Synopsis of the Books of the Bible

Deuteronomy

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

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Introduction

We now come to the book of Deuteronomy, a book full of interest in its moral warnings as to testimony, but presenting fewer subjects for interpretation and exegesis than those, the summary of which we have hitherto sought to give.

The scope of Deuteronomy

This book takes up Israel just on the borders of Canaan, and insists upon the faithful maintenance of their relationship with God, and on obedience to His commandments, as the only ground on which Israel can enter and continue therein, adding warnings as to the consequence of failure in obedience. It takes, in the main, the ground of their historical state (not of typical forms, presenting the thoughts of God, as the books we have just been considering do).* The body of it, after recalling the history of the wilderness, deals with the ordering of Israel in the land under God without a head on earth. The people are under responsibility to walk in obedience, with only God as their king and ruler. In immediate reference, the people are in enjoyment of the promised land under condition of obedience; but feasts, and such like ordinances, look forward to millennial times. At the end the distinction between possessing the land under condition of legal obedience, and by the grace which accomplishes its purpose in spite of failure is definitely brought out. {* After Genesis and the earlier chapters of Exodus, there is very little of which the object is historical in the previous books of Moses. And even in Genesis and the beginning of Exodus principles and types are the most important aspect of what is related. As to the history of Israel the apostle tells us this expressly in 1 Corinthians 10:11. And this appreciation of the character of these books greatly aids us in understanding them. There is no proof that one sacrifice was offered possibly the fixed ones were; but Amos, quoted by Stephen, would say the contrary. Those born in the wilderness were not circumcised, and could not rightly keep the passover.}

The divisions of the Book

The book may be divided into three parts. The first eleven chapters insist upon obedience, presenting various motives to lead the people to it. Then come, as far as the end of the twenty-ninth? divers commandments; to which are added, by way of sanction, the consequences of obedience and the curse upon disobedience. From the thirtieth to the end we have things to come, the blessing of the people, and the death of Moses.

The contents and teachings of the first eleven chapters

But this division requires more development, which will much aid our understanding of the book. The first part recounts their history, and this as insisting on the unity of an invisible God, their obligation to Jehovah who has called them, through redemption, to be with Him. This closes with chapter 4, where three cities are secured for the two tribes and a half. Moses cannot enter into the land; Jehovah their God is a jealous God. They are placed under the covenant of Sinai, but He is a merciful God, and in their tribulation they can look to the God of their fathers. In chapter 5 all Israel are called to hear as to

their present place, and put upon the basis of the covenant of Sinai — to observe it in the land into which they were going to possess it. The land had been promised, but they held it under the covenant of legal obedience, but on the basis of deliverance wrought by Jehovah out of Egypt. Him they were exclusively to serve, and He was a jealous God. They were to have no kind of connection with the nations found in the land. Further, we have the terms of the government of mercy, still of righteousness, established in Moses's second ascent of Sinai. Thus we have the government of God — His ways taken into account; and so the character of their ways and their object (Deut. 8). If they did not give heed they would perish. This leads to recalling, in order to humble them, how they had failed all through in the desert. The second governmental covenant is referred to, and the Lord's love that had chosen them in pure grace, and that in spite of their failures, had already so largely blessed them. They must circumcise their hearts to serve Him and Him only: one only exclusive God, and a God of government. All is summed up hortatively in chapter 11. Over Jordan they were going, there they were to keep all that was commanded. Here Ebal and Gerizim are brought in. To the end of chapter 4 it is Israel outside Jordan; chapter 5 inside the land. The first part presents the one invisible Jehovah of Horeb, jealous but merciful, though His ways in general with the people are there too; the second, the covenant of the ten words with Jehovah, and His government on the ground of their responsibility.

Of the first eleven chapters, the first four form thus a rather distinct part.

Motives for obedience and consequent blessing

That which strikes one in the first chapters is, the pains that Jehovah takes to present all possible motives to that poor people to lead them to obedience, in order that they may be blessed. These things, which ought at least to have touched the heart, served, alas! only to prove its hardness, and to shew that, if man is to be blessed, God must give him a new heart, as it is written in the chapter which closes the second part of His exhortations to obedience: "Yet Jehovah has not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day" (Deut. 29:4).

Deuteronomy is, then, of all the books of Moses, that which is the most essentially conditional — that is to say, the first two divisions which I have pointed out.

The secret things and their unfolding

Chapter 29, which is the last of the second division, ends, consequently, by saying, "The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

The chapters which follow throw this into greater prominence, by unfolding the secret things which were to happen after the people had completely failed in the fulfilment of the law, as chapter 30, and, still more strikingly, chapter 32, by speaking of righteousness by faith. For the discussion as to righteousness by the law ended with chapter 29; and chapter 30 supposes the people in a position in which the securing of righteousness by the law was impossible, and where there could only be question of the spirit and end of the law, in the counsels of God.

Now, Christ was the end of it, and it is thus the apostle applies the passage (Rom. 10). It is interesting also to see that the Lord always quotes Deuteronomy in answering Satan. He put Himself on the true ground where Israel stood, in order to possess and keep the land; being not only the faithful man, but the Jew, the true Son called out of Egypt, put to the test as to His faithfulness, in the conditions under which the people were placed by Deuteronomy.

Chapters 1 to 4

Moses recalls the patience and goodness of God in the wilderness journey

Let us examine a little more closely these chapters, which shew the pains the Spirit took, to set before the eyes of the people all the motives which could induce them to walk faithfully in the career which now lay before them.

He begins with the narrative of what had occurred since the sojourn of the children of Israel at Sinai; and Moses reminds them of the commandment to leave that place and to go to the mount of the Amorites,* to go up and possess the land. They get there, and, discouraged by the spies, they will not go up; then, trying to do so without God, they are smitten before their enemies. Passing by the borders of Esau and Moab, God gives them the land of Sihon and of Og. {*It is interesting to put together the second and third verses. For an eleven days' journey Israel took forty years. Alas! how often is it thus with us, owing to our unfaithfulness.}

We learn too here that, though sanctioned by God, the sending the spies was the effect of unbelief among the people — an instructive lesson. God may allow, and so far sanction a course, wise humanly, in His ways — His government, which yet bears the fruit of the unbelief which is at the root of it.

In a word, Moses recalls to them, in general, what had taken place in the journey which led to their entrance into the land of which they are to take possession — the patience and the goodness of God.

The majesty of God and His Word, and the privilege enjoyed at Horeb

In reminding them of Horeb, he insists on the privilege they had enjoyed in nearness to God, who Himself had spoken to them out of the midst of the fire, when they saw no similitude; on the authority of the word — its majesty — excluding thus all thought of idolatry. He shews them that all that were of full age had perished, as a consequence of their unbelief; that he himself could not enter into that good land; that God is a jealous God, a consuming fire; and that, if they made any graven image, they would utterly perish from off the land they were about to enter, and would be scattered amongst the nations and — left to serve the gods they had loved; that, nevertheless, they should find God if they sought Him with all their heart, for He is a merciful God, who would not forsake them; that if Sinai had been the brightness of His majesty, it was also true that such a God of majesty had never vouchsafed to come so near to a people, elect and chosen for their fathers' sakes. Such is the basis of the government of this people. Three cities of refuge on this side Jordan. Moses sets apart three cities of refuge, as a token of possession, on the part of God, of what was on this side Jordan. These four chapters are introductory.

Chapters 5 to 7

The ten commandments and the great principles of God's government in the land

In Deuteronomy 5 Moses reminds them of the ten commandments given in Horeb; and it is to be remarked, that the deliverance out of Egypt (not the rest of God after the work of creation) is the reason he gives for the sabbath: it became a sign of His covenant with Israel (compare Ezek. 20). These were the basis of a regular covenant; and God here, as we have seen, governs the people in the land of promise according to their responsibility, as a jealous God. Mercy, beyond law, only comes in in chapter 30. There had been mercy (chap. 10) in giving them back the law, and placing them under sparing mercy Still. These chapters give us the great principles of God's government in the land; chapters 12-29 the terms of it.

Reverent fear of God and His Word, with heartfelt love and remembrance of His deliverance

He reminds them of their fear in the presence of the Lord engages them, in chapter 6, to love God with all their heart, and exhorts them to remember His words in every way, and to keep them, when they should enjoy the land, having nothing to do with other gods.

When they should have cast out their enemies, as Jehovah had spoken, and when their children should ask the meaning of the ordinances, they were to tell them of the deliverances and of the signs wrought in Egypt.

God's sovereign grace; faithful obedience the channel of blessing

They were to destroy every vestige of false gods, being a people holy to Jehovah. Nor did God set His love upon them on account of their own importance, but because of the election and love of God. He assures them that their faithfulness would also be the channel of blessing, for God would recompense them according to their ways. Neither ought they to fear, after all the signs they had seen. Thus they were a people separate to Jehovah. As to Him all was sovereign grace, but sure faithfulness. As to them the ground they were on was the government of God; hence all then depended on their holding fast to Jehovah, and faithful obedience.

Chapters 8 to 11

Calling to remembrance God's care, His twofold dealings and their own perverseness

In Deuteronomy 8, in the most instructive and touching language as to the care God had taken of them, while keeping them in dependence, and His object in doing so, he also brings to mind the dealings of God with them by the way,* as a motive; and how God had humbled and had exercised them, lest, through the enjoyment of the blessings of the good land into which He was bringing them, they should be puffed up (for it was God who gave them the needed strength); that otherwise God would destroy them, as He had destroyed the nations. On the other hand (Deut. 9), He reminds them of their continual perverseness, in order to shew them that it was not on account of their righteousness, but because of the wickedness of the nations, that God drove them out before them.** {* See particularly verses 2-4; 15, 16. ** It is important to keep this in mind. Israel was the rod in God's hand to get rid of intolerable evil. Therefore also they were not to spare.}

This he applies to them (Deut. 10), reminding them that God had renewed the tables of the law, urging them to circumcise their hearts, to care for the stranger, remembering how God had enlarged them since they went down as strangers to Egypt.

God's judgments; the beauty of the promised land; blessing dependent on obedience

Then, in Deuteronomy 11, he brings to their remembrance the judgments upon the Egyptians, and those upon Dathan and Abiram; and declares to them the beauty and excellency of the land into which they are about to enter, a land upon which the eyes of Jehovah ever rested;* and, lastly, he puts before them the blessing and the curse which there awaited them, according to their conduct, when brought in; charging them to keep carefully the commandments of the Lord, and to teach them to their children. And it is added, that, by keeping the commandments of God, they would be able to take possession, according to the full extent of the promise. {* The terms in which this is expressed present a perfectly beautiful contrast between the carefulness of man in seeking for blessing, and the grace from above.}

But here all depends on their obedience to this conditional covenant which made them Jehovah's, whose exclusively they were to be; sovereign restoring grace does not come till chapter 30.

Chapters 12 and 13

The conditions of relationship with God in the land and enjoyment of His promises

The second division begins with Deuteronomy 12, and contains the statutes and ordinances they were bound to observe. It is not a repetition of the old ordinances, but what specially referred to their conduct in the land, that they might keep it and be blessed in it. It is a covenant, or the conditions of their relationship with God, and of the enjoyment of His promises, added to what had been said before (see Deut. 29:1).

Maintenance of their relationship with Jehovah characterised by a centre of worship

The ordinances tended in general to this, that they were a people belonging to Jehovah, and that they were to give up every other relationship in order to be His; and keep themselves from all that could seduce them to form such relationships, or defile them in those which they had with Jehovah. At the same time, directions are given as to the details of the maintenance of those relationships. One thing specially characterises this part: a fixed place where Jehovah would put His name to which they were to go up to worship.

But in all this, and in the whole book, this point is treated as a question of a direct relationship of the people itself with God. The priests are, in general, mentioned, more as being the objects of the care of the people when in the land, according to ordinances already given. The people were to behave in such-and-such a way towards them; but the relationship is immediate between the people and God.

The fixed place of worship chosen by Jehovah, and conduct suited to the true God

The first principle laid down to confirm these relationships is the choice of a place as the centre of their exercise. They were to go thither with all their offerings; they might eat flesh elsewhere — without the blood; but the consecrated things could only be eaten in the place chosen of God. They were not to forget the Levites. They were not even to inquire about the ways of those who had been driven out of the land.

If the signs of a prophet, who would entice them to serve other gods, came to pass, or if a relative, or the beloved of their souls, enticed them, such were to be put to death; if any of a city, the whole city was to be reduced to a heap of stones. No relationship with any but with the true God was to be allowed — no forbearance toward that which ensnared them to follow another.

Chapters 14 and 15

A holy people to maintain holiness

Chapter 14 forbids that the people, as being the children of the living God, should imitate the profane customs which indicated the devotedness of idolaters to the impure beings they worshipped. God had chosen Israel for Himself. Neither were they to defile themselves by eating abominable things. They were a holy people. The tithes and all the firstfruits were to be offered to God.

Recognition of God's supremacy, and united enjoyment of His goodness in communion with Him

Thus consecrated, each one might eat them in the place where God had put His name. The same command had been given (chap. 12) with regard to the place where they were to be eaten, with the addition that the children, menservants, and maidservants, might partake of them, applying it also to the vows, the free-will-offerings and the heave-offering. These ordinances are very remarkable.* {* It is generally explained that there was a double tithe; that is, that this does not refer to the regular tithe paid to the Levites, as ordered in the other places in the law, and that the Levitical tithes remained as they were according to the previous prescriptions of the law; and it is to be remarked they were to be locally paid to the Levites, not where Jehovah had placed His name. Two years they carried the different offerings to the place chosen of Jehovah, and ate and rejoiced, but the third, invited the Levite and the poor at home. Tobit 1:7 gives us historically all these different tithes and offerings; only it appears that, the ten tribes being in rebellion and apostasy, pious people carried the Levitical tithes to Jerusalem. Amos 4: 4 shews. there was some special habit of tithing every third year, then at Bethel. At any rate what characterises Deuteronomy is their enjoying God's goodness together, and making the poor enjoy it with them, Levites and strangers; while priests, though named, are on these points wholly ignored (see Deut. 12:6-7, 11, 12, 17, 18; 14:22-28). The priests' portion is in chapter 18:3-4. But firstlings and firstfruits in chapter 12 are not the same word; nor is chapter 14:23. But the whole tone of Deuteronomy is fellowship and enjoyment only before the Lord, not priestly or altar service.}

Another, found at the end of chapter 14, may be added here. The tithe of the third year was to be laid up within their gates, and the Levite, the fatherless, and the stranger, were to come and eat of it; and he who did thus would be blessed of Jehovah in all the work of his hands.

Here everything was sanctified, as having been presented to Jehovah. There was thus the recognition, on the one hand, that the people were His, on the other, that all they had was of Him; but in giving Him back what He had given them, they enjoyed, in fellowship with Him, and their families, the things common to God and the people, given by Him, offered to Him, and enjoyed in His presence in communion one with another, God Himself partaking of them, for the whole was offered to Him.

It was not here the priests opening out a way for the people to draw near to God: God was honoured by the offering. God enjoyed the piety of the people, and the people themselves offered with joy. Seated before God Himself, in the joy of communion with Him, as at the same table, it was the people who enjoyed the privilege. Acting in grace to Jehovah's poor in family fellowship and with His blessing

In the case of the tithe of the third year, it is not the family joy of the people with God, but rather the grace that brought enjoyment to those who were strangers or in want, and to the servants of God who had no inheritance. It was within their gates that this took place. They had the privilege of acting in grace from Jehovah, in communicating to His poor what He had given them. They did not go to the house of Jehovah, but they invited the widow, the orphan, and the Levite, to their house to rejoice, and Jehovah blessed them. The immediate relationship of the people with God in family fellowship and in grace here is very remarkable. The priests are out of the scene; the Levites being the objects of the liberality of the people, as having no inheritance (compare Deut. 12:19).

The year of release: liberality and grace to the poor and needy

Chapter 15 teaches each one among the people to consider with liberality and grace their poor brethren (this consideration being besides made sure to them by the year of release, which applied to debts and to the Hebrew slaves). The dependence of him, who thus respected Jehovah in His poor, was to be placed in God, who would bless him in thus acting according to His commandment; for the poor were His poor.

Chapters 16 and 17

The dwelling-place of Jehovah and His solemn feasts

Chapter 16 connects the people with the dwelling-place of Jehovah, by solemnities in which He surrounds Himself with His people, blessed and happy in the deliverance which He has granted them under His reign.

The Passover and what it recalls

It gives us three solemn feasts — the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The spirit of each of these feasts suggests a few remarks. The Passover recalled deliverance, deliverance from bondage in Egypt* — for us under sin and Satan. The unleavened bread, truth in the inward parts, was here the bread of affliction. The knowledge of Christ, or the application of Christ to the heart, though coupled with deliverance and salvation, when it takes the form of repentance (and this is the case, when the question is of remembering one's deliverance), has always something bitter in it. Joy is not the point here. One has gone out in haste, by the mighty arm of God; and if one is happy, it is only as having escaped, feeling that it is through the power of God alone, and conscious of the state which required it all. They ate it during the night, and every one returned in the morning to his tent. They went home with the sense of the goodness of God, with the sense that it was a deliverance from the evil under which they had been by their own fault and to their own ruin. {* Egypt signifies properly the flesh, but that involves sin and Satan.}

Holiness obligatory, but also the joy of the redeemed Holiness is presented in repentance and deliverance from the power of evil, under the form of conscience and judgment of sin; it is an obligation. One dares not remain any longer in evil. They were cut off if leaven was found in the house; whereas this holiness is in itself the joy of the redeemed. They were bound to keep the feast wherever God should put His name. God gathered the people around His dwelling-place, and linked them with His name and with Himself.* Their nationality and all their recollections were connected with the worship of Jehovah. It was another safeguard against idolatry (vers. 5-7). {* This we have seen was part of Deuteronomic worship.}

Pentecost characterised by the free-will offering, the effect of the presence of the Holy Spirit

Seven weeks having elapsed, the people were again to gather around Jehovah. They numbered seven weeks from the time they began to put the sickle to the corn, from the day they began to reap the fruit of the land of promise. They waited for the perfect time of the work of God.

That which first of all characterised this feast was, that every one offered a free-will-offering, according to the blessing wherewith Jehovah his God had blessed him. It is the Holy Spirit, and the blessing flowing from Him, which this type presents to us. It is not only redemption, but the power of the things which are the result of it — not in full, however; they were only firstfruits offered to God. The presentation of these firstfruits to God is the effect of the power of the Holy Ghost. They are the remnant of Israel, historically in the beginning of Christianity, on the principle of redemption and of the new covenant; but, in fact, Christians themselves become the firstfruits of the creation of God. But the effect produced by the Holy Spirit, the effect of His presence in general, is that which characterises this feast.

There was no mention of free-will-offerings at the passover; they ate in haste and returned home. But the Holy Spirit has made the renewed heart willing; and according to the enjoyment of the fruits of the promise — according to the measure of the blessing of the Spirit of God, it can and will render to God the firstfruits of the heart, and of all that He has given us. Therefore (and it is what always accompanies this free-will — fruit of the Holy Spirit) they were to rejoice in the presence of Jehovah their God.

God surrounded Himself with joy, the fruit of His grace and blessing

The fruits of grace and of the Spirit manifest themselves in joy and in grace.* Blessing manifests itself in the spirit of blessing, in the joy and the good-will of grace. Blessed and precious results! Joy, and the desire for the joy of others, always flow from grace, known according to the power of the Spirit of God. {* This also characterises Deuteronomic worship.}

Thus the worshipper, his son and his daughter, his manservant and his maidservant, the Levite within his gates, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, were to rejoice together in the place where Jehovah had set His name. God surrounded Himself with joy, the fruit of grace and of His blessing.

The remembrance of having been themselves bondmen was to touch the heart and influence the conduct of Israel; and by comprehending the grace which had delivered them when they were in that condition, they were to be led to act in grace towards those who were bondmen to them. They are admonished, at the same time, to observe the statutes of Jehovah; for the presence of the Holy Spirit, whilst ministering joy, leads to watchfulness and obedience. We enjoy the earnest and the firstfruits before God; but still it is down here, where watchfulness and restraint are needed.

The Feast of Tabernacles, as yet unfulfilled

When the ingathering of the harvest and vintage were ended (that is, God having gathered in His own, hidden them in His garner, and trodden His enemies in the winepress), then came the Feast of Tabernacles; a feast, the antitype of which we have not, it is certain, yet seen.

Although all the effects of the Passover and Pentecost are not yet accomplished, yet they have been fulfilled as to the event marked by them; but there has been as yet no fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles. This will take place when Israel, restored to their land after the end of this dispensation, will fully enjoy the effect of the promise of God. Consequently joy is put in the foreground, whilst in that which prefigured the presence of the Holy Ghost upon earth the free-will-offering came first.

Full joy connected with the time of rest when labour will be ended

This feast was to be kept during seven consecutive days. It is joy, full and complete joy; not according to the measure of the blessing, as in Pentecost, but because God had blessed them in all the works of their hands: therefore they certainly ought to rejoice. The spirit of that day belongs to us, although the fulfilment of it has not yet taken place.* {* But it is to be remarked here, that in the account of tabernacles in this chapter, there is no reference to an eighth day as elsewhere. All refers properly to Israel placed in the land in present responsibility, but with promise of yet better things under the new covenant. To us it is anticipatively the eighth day, that great day of the feast. See John 7 where we get what to us is now in the place of the feast, connected with the glory of a rejected, but exalted, Christ — the outflowing fulness of the Holy Ghost.}

There is a joy that manifests itself in us in connection with the measure of the present effect of the presence of the Holy Spirit, a joy with requires watchfulness and to walk in the narrow way, and in which the remembrance of our former condition strengthens in us the spirit of grace towards others, and the presence of the Lord is specially marked.

There is a joy known to the heart, although the things which cause it have not yet had their accomplishment, a joy connected with the time of rest, when labour will be ended, and when there will no longer be any need of vigilance, nor of the remembrance of our misery, to urge us to share our blessings with others. The feast itself will suffice for the joy of all: "Thou shalt rejoice in thy feast." The Lord recalls the great principle of the three feasts, namely, to appear before Jehovah three times in a year, bringing offerings to Jehovah.

The pains taken and instruments used to preserve blessing and maintain relationship with God

Verse 18 begins a new subject: the pains taken, and the instruments used, to preserve the blessing and execute the judgments necessary to that effect. The thought is still to maintain the people in relationship with God alone. They were to appoint judges and officers in their gates. Whatever led to idolatry was forbidden; he who enticed them to it was to be stoned (Deut. 17). If the matter were too hard, they were to come to the priests and the judges, and the people were to abide by their judgment.

The people's desire for a king anticipated

The case of the people desiring a king is anticipated; and they are told that he must be of the people, and not act so as to open the way for intercourse with Egypt, nor so as to lead the people to idolatry; but he

is to write a copy of the book of the law with his own hand, and read therein all the days of his life, being subject to it, so as not to despise his brethren.

Chapter 18

Lack of faith forseen, but Jehovah would raise up a prophet to whom they should hearken

Deuteronomy 18. The priests and the whole tribe of Levi have their portion assigned to them. The people are forbidden to do after those abominations, on account of which the nations which inhabited the land were driven out before Israel, inquiring of those who used divination. Jehovah would raise up a prophet like unto Moses, unto whom the people should hearken. These ordinances foresee in the people the lack of the faith needful in order to walk simply with the Lord. Christ is the true and only answer. They were not to fear a prophet who gave a sign which did not come to pass, for Jehovah had not spoken by him.

Theocracy, and the portion of the priests and people

One word here as to the portion of the priests. First, the normal condition of the people was that of being guided by the priests, and, in case of need, by judges raised up in an extraordinary way; and to abide under the keeping of God in the land, enjoying His blessing. It was, properly speaking, theocracy. The laws of God directed the people; they enjoyed the blessing of God; and the priests settled any questions which arose, a judge being raised up in exceptional cases.

The priests are introduced here in connection with that which was necessary to the enjoyment of the land, not as a means of drawing near to God. Consequently, they were there to fulfil their ministry before God, and a certain portion belonged to them.

The acknowledgment and enjoyment of God's deliverance and goodness

The king was only thought of in the case when the people would ask one, in order to be like the nations; and in that case he was to remain, as much as possible, simple in the midst of Israel, that the law of God might have its full authority. The people are always accounted to be themselves responsible before God, and enjoying the land under this responsibility, though for that reason subject to the decisions of the priests. They had the land from God. The position spoken of here is not that of drawing near to Him, but acknowledging His deliverance and His goodness, as in the feasts which we have considered.

Thus he who went up to the place which Jehovah had chosen ate with his family, and sometimes with the Levite, the stranger, etc., the tithes* of each year (in the third year there were some for the Levite and the poor), the firstling of the herd and of the flock, the vows, the free-will-offerings, and the heave-offerings, all before Jehovah. But at the same time that they offered them to Jehovah, the offerer partook of the enjoyment of them (see Deut. 14:23, 28, 29; 12:7, 11, 12, 17); whilst, in chapter 18 the

priest had a certain portion of the sacrifice, the firstfruit of the corn, of the wine, and the oil, and the first of the fleece of the sheep. {* See note in chapters referred to; they were second tithes, not Levitical ones. The people never paid tithes to the priests; but to the Levites at home, they to the priests. The tithes of the third year (not Levitical) were eaten at home. We have nothing of Levitical tithes in Deuteronomy.}

The true character of Deuteronomic worship

The first part of these ordinances is so much the more remarkable that in the book of Numbers (Num. 18), the firstborn,* the heave-offerings, all sorts of offerings for sin, and the meat-offerings, are given to the priests, and the tithes to the Levites. But these are assumed, not reordained here, that the true character of Deuteronomic worship may be maintained, rejoicing before Jehovah in the enjoyment of what He gives, not drawing near to Him in the holiest. {* Firstborn males. See notes to Deut. 12, 14.}

The position of the people and priests in Deuteronomy compared to preceding books

We may remark here the difference between that which was in this case for the priests, and that which in Deuteronomy the people are to eat of before the Lord, and in the other books what is given to the priests. We have already pointed out the difference of position.

In the three preceding books, what is brought before the mind is drawing near to God, and the priests alone are looked upon as able to do this; and thus, in the relationship of priests, they ate in the holy place all that was offered. They alone were near God, and that which was offered to God (according to the force of the word,* that which was brought near to God) was theirs, as being near. They were all as one company in the camp, and the whole was essentially typical. {* The word translated "an offering" (that is, corban) comes from a word which means "to draw near," and, in the form Hiphil (causative active form), "to bring near."}

Pilgrims in the wilderness and dwelling in the land

Thus all the arrangements of the tabernacle were made for a people who found themselves in the wilderness — strangers there; and it is to be observed that Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, never speaks of anything but the tabernacle, never of the temple. The relationship he speaks of is that of pilgrims with God.

It is no longer thus in Deuteronomy. There the dwelling of the people in the land of promise is considered; and, consequently, the people are accounted, not as needing to learn how to draw near to God,* but as enjoying, from God, the effect of His promise in His presence and before Him, so that the people are directly concerned in the sacrifices. They are in the enjoyment of the promises, in the presence of God, and they realise, in the communion of Jehovah, all the means through which it is enjoyed, and they partake, in communion, of all that is devoted to Him, as a sign of the redemption through which this enjoyment was procured for them. {* This very important difference characterises

the book. It is no question how near we can get to the holiest, to God Himself, but communion in the enjoyment of all the fruits of His promise in His presence and in the spirit of grace. It is not wilderness connection with God, a yet deeper principle of connection with Him.}

The firstfruits of the land

It is otherwise with regard to the firstfruits of the land — that which it yields. Enjoying those fruits of the goodness of God, the people gave Him back the firstfruits, as a testimony that all came from Him, and that all was His, and that His grace had communicated it to them (see chap. 26). Therefore the firstfruits were not for the people to eat: they offered them to God, and ate of all the rest. It was the recognition of God, while sharing His blessings. The firstfruits then were offered to God, and thus fell into the hands of the priests as their portion.

Chapters 19 to 21

Ordinances as to the enjoyment of the land

Deuteronomy 19 opens with ordinances which contemplate the people in possession and enjoyment of the land; they were to observe them, that the land might not be defiled, and that the people might walk in the strength of Jehovah.

Cities of refuge appointed: regulations as to false witnesses

Three cities of refuge are appointed, and he who kills his neighbour, without hating him, is distinguished from the murderer: an important principle, as to the fate of the Jewish nation, which makes' a distinction between those who have taken a voluntary part in the death of the Lord, or who afterwards heartily approve the deed, and those who have done it ignorantly. The regulations of righteousness also against false witnesses are given here.

In Deuteronomy 20 we have the ordinances relative to war.

Principles of the ways of God with Israel

In Deuteronomy 21 we have three interesting cases, because of the principles which apply to the ways of God with Israel: the case of the man found slain; that of the child of the hated wife; and that of the rebellious son. The land of Jehovah must be kept pure. Israel will have to make this confession in the latter days, and to clear themselves of the blood of Messiah.

If the case of the two wives applies to Israel upon earth, it applies still more closely to Christ (Head of the Gentiles) and the assembly with whom He will inherit all things, although upon earth Israel be the wife beloved.

However, Israel, as a rebellious son under the old covenant, is condemned and cut off; as regards the redeemed, the curse of the law has fallen upon another. Those who read the Bible are too well acquainted with the application of the end of this chapter to make it needful for me to dwell upon it. The point here under consideration is the defiling of the land, which Jehovah had given for an inheritance to the people; the hardness of heart of the priests in applying the precept under the circumstances is appalling, yet natural.

Summary of Deuteronomy 16:18 to 21:23

I will now briefly sum up the subjects we have looked at from Deuteronomy 16:18. We have the means, in point of authority, employed of God to maintain the people in His ways, and in the knowledge of His will, that they might enjoy the land in peace. Judges and officers were to be appointed, and to judge with uprightness. The priest and the judge, raised up in an extraordinary manner, were to communicate, in case of need, the judgment and will of God, and the people were to obey them. In case the people wished for a king, directions are given respecting his conduct.

Directions are given for those Levites who should devote themselves to the service of Jehovah, in the place chosen by Him as His dwelling-place. The people, seeking to know the will of God, were not to consult diviners. Jehovah would raise up a prophet. Afterwards there is provision made to keep the land from being polluted with blood; the elders of the city were to take knowledge of the deed, whether the slayer had killed without set purpose.

The cities of refuge present a beautiful type of the state of Israel, as to their sin, in having killed the Lord Jesus, whether ignorantly (as the grace of God looks upon it with regard to those who repent), or knowingly (as perseverance in rejecting Him would be the proof of): this is the principle upon which God will judge them. So, in this last point of view, the people were placed under the searching severity of the law.

In Deuteronomy 20 provision is made to reconcile any war that might arise with the enjoyment of the land and the blessing of God, either individually or in case of conquest; and directions are given to secure the presence of the power of God, and to shew how the enemies were to be treated according to the mind of God; all mercy towards the nations of Canaan being prohibited, in order that Israel might not learn the abominations they were guilty of.

Deuteronomy 21 gives another provision for preventing the land from defilement by blood, while declaring (as elsewhere) that life belongs to God — that, when His rights are infringed, He will not wink at it. We cannot fail to see that the blood of Christ is, above all, that of which Israel is here (chap. 21) guilty (see Psalm 51), and the blood of Jesus is the only atonement for the sin which shed it. The elders excuse themselves by pleading their ignorance of what had been done. The same thing will take place with regard to Israel. So pleads also Paul. However, there is nothing but the blood of the heifer which never bore the yoke that can wipe away sin. Thus will the guilt of innocent blood be taken from off the people.

The following directions are indeed practical directions for Israel; but they seem to me to contain, at the same time, some of God's principles towards His people. Thus Israel upon earth, and the assembly in heaven, have both been the true firstborn, whom God will not disinherit. And the rebellious son presents also Israel in final disobedience to God.

Chapters 22 to 25

Ordinances to guard against want of benevolence and mercy, or tenderness and purity

Deuteronomy 22 appears to contain ordinances to guard the people from want of benevolence and mercy, and of that which would offend the sensibilities of nature, either with regard to tenderness or purity. So also all mixture was forbidden in ploughing or sowing. We find the same with regard to women: they were protected against the dishonour done to them by a brutish, inconsiderate husband; whilst impurity was punished with death.

Conducts and sentiments according to God's goodness, tenderness and kindness

Thus (Deut. 23) the people are taught what sentiments became them, according to God, with reference to the nations (taking the ways and doings of those nations into consideration) in case of war. They are also instructed in what was proper, as to the purity of the camp in case of war, seeing God was there. So with regard to all sorts of things, such as the slave that was escaped from his master; things morally impure; even the neighbour's vineyard; and (Deut. 24) a more serious thing, divorce, and everything relative to it; delicacy towards the poor, the hire of labourers, the gleaning for the poor.

The spirit of all these ordinances is very instructive, and the goodness and the tenderness of God, who deigns to take knowledge of all these things, and to teach His people delicacy, propriety, consideration for others, sensitiveness, and those feelings which, by removing brutality, and softening the hardness of the heart of man, fashion his ways according to that love with which the Spirit of God clothes Himself when He acts in the heart of man. Here, it is true, everything is imperfect. There are things taken for granted here, which form the basis of these ordinances, which the full operation of the Spirit of Christ would entirely take away; divorce, for instance, and other things endured; owing their existence to the hardness of man's heart. But the limitations and conditions, assigned by the law of God, keep in check the wickedness of that will which hardens itself, while it oppresses others.

Care taken that no family should perish, and for the maintenance of purity and uprightness

Deuteronomy 25 adds ordinances which are a continuation of what we have already read; taking care that none of their brethren should be dishonoured in their eyes, and that no family should perish from among the people (there being, at the same time, the maintenance of purity and uprightness).

Israel forbidden to seek peace with Amalek, the inveterate enemy of God

As to the inveterate enemies of God and His people, Israel was never to seek peace with them. Human amiability is often enmity with God. This ordinance is so much the more remarkable, because it follows so many others which made provision for kindness, even to a bird.

Forgetfulness of what was due to God and indifference toward evil shown in sparing Amalek

Jehovah had taken care that an Egyptian should find the entrance into the assembly of God; but those affections were to be in exercise towards the Egyptians for the good of the souls of the Israelites themselves. They were not to harden their hearts against those in whose midst they had sojourned. But to spare the Amalekites (who came to meet Israel to shut up their way and destroy the feeble ones among them) was to forget what was due to God, who brought them back; and, as regarded the people, it would have proved indifference of heart to evil, and not the effusion of a natural affection; neither was it yielding to remembrances, with which charity might mingle for good, by a becoming forgetfulness of wrongs formerly received.* Where there is nobleness of sentiment, men who know (though they have injured) each other, still will own one another when the evil is over. {* The Egyptians were merely that in which Israel was held naturally. The Amalekites were positive active enemies against them when the redeemed people of God. One was really man, though fallen man without God — I honour all men; the other, the positive direct power of the enemy.}

The different position of the Egyptian and of Amalek

But there is a spirit which claims nothing but disgust: to tolerate it is only sparing oneself, and admitting that very spirit into one's heart so as to partake of it. What is in question is not judging, but the state of one's own heart. The distance of an Egyptian from God was recognised; but if he were in relationship with Him during three generations, why should he be kept at a distance? why should he remain a stranger? But Amalek did not fear God — did not recognise Him. What then could be recognised in such a nation? We must bring God into our affairs — our relationships; and charity, firmness, justness in our judgments, will each find its place, and be reproduced in all our ways.

Chapter 26

Worship consequent on the enjoyment of the land

To close this succession of ordinances, we have (Deut. 26) a most beautiful picture of the worship consequent on the enjoyment of the land according to the promises of God, a picture full of instruction for us too. First, we find the main subject of this book appears as everywhere else: Israel is in the land which God had given him for an inheritance.

But, as to worship, it is not looked at here in the light of drawing near to God in the holy place, by means of sacrifices which, supposing sin, opened the way for the people into the presence of Jehovah. This characterises the whole book. Then the question was, could they, or how far could they, or how near could they or the priests — draw near to Jehovah in the sanctuary of His holiness. What Deuteronomy presents is, while acknowledging their previous state, the festal enjoyment of the effect of all the promises, only as coming from, and they themselves identified with Jehovah. (So in Deut. 12 and 14).* They enjoy the promise, and present themselves as worshippers, giving thanks as enjoying it. In presenting the firstfruits of the land of promise, they were to go up to the place where the Lord had placed His name. What then was the spirit of that worship? {* These two characters of worship, the wilderness worshipper's approach to Jehovah, and the enjoyment of promises in the land, are not separated for Christians as they are in these books, because we have entered into, and are in, the holiest, in heavenly places, and the things we enjoy are the things that are there. It is all one, though we shall reign over a subject inheritance, but our undefiled inheritance is there where we are entered. This is a blessed truth. It is with, not from. We have from; but we joy in God.}

Acknowledgment of the faithfulness of God

First, it was based on the open confession that they were in the full enjoyment of the effect of the promise of God. "I profess this day unto Jehovah that I am come unto the country which Jehovah sware unto our fathers to give us." That is the first feature of that worship — the full profession of being in the enjoyment of the effect of the promise. It was the acknowledgment of the faithfulness of God in the present communion of His goodness. Thereupon the offering was presented.

Confession of past misery and Jehovah's redemption

Then, in the presence of Jehovah, the worshipper made confession of the redemption and deliverance of the people. A Syrian, ready to perish, was his father; and afterwards, when his children, oppressed by the Egyptians, cried unto Jehovah, Jehovah had heard and delivered them with an outstretched arm, and had, by a display of His power, brought them up into the land they were enjoying.

Presentation of the firstfruits of God's blessings as the recognition of God in them

The second feature, then, is the confession of what their misery had been, of their impotency in time past, and that their redemption has been accomplished by Jehovah alone, to whom they were indebted for all these blessings. Thereupon the worshipper directly addresses Jehovah, presenting Him with the firstfruits of those blessings. It was the recognition of God in the blessings (the infallible effect of a work of God in the heart), and the only means of truly enjoying them; for God's blessings turn the heart away from Him, if their first effect is not to turn it to Him. That is the history of Israel, and a thousand times alas! in the details of life, that of our own hearts. A pious heart acknowledges God Himself in the blessing, before enjoying it. See a beautiful example in the conduct of Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, sent to fetch a wife for Isaac.

Rejoicing with God in consecration in purity

Then it is added, "And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which Jehovah thy God has given unto thee." They were to enjoy them with God; and, consequently, observe here, that in this the spirit of grace manifests itself at once: "Thou, the Levite, and the stranger that is within thy gate." It is impossible truly to rejoice in the blessing of God before Him, without the spirit of grace being present — without returning blessing for cursing, knowing that we are called to inherit His blessing. The same truth is found again in the tithes of the third year, given to the poor, the Levite, etc., according to the spirit which we have just spoken of.

Another feature of the state of heart of the true worshipper was holiness in consecrating to Jehovah, with uprightness of heart, that which was due to Him according to grace. He was not to be robbed in anything for appropriation to oneself: nothing was to be profaned by applying it to self — to defiled or interested uses.

In a word, the conscience was good as regarded consecration to Jehovah, in the things by which the worshipper acknowledged Him as the true and sole Author of all the blessings. And if Jehovah was the Author of them, communion with Him, in acknowledging Him, was enjoyed in the spirit of holiness, of consecration to Him, and in the spirit of goodness and grace that was in Him towards His poor and forsaken ones. The character of God is introduced again and again, and His name brought in, in that which is recognised in the communion of His people; if overlooked, the people were guilty and defiled, in that they had profaned the name of the Lord. This consecration in purity to God, and this expression of His goodness, are singularly beautiful. Then the blessing of God was implored not only upon oneself, from God who cared for all His people, but upon all Israel, upon the land which was the proof of the faithfulness of God and of the riches of His goodness.

Summary of chapter 26 as giving the spirit of the Book

This chapter is of great importance, and a kind of summing up of the spirit proposed of God in the whole book: it is the last chapter of the body of its contents. It refers to no promises to Abraham, Isaac, etc., but takes the history of Israel from Jacob's going down into Egypt, a Syrian ready to perish; oppressed in Egypt they cried to the God of their fathers, historically so known (not the promises), and they were delivered with great signs, and Jehovah had brought them into that good land where they were, and they brought the firstfruits of the land Jehovah had given them. It was the acknowledgment of the possession of blessing in the land given by Jehovah through grace. This was their worship; and they, and Levites, and strangers rejoiced together there in all the good Jehovah had given. They did so also, when they had given to fatherless, widows, Levites, strangers, the tithes of the third year, which were eaten within their gates, they declare their cleanness and uprightness; there had been no profanation, but obedience in all things as to their ordinances; and thereupon an appeal to God for blessing on the people and the land. The land possessed, its firstfruits offered to Jehovah; then comes rejoicing in all the good Jehovah gave; then fellowship in grace with all in need every third year, and with this, avowal of purity of ways, thoroughness in doing it, and obedience, and so a blessing looked for. It is a picture of the true state of the people with Jehovah, and in the land, and walking uprightly,

considering the needy, that the blessing might rest upon them; and on this ground they now entered into covenant with Jehovah to possess and enjoy the land in obedience, and be fully blessed and exalted.

This worship was, then, a bond between the people and God, in the communion of what He was; that is, a bond in worship by acknowledging what He was; and by bearing witness to it. Thus, according to the commandments of Jehovah, looked at as the conditions of this bond, God had that day acknowledged the people, and the people had acknowledged Jehovah for their God. This closes the teaching of the book.

Chapter 27

The law written on the altar: blessings or curses following obedience or disobedience

Now comes the sanction — that is to say, that which gives vigour to His law — in the consequences (blessings and curses) which were to correspond with obedience or disobedience. This is brought out in chapter 27 and two following chapters.

Deuteronomy 27 is by itself, however, and is of rather wide scope in the understanding of the word of God. If individual piety expressed itself in the manner we have seen in the preceding chapter, the public relations of the people with God were based on the threats of the law. When the people should have gone over Jordan to take possession of the land of promise (an idea which constantly presents itself), having set up great stones and plastered them with plaster, they were to write the law upon them. This law contained the conditions on which the land was to be enjoyed.

Mounts Ebal and Gerizim

The people were to divide themselves into two companies of tribes, part being placed upon Mount Gerizim to bless, the other upon Ebal to curse. Upon the latter was an altar to be erected to Jehovah, not for sin-offerings, but for burnt-offerings and peace-offerings: a worship pre-supposing a righteous people in communion with Jehovah, but placed under the curse if they should break the law. The announcement of the curses follows, ending with that curse which would rest on every one, not continuing in all the things which were written in the book of the law to do them. But the blessings of Gerizim are entirely omitted.

It is needless to insist upon the importance of this blank. The apostle seizes on it as the place of all under the law. "As many as are of the works of the law* are under the curse," says the apostle: "for it is written, Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law." There is no possibility of escape. No one, except the Lord Jesus, has accomplished it; and He, if one may so speak, did not raise an altar for burnt-offering, an altar of worship for a righteous man who had fulfilled the law — for Himself alone; but He offered Himself for us on that mountain of cursing as an offering for sin, and has thus silenced for ever all those threats and curses. The blessing of Gerizim, consequently, is not sufficient either. Heaven, and, moreover, for Him, the Father's throne, are the only

worthy answer and reward for what He has accomplished by suffering for our sins. But this is the righteousness of God, giving to Christ, and so consequently to us, what He was fully entitled to in having glorified God, and to us what He has obtained for us. {* This expression does not contemplate the conduct, but the principle on which we stand before God. Those who are of faith are linked with faithful Abraham; those that are of the works of the law are under the curse, for the law saith, "Cursed," etc.}

The principles of chapters 26 and 27

The connection between the principles of chapter 26 and those of chapter 27 is deeply interesting: the fulfilment of the promise in the enjoyment of the land, the basis of thanksgivings and of the worship which has its source in redemption; afterwards the altar, the service to be rendered to God, a service linked to His law, the violation of which, in a single point, brought the curse. This was the condition of their enjoyment of it.

It is in that point of view, the only one which went to the root of the question, that the apostle looks at it. It is on the ground of this covenant of Deuteronomy that the people became the people of Jehovah on their entering the land (compare vers. 2, 10, and Deut. 29:1).

Chapters 28 and 29

The immediate consequences of obedience or disobedience

In Deuteronomy 28 we have the principles of God's government in the midst of that people, and the immediate consequences of obedience or disobedience — consequences so solemnly fulfilled in the fate of that unhappy people, still beloved for the fathers sakes. The consequences of the violation of the law as a principle of relationship with God, as to the point of a righteousness which was adequate ground of God's acceptance, must not be confounded with the temporary consequences of disobedience under the government of God. It is to these latter that chapter 28 has reference. We may notice for ourselves the deep instruction of verses 47, 48. As to Israel, universal history presents to us the accomplishment of the threats of the chapter.

God's exhortations applied to the conscience; His unalterable purpose

Deuteronomy 29 is the personal application to the conscience of the people, both collectively and individually, of all that precedes, that there may be no bitter root of sin (compare Heb. 12:15, the application of this exhortation to the discipline and the loving care of saints now).

Verse 29 requires to be noticed. We find in it the contrast between the consequences thus revealed of obedience and disobedience, and the purposes of God in behalf of the people, notwithstanding their disobedience — purposes which evidently could not be a rule for their conduct. The rule was found in the ordinance of the law. The meaning of this verse has been so twisted, that it is worth while thus to point out its force. The secret things are the purposes of God with regard to the people, though they

should have been disobedient and driven out of the land; but, although they are not the rule of conduct, they are revealed and are of deep interest. In what follows, God begins already to present them to our attention, and surely it becomes us to consider them.

Summary of chapters 27, 28, 29

Thus we have, in these chapters, the relationship of the pious Jew with God, grounded upon the accomplishment of the promises made to the fathers, in the present enjoyment of the land; the relationship of the people with God, in view of the curse pronounced upon the violation of the law; the relationship of the people with God, according to the principles of His government, the consequences brought in, either by their obedience or disobedience: and, finally, after the disobedience, and when this has produced its fruit, the designs of God according to His purpose, which nothing could alter.

Chapter 30

A new principle: faith laying hold of the spirit of the law and turning the heart to Jehovah

We must now dwell a little on this last point. Deuteronomy 30 furnishes us with an important principle. It supposes that the people have already incurred the consequences of disobedience, and they are seen as driven out of the land, and strangers among distant nations. The law could not be followed out in such a case; and, indeed, the violation of the law had even then produced its fruits.

But then quite a new principle is introduced: the return of the hearts of the people to Jehovah, and obedience, one must add, in spirit. Thereupon Jehovah brings them back into their land, and blesses them in it. The curse is put on their enemies; and they are to observe in the land the ordinances of Jehovah, enjoying anew His full blessing; for the commandment was neither in heaven, nor beyond the seas, but in the mouth and in the heart. This was not the new covenant, but faith laying hold of the spirit of the law in principle, and turning the heart towards Jehovah, when the law was externally impracticable.

The principle of the return of the heart when under the curse of the law

The establishment of the new covenant, based on this return of the heart, at a time appointed of God, will be something well defined. Here we have the principle of their return when under the curse of the law they had broken. Hence, the apostle quotes this passage for the basis of the principle, as a testimony given to what righteousness by faith was, applying it to Christ Himself — the return of the heart to the object and end of the law, when judgment was on them for its violation, and hope of righteousness by its accomplishment impossible — how Christ was the end of the law for righteousness. The principle is found here. The apostle brings in Christ as the true accomplishment of it. At the end of the chapter, Moses declares that he has now set before them the good and the evil, and that they would have to bear the consequence of their choice.

Chapter 31

Joshua the leader into the promised land: the law a written witness against the people

In Deuteronomy 31 he introduces Joshua, as the leader under whom the people were to take possession of the promised land. He orders that the law should be read before all every seventh year, in order that every one might take notice of it, in that solemn moment when, enjoying afresh, as it were, the blessing which it secured to them, they submitted to it as a testimony that the land, as well as everything, belonged to Jehovah. Afterwards, when Joshua is established in his charge, Moses is ordered to communicate to the people a song inspired of God, which, based upon the certainty of the iniquity of the people, announces the ways of the Lord towards them; commanding the Levites, at the same time, to put the written law by the side of the ark, as a witness against the people.

Chapter 32

Moses' prophetic song based on the people's foreknown fall

We have the prophetic song, which is based on the foreknown fall of the people. First, it declares the perfectness of Jehovah, whatever may take place; it is Israel who have corrupted themselves (compare Ps. 22:3. Christ can say, "Why?") At the same time (ver. 8) we have an all-important declaration; namely, that God, in His government of the world, had made Israel the centre, and had arranged the nations of the earth, in their various localities, as having respect to the bounds of Israel as being the first object of those ways. For His earthly people are Jehovah's portion, His inheritance upon earth. But Jeshurun (Israel) waxed fat, and kicked, and forsook the Rock of his strength. Consequently God moves them to jealousy with those that are not a people. It is the call of the Gentiles, according to Romans 10:19.

God's ways with Israel and the Gentiles

The judgment, nevertheless, falls upon Israel, so that God would have destroyed them, had not the glory of His name hindered Him, for the Gentiles proved themselves perfectly wicked. Then, the people being distressed, without strength and without hope, He remembers them, and finally takes vengeance on their enemies, those idolatrous Gentiles. But, though avenging Himself, it is then that, having restored His people Israel, He will cause the Gentiles to rejoice in Him.

Israel yet to be restored, and God's mercy shown to His land and His people

This principle is true already; but the testimony it furnishes will be fully accomplished when Israel is again restored to the enjoyment of the promises; when God will manifest His mercy towards His land, as well as towards His people. The whole course of His dealings, in respect of the people who form the

centre of His ways upon earth, is thus fully brought out. Afterwards, Moses puts obedience (the great end of this book, Israel being placed under the condition of obedience for continuance in the enjoyment of the promises) before them again, and reminds them that thereby they would prolong their days in the land which they were going up to possess.

Moses' sight of the land

At last poor Moses has to go up Mount Nebo, to see the land into which he cannot enter, not having answered the requirement of the glory of God in the wilderness, nor sanctified His name by faith. It is the unavoidable consequence of the just government of God towards a servant — I mean under the law. He does not get into the enjoyment of the promise. A single fault deprives him of it.

Chapter 33

The blessings of Moses over the people according to those of God

We have also the blessings of this man of God, pronounced over the people before his death (Deut. 33). The blessings of Jacob were more historical regarding the future. Here they are rather relationship with God according to His government. Twelve is still the number of the tribes (Simeon being omitted to make room for two tribes of the posterity of Joseph, the firstborn as to the inheritance, instead of Reuben). Here it is according to the blessing of God, and not according to the rights of nature. Upon this latter principle, Israel, represented by Reuben, will be diminished, but will not die.

Jehovah is there in majesty, with the terror of the law in His right hand; but He loves the people, that is to say, His saints there surrounding Him to receive His words. The people receive a law, through the mediation of Moses, which is the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. This Moses is there as king. These, then, are the relationships on which these blessings are based.

Jehovah's blessings according to the majesty of Sinai and of the revelation of Himself

The blessings are not here presented historically as those of the children of the fathers, and, consequently, in connection with Shiloh, the Rock of Israel, nor as a complete view of God's ways in Israel, as in Genesis; but the subject is the relationship of Jehovah with the people, as in possession of the land (as in the rest of the book), and placed under the government of God: Jehovah blessing, but blessing according to the majesty of Sinai, and of His revelation of Himself in the bush; Moses, the king, being the channel of these blessings, which had thus reference to the nation, and were based upon this relationship with God.

Thus Levi is blessed, having been faithful to Jehovah; Joseph has the blessing and the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush, having been separated from his brethren, fearing God, and being the vessel of His purposes. This was accordingly the position of the two tribes in the land, as Simeon, not mentioned

here, was, so to speak, lost in the land; his portion was where the Philistines dwelt.

Why the chief blessings rest on Levi and Joseph

We must also remark here, that the chief blessings rest upon him who, for the sake of God, neither knew his father, nor his mother, that is, Levi; and upon Joseph, who, for the glory of God, was separated from his own. Both were His. Levi has the most excellent place; his separation, which should actually take place, was a fruit of faithfulness. Joseph has, perhaps, more sensible enjoyment; he was faithful to God in his involuntary separation. Both these are completely realised in Christ.

Reuben and Judah

If the blessing of God preserves life to Reuben, with but few men, Judah is presented to Jehovah, that he may be heard, and that the help of Jehovah may be with him. The expression, "Bring him unto his people," deserves careful notice, in the relations which have existed between that people and God, seeing the position of Judah in their history, under the government of God, and its present dispersion, and in that which is yet to take place, when the union of the whole people will be restored in their own place.

Levi and the everlasting priesthood

Levi occupies the third place, Simeon being left out. The request of the prophet-king for him (Levi) is the everlasting priesthood of the people of God (upon earth, of course). "His holy one" is used in the sense of piety towards God — grace in the heart. He requests that light and perfection (Urim and Thummim) in the intelligence of the relations which would in reality exist at all times between the people and God, and between God and the people in return, might be with the man of grace and piety, officially the priestly tribe.

But the basis of this request is remarkable, as to the government of God. God proved the people at Massah, and strove with them at Meribah. Now, that is precisely what is attributed to Israel historically. They tried (or tempted) God at Massah, and strove With Him at Meribah. But where the flesh manifested itself in Israel, there did God put His priest to the test, and at the waters of Meribah, where Moses did not sanctify Him, He was in controversy with Moses.* Painful circumstances — the being deprived of the stream of manifest and sensible blessings in the midst of the people of God, a state which makes room for the manifestation of rebellious flesh, and for murmurs against God in the wilderness, tempting God and saying, "Is He amongst us?" — are trials to which God subjects His priests. The church, in her priestly position, and especially those who have the good of the church at heart, are also put to the test, to see whether they know how to reckon upon the blessing of God, however things may be. {* No doubt the fall of this man of God was the effect of his previous state, for he was a man. Trial, when we are not going on well, is chastening, but needful chastening, and a blessing in result. Therefore, at the same time that it is a blessing, it is said, "Lead us not into temptation."}

Levi put to the test

But, although Levi was put to the test in his priesthood, he had been put to the test in order to obtain it; and Levi had not hesitated one moment in choosing between man and God — even man in the nearest relationship according to the flesh. That is the sole basis of all-priesthood. One can only stand before God on the behalf of another, in proportion as one has oneself stood truly for God before man. For with what God would one be a mediator? It would not be with the holy God, who has a right to our whole being. There could only, as to sinners, be the sympathy of the flesh, which connects itself with sins.

One must be accepted in the presence of God according to His holiness, in order to be able to intercede for man in his weakness. This is absolutely true of Jesus, and of us all in a practical sense. But to be so, there must be the testimony when the question is raised; and this must needs cost us something before men. One must be for God, not sparing oneself, hating father and mother. This instruction is important. There must also be the distinguishing between the trial of our priesthood and the trial of ourselves before entering upon it. Here the practical trial, where we are so, is spoken of, for we are priests by grace, yet fitted by full exercise of heart, separating us to God.

Benjamin and Joseph Zebulun, Issachar and Gad

It would seem that the place of Benjamin, in relation with Jehovah, was in His favour; being kept near Him, as has been the case with that tribe, within whose limits was Jerusalem.

Joseph had his earthly blessing by the title of firstborn; as to the inheritance, his land is blessed, the double portion is assigned to him.

I have no remarks to make on the other blessings, except that those of Zebulun and Issachar seem to be yet future, and those of Gad to establish the relations which existed already.

God exalted Himself to bless His people in the end

But, moreover, if the ways of God towards His people were connected with their faithfulness and the manifestation of Himself — if God suited His ways to their conduct to manifest His government and Himself — He also exalted Himself above all to bless and to keep. He would fall back upon the title of His own glory in order to be to them an infallible source of blessing and security; He would make known His glory in the behalf of Israel; He rode upon the heavens in their help. Where His majesty was, there was the help of the people. He would uphold them also, would destroy their enemies, and then should Israel dwell in safety alone. The nations should dwell in a fruitful land, on which the heavens would drop down blessings as dew. Happy people! objects of the deliverance of God, who was unto them as a shield and a sword. Their enemies would be subdued under them.

Thus, whatever might be the details of the relationship of the people with God, in His government of them, He would bless them in the end, as a people, according to His sovereign glory and majesty.

Chapter 34

Moses, as the servant of God, belonged to the wilderness and could not enter the land

We have now to consider a little the prohibition to which Moses was subjected, not to enter the land of promise. Moses, the man of God, might pronounce the blessings on Israel as in the land; but he himself, as servant of God, belonged to the wilderness. There are more things than one to be weighed here. As to the position of Moses, it was that of the government of a people, placed under the principles of Sinai; that is, while under the government of God, it was in the flesh that His people were subjected to that government (compare Rom. 9:5, where the subject is fully discussed).

Man in the flesh cannot enjoy the promises

Now, man in the flesh, under the government of God, cannot come into the enjoyment of the promise. This is true even of a Christian. Risen with Christ, he is seated in the heavenly places, he enjoys the promise in the presence of God; or, at least, his affections look up there, his life is hid there with Christ;* but, as a man upon earth, he is under the government of God, who acts towards him according to the manifestation of the spiritual life here below; and Christ is between him and God, exercising priesthood and advocacy, which do not establish righteousness (that is done once for all), but which maintain the relationship of weak men with God in the light — to the fellowship of which they are called in Christ who is in it — by obtaining mercy and grace to help in time of need so that they should not fall, or to restore them if they do, through the advocacy by the operation of the Spirit upon earth. {* The former is the teaching of the Ephesians, the second, of the Colossians. In the former, dead in sin, he is raised up and set in Christ in heavenly places. It is a new creation. In the latter, he has died to sin and is risen, with Christ, and his affections are to be set on heavenly things. In this last epistle he is viewed also as dead in sins and quickened together with Christ, but not as sitting in heavenly places.

Crossing Jordan was our death and resurrection with Christ in a figure. Joshua always represents Christ, Head of His people, according to the power of the Spirit. But the wilderness is this world. Moses directs and governs the people there according to God; consequently he does not enter into Canaan. The difference between the Red Sea and the Jordan The difference (we shall dwell on that more at length when we study the Book of Joshua) between the Red Sea and Jordan is, that the Red Sea was the efficacy of redemption through the death and resurrection of Christ Himself, and we are viewed, withal, in Him; Jordan was the application of it to the soul, as having died with Him in order to the enjoyment of the promises. The passage of the Red Sea was followed by songs of joy; that of Jordan, by conflict and the realisation of the promises.

Moses' fault when wearied with evil

As to Moses himself, personally, the fault which precluded his entrance into the land is well known. Provoked by the rebellion of Israel, and wearied with caring for the people, instead of exalting God in the eyes of Israel, he exalted himself. He made use of the gift of God for that purpose; he did not sanctify Jehovah in the eyes of the people; he did not give Him His place. God does not become weary in His goodness; and thus acting in discipline, for the good of His people, according to His majesty, He

can always fall back upon those ways of direct blessing which flow from His unfailing grace. Man wearied with the evil that vexes him, tries to exalt himself, to put himself above the evil, and to shelter himself from it, because he is not above it. He no longer glorifies God; he exalts himself and he is abased.

If Moses, instead of acting according to the flesh, had remembered that it was not he or his glory which was in question (and how often had he himself told them so!) but God, he would have felt that the people could not touch the glory of God; and this unfailing glory would have sustained him, looking only at that glory which ever maintains itself; so that if we only seek to maintain it, we may rest upon it.

But he lacked faith, and was forbidden to enter into that which only the perfection of glory could open to men; and, indeed, what could lead Israel safely through the desert and into the land of Canaan? Pure grace alone. Moses was not able to apprehend the height of the grace that conquers everything. It was according to that grace, as we have seen, that God acted at Meribah.

New creation needed to enjoy the promises

Now, the law could not lead into life; and, therefore, the flesh, the world, and the law, ever correlative in the ways of God, were found in the journey through the wilderness; and Moses remains there. He might, as a man of God and a prophet, tell of grace, as making sure the blessing of Israel (Deut. 33:26-29). Faithful in all his house, as a servant, he remains on this side Jordan; a proof, in these touching circumstances, that an absolutely new creation is needed to enjoy the promises of God, according to that grace which can alone, after all, bring one in safety even through the wilderness — the unfailing grace of our God.

Moses' death: the purpose of his honoured burial by Jehovah

Moses dies, and, buried by Jehovah, does not serve as an object of carnal veneration to a people at all times ready to fall into this sin, when his name gave them honour according to the flesh; just as they continually opposed him, when his presence according to God thwarted the flesh. He was a man honoured of God, who scarcely had his equal (He of course excepted who had none); but nevertheless he was man, and man is but vanity.