritance.

Colossians views the saints as risen with Christ, and Ephesians views them as seated in the heavenlies in Him. The things which God has prepared for them that love Him are on that side; it is spiritual ground, and spiritual energy is needed to "spring forth" to take possession of it. This does not mean that we shall lose any of the good of Romans; on the contrary, those in the good of Ephesians would have the deepest and fullest enjoyment of all that is in Romans,. But they also know another region which is described typically as "the pleasant land", "a land which Jehovah thy God careth for; the eyes of Jehovah thy God are constantly upon it". The energy of Dan is needed to "spring forth" and enter into it.

Naphtali is seen as in possession of the inheritance, for he is "satisfied with favour, and full of the blessing of Jehovah" (verse 23). I wonder if we really believe that God's thought for us at the present time is that we should be infinitely happier than Adam and Eve were as innocent in the garden of Eden? There was, indeed, everything in the garden of Eden to make an unfallen man happy, but it did not rise to the great thought of God for man, and so the tree of life was there as a testimony that God had something greater and better in view. His thought was that man should live, and be satisfied with His favour as known through Christ and in Christ. So that when sin and death came in God began to speak of Christ. As evil developed here God met it by promises that centred in Christ. What favour! Then in the fulness of time Christ came as the

verification of all those promises. God's own Son was amongst men — fallen and lost as they were — in pure divine favour. Then He went to the cross and bore the judgment of the fallen man, and came forth in resurrection that we might have eternal life in Him. For the "act of favour of God" is "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6: 23). True satisfaction is there — no thirst, no hunger, no want of anything. The love of God expressed and satisfied in what He gives, and men brought to supreme satisfaction in receiving it! In the great supper (Luke 16) God is saying to men, I have provided everything; come and share my satisfaction in Christ! In Luke 15 we see how everything is furnished for us that we may come into the place of divine favour in perfect suitability. The favour and the blessing are there for us, the free gift of love, and they are to be enjoyed in God, and in His beloved Son, by the Holy Spirit. Deuteronomy 33: 23 describes life eternal as possessed and enjoyed; the words "satisfied", "full", "possess", convey a great deal more than having title.. The inheritance is viewed as acquired and enjoyed. The difficulties which many have had as to eternal life arise from the fact that the spiritual nature of that life has not been understood, and it has been assumed that one could *have* it without being spiritual, without sowing to the Spirit, or going over Jordan. Eternal life pertains to every believer as divine gift, but it does not mean much to any one until it is consciously possessed. Nothing could be more incongruous than for a discontented, carnal, and worldly-minded person to say that he has eternal life. His whole condition is the reverse of Naphtali's blessing — satisfaction, fulness of blessing, and conscious possession of ineffable divine favour.

The real difficulty is that the Lord's statements in John's Gospel are taken in the letter without any apprehension of the greatness of what they convey. Eternal life is supreme divine favour to men; it does not leave a question unanswered, or a need unmet. No element of happiness that God can confer upon men is lacking. We have to put all the promises together to get a true and full thought of it. It is the gift of love for all. Everything that Paul or Peter or John had in the joy of divine favour in Christ the Son of God is in God's mind for all believers to enjoy. One might say that it is in His mind for all men to enjoy. But let us see that, like Naphtali, we *do* enjoy it! Many of us need to be awakened to a sense of the greatness of what the love of God would give us as a present portion.

"The west and the south" suggest the most favourable position that can be assigned. The "showers of blessing" come from the west (Luke 12: 54), — spiritual ministry in refreshing power — and the south gets the full warmth of the sun.

In Naphtali we see a favour and blessing from God which abundantly satisfies. In Asher we see the result in being "blessed with sons"; the continued occupation of the inheritance is always to be in view. "The generation following" is always to be thought of; it is a great proof of spiritual vigour that we should have "sons". What joy it was to Paul to have in Timothy a "beloved and faithful child in the Lord", one who could be trusted to carry on the impression of his father's ways in Christ! It is striking to see the frequent references in Scripture to "generations", showing how great a place the thought of the continuance of things here has in God's mind. Things are not to die with the present generation at any time. One of the most distinct marks of blessing will be that there are "sons". I venture to say that older brethren have no greater joy than to see "the generation following" acquiring ability to take up things in a spiritual way.

"Let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil". This would intimate that happy relations with our brethren are essential to the enjoyment of eternal life. This is in keeping with Psalm 133, where we learn that it is as brethren dwell together in unity that Jehovah commands the blessing, life for evermore. We should covet to be acceptable to our brethren as having spiritual features, and moving amongst them in a spiritual way. The brethren, as partaking of the divine nature, know how to appreciate what is spiritual. They know the difference between natural amiability, and a walk which is the result of nearness to God. A man with his foot dipped in oil will move amongst the brethren in "kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control" (Galatians 5: 23). The roughness of nature will not be there to irritate, and to provoke resentment.

Then after all this spiritual wealth and blessing we get a remarkable word. "Iron and brass shall be thy bolts". As though to remind us that there are thieves about, and enemies who may molest, and spiritual wealth must be held securely against intrusion. "Bolts" speak of watchfulness and care on the part of those who are holding a priceless heritage in the presence of crafty and deadly foes, But they also speak of a divine security which no power of the enemy can break through. So that in the consciousness of this we may realise the closing feature of Asher's blessing: "And thy rest as thy days". God would leave upon our spirits as a final word of blessing the thought of rest — unbroken rest! — for it is "as thy days". Rest is, indeed, a prominent and characteristic feature of the inheritance. In Deuteronomy 12: 9 Moses said, "Ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which Jehovah thy God giveth thee". And the Spirit of God in Hebrews 3, Hebrews 4 has shewn us that the literal entering into Canaan was in nowise what God had before Him as true rest. He will reach it in the world to come, but He has already

reached it in Christ, and it may be reached spiritually in Christ by those who believe.

The last four verses of the chapter are a celebration of God as the Help and Refuge of His people. His eternal arms are underneath them, He will drive out the enemy, and they will dwell in unique blessing. These verses intimate to us that as the blessings of this chapter have place with us we shall become the true Jeshurun — the upright people, with whom there is nothing found but what is according to the thoughts of God. For His people are viewed here according to what they are by His grace and work, and not at all as in the flesh. One feature of blessing after another is added until the complete thought of God is reached. And, as remarked before, the tribes have all to be “gathered together” so that these different blessings characterise them as a united and collective whole. These last verses shew that God is pledged to support what is wrought by His own grace and power.

This chapter gives a fulness of blessing which has never yet been realised in Israel, but which will be realised in the day when all Israel shall be saved, and it is to be realised in a spiritual way by the grace and power of God in His people today. It is, most surely, the word of God to us.

DEUTERONOMY 34

Deuteronomy 34

There is no more impressive instance of the operation of the government of God than the fact that Moses was not permitted to enter Canaan. But while this was so, he obtained peculiar favour in being allowed to see "the whole land" concerning which Jehovah had sworn unto Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He saw it in communion with God as it was in divine purpose, and such a view of it corresponded with his outlook upon "the tribes of Israel" in the previous chapter. "Before his death" the man of God was privileged to see the people whom he loved in full blessing according to the thoughts of God concerning them, and he was also permitted to see "the whole land" as it was in divine purpose.

What a compensation it must have been for the "man of God", who had suffered rejection at the hands of the people in Egypt, and who had been tried by their rebellion and naughtiness in the wilderness, and who knew, moreover, all that they would be after his death, to see them according to chapter 33!

Moses' view from Pisgah has its heavenly counterpart in John's vision from the "great and high mountain" in Revelation 21. Both Moses and John had painful knowledge of present failure in the people they loved. Both knew prophetically how that failure would develop, and what its issue would be in divine government. But both were privileged to look beyond all the failure to the complete realisation of divine thoughts, whether on the earthly or the heavenly side.

John's writings develop the character of the saints viewed as born of God, and in conscious possession and enjoyment of life eternal. That answers to the blessings of Deuteronomy 33. But John also saw One like the Son of Man in the midst of the seven lamps, and fell at His feet as dead. He knew full well that things in the assemblies would not bear the scrutiny of those eyes as a flame of fire. To five of them he had to address, as the Lord's scribe, a call to repent. He had to learn the Lord's government in relation to the assemblies and its solemn results, whatever blessing there might be for the overcomer. Indeed the Lord's warnings to the assemblies, and His promises to the overcomer, are in striking analogy with much that has come before us in Deuteronomy concerning blessing and curse. How could one who loved the children of God feel about it all? One fully identified with the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, and who was in the Spirit? He knew the present actual state of things in the assemblies, and whereunto it would develop, as surely as Moses knew the present state and future departure of Israel.

But John reached his Pisgah, and saw the holy city coming down out of the heaven from God, having the glory of God! He saw prophetically the complete realisation of the divine thoughts as secured and displayed in the bride, the Lamb's wife, in the world to come. Nothing comes short there; everything is up to full measure; the city has the glory of God. The "northward and southward and eastward and westward" of which God spoke to Abraham have a heavenly counterpart in the city that lies four-square. The complete administration of blessing in the world to come is there. Moses saw prophetically the earthly side; John saw the assembly as the perfect vessel of heavenly administration in virtue of whose shining the earthly blessing will be secured.

Moses died in full view of the world to come, and of the accomplishment in that world of all that had been the subject of God's promises and oath. It was reserved for him to have the land in a better way than.. those had it who went over with Joshua. He actually stood upon it in company with the Son of God, for it is interesting to see that Moses and Elias did not appear in the air on the mount of transfiguration; we are told that they "stood with him". And Moses in a coming day will have all the promises from the heavenly side as one of those for whom God has prepared a city. He had to accept death *here*, but he was buried by God in view of resurrection — in view of the mount of transfiguration, and of all that is now secured, through death, in Jesus glorified.

We know from Jude that the devil was observant of what God had done, and would have acted in some way — we are not told how — to frustrate the thoughts of God. But this brought out the fact that Michael the archangel had a special charge with regard to the body of Moses. The devil is not allowed to do as he will with the saints while they are alive, nor is he permitted to have his way with their bodies even after they are dead. Michael *disputed*, we are told, with the devil about the body of Moses; he had to resist what the devil would have done. But he also "reasoned", which would indicate intelligence as to the mind of God in the matter. Michael understood why he had such a charge as to that body. The angels know where the saints are buried, even as two of them sat "one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had lain". One grave may look much like another to the natural eye, but there are millions of graves in the world which have a very special character under the eye of heaven because they are the graves of "the dead in Christ". It was said of Moses' burial that "no man knows his sepulchre to this day". It was removed from all human guardianship, nor could it be made an object of idolatrous veneration, but it was known to Jehovah and to Michael, and whatever the devil's thoughts might have been, he could not prevail.

"Archangel's voice" will be heard when the Lord Himself descends from heaven to raise the dead in Christ, and to catch up the living who remain. It will be no longer necessary for the archangel to dispute or reason with the devil; his voice will ring forth in everlasting triumph as death is swallowed up in victory.

It will be remembered that Michael has a special charge in relation to Israel. Daniel was told that he is "the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people" (Daniel 12: 1). Israel at the present time is sleeping in the dust of the earth, but those written in the book will be delivered; they will awake to everlasting life. The two references to eternal life in the Old Testament connect it with the quickening power that will awake many who sleep in the dust of the earth (Daniel 12: 2), and with brethren as dwelling together in unity (Psalm 133). The one shews that it is a people quickened out of death who enter into it; the other that it is enjoyed in the happy and holy unity in which brethren dwell together.

Moses, as permitted to see "the whole land" but not to enter upon it, may be regarded as representing all those who "died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off and embraced them" (Hebrews 11: 13). Before the promises are received the greater part of the faith family will, like Moses, have passed through death. In the government of God death is present as the result of sin, and saints die as well as other people; but they die in the faith of resurrection, and of all that is now secured by the resurrection of Christ. All that will remain in resurrection will be what God has wrought. Moses will get his prayer answered: "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy majesty unto their sons. And let the beauty of Jehovah our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us: yea, the work of our hands, establish thou it" (Psalm 90: 16, 17).

Moses did not die a natural death, for we are told that "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated". He died "according to the word of Jehovah", and not by the failure of his natural strength. Moses' death was not the evidence of his own physical weakness, but of the inadequacy of the natural, even when in unabated force, to enter into what is spiritual. The surpassing greatness of the power that wrought in Christ in raising Him from among the dead is needed for that, and such is the power that is "towards us who believe" (Ephesians 1: 19, 20). "Flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom"; resurrection, or what is equivalent to it in changed bodies, is needed for that kingdom.

All the Old Testament saints will have the inheritance from the heavenly side, for God has prepared for them a city, "having foreseen some better thing for us, that they should not be made perfect without us" (Hebrews 11: 16, 40). The fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob depends on

something else being secured which is altogether heavenly in character, and Old Testament saints will come into possession of the promised inheritance as taking it up along with the saints who form the holy city.

In the meantime "the whole land", and the conditions on which it can be enjoyed, have a spiritual import which is to be apprehended at the present time in relation to the promises of God having their Yea and Amen in the Son of God Jesus Christ for glory to God by us. We have sought to trace, so far as grace has been given to do so, something of this import as we have gone through Deuteronomy.

I have no doubt that when Israel comes to take things up literally in the land their doing so will derive a peculiar character from the knowledge that the instruction of this book has been taken up spiritually by saints of a heavenly family. For Israel will take it up in the light, and under the administration, of the holy city which is composed of those very saints. In this way the whole book will acquire for them an elevated and spiritual character; it will be taken up in the light of a risen and heavenly Christ, and of the administration of those who have had part in His rejection and reproach, and who will be glorified as His joint-heirs.

The wisdom of God in all this bows the heart in adoration, while it intensifies the desire to take up in wisdom all that in which God would glorify Himself in His saints today. As having understood it spiritually, and answered to it by God's grace, the saints of the assembly will be competent to bring its influence to bear in a coming day upon those who will be found in the place of a divinely favoured earthly people.

But very much in this book has not millennial conditions in view. Having to do with enemies, the great danger of departure and idolatry, the possibility of curse, indeed all in the book that speaks of active evil, shows that it has a bearing *now* which will not have place when the kingdom is established, and there is rest on every side, "neither adversary nor evil event". But what is learned of God now, and maintained for God in the presence of what is adverse, will remain in its own blessedness to govern everything in a day when evil will no longer molest.