

**Deuteronomy 12**

—C. H. Mackintosh

The discourses contained in the first eleven chapters of Deuteronomy 12 having established the all-important principle of obedience, we now come to the practical application of the principle to the habits and ways of the people when settled in possession of the land. "These are the statutes and judgments which ye shall observe to do in the land which the Lord God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth."

It is of the utmost moral importance that the heart and conscience should be brought into their true attitude in reference to divine authority, irrespective altogether of any question as to details. These will find their due place when once the heart is taught to bow down, in complete and absolute submission, to the supreme authority of the Word of God.

Now, as we have seen in our studies on the first eleven chapters, the lawgiver labours, most earnestly and faithfully to lead the heart of Israel into this all-essential condition. He felt, to speak after the manner of men, it was of no use entering upon practical details until the grand foundation-principle of all morality was fully established in the very deepest depths of the soul. The principle is this (let us Christians apply our hearts to it): It is man's bounden duty to bow implicitly to the authority of the Word of God. It matters not, in the smallest degree, what that Word may enjoin, or whether we can see the reason of this, that, or the other institution. The one grand, all-important, and conclusive point is this: Has God spoken? If He has, that is quite enough. There is no room, no need, for any further question.

Until this point is fully established, or rather until the heart is brought directly under its full moral force, we are not in a condition to enter upon details. If self-will be allowed to operate, if blind reason be permitted to speak, the heart will send up its endless questionings; as each divine institution is laid before us, some fresh difficulty will present itself as a stumbling-block in the path of simple obedience.

What! it may be said, are we not to use our reason? If not, to what end was it given? To this we have a twofold reply. In the first place, our reason is not as it was when God gave it. We have to remember that sin has come in; man is a fallen creature; his reason, his judgment, his understanding — his whole moral being is a complete wreck; and moreover, it was the neglect of the Word of God that caused all this wreck and ruin.

And then, in the second place, we must bear in mind that if reason were in a sound condition, it would prove its soundness by bowing to the Word of God. But it is not sound; it is blind, and utterly perverted; it is not to be trusted for a moment in things spiritual, divine, or heavenly.

If this simple fact were thoroughly understood, it would settle a thousand questions and remove a thousand difficulties. It is reason that makes all the infidels. The devil whispers into man's ear, "You are endowed with reason; why not use it? It was given to be used — used in every thing; you ought not to give your assent to any thing which your reason cannot grasp. It is your chartered right as a man to submit every thing to the test of your reason; it is only for a fool or an idiot to receive, in blind credulity, all that is set before him."

What is our answer to such wily and dangerous suggestions? A very simple and conclusive one; namely, this: The Word of God is above and beyond reason altogether, it is as far above reason as God is above the creature, or heaven above earth. Hence, when God speaks, all reasonings must be cast down. If it be merely man's word, man's opinion, man's judgment, then verily reason may exert its powers; or rather, to speak more correctly, we must judge what is said by the only perfect standard — the Word of God. But if reason be set to work on the Word of God, the soul must inevitably be plunged in the thick darkness or infidelity, from which the descent to the awful blackness of atheism is but too easy.

In a word, then, we have to remember — yea, to cherish in the very deepest depths of our moral being, that the only safe ground for the soul is, divinely wrought faith in the paramount authority, divine majesty, and all-sufficiency of the Word of God. This was the ground which Moses occupied in dealing with the heart and conscience of Israel. His one grand object was, to lead the people into the attitude of profound, unqualified subjection to divine authority. Without this, all was useless. If every statute, every judgment, every precept, every institution, were to be submitted to the action of human reason, then farewell to divine authority, farewell to Scripture, farewell to certainty, farewell to peace but on the other hand, when the soul is led by God's Spirit into the delightful attitude of absolute and unquestioning submission to the authority of God's Word, then every one of His judgments, every one of His commandments, every sentence of His

blessed book, is received as coming direct from Himself, and the most simple ordinance or institution stands invested with all the importance which His authority is fitted to impart. We may not be able to understand the full meaning or exact bearing of each statute and judgment, — that is not the question; it is sufficient for us to know that it comes from God. He has spoken; this is conclusive. Till this great principle is grasped, or rather till it takes full possession of the soul, nothing is done; but when it is fully understood and submitted to, the solid foundation is laid for all true morality.

The foregoing line of thought will enable the reader to seize the connection between the chapter which now lies open before us and the preceding section of this book; and not only will it do this, but we trust it will also help him to understand the special place and bearing of the opening verses of chapter 12.

"Ye shall utterly destroy all the places wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree. And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place" (vv. 2-3).

The land was Jehovah's; they were to hold as tenants under Him, and therefore their very first duty on entering upon possession was, to demolish every trace of the old idolatry. This was absolutely indispensable. It might, according to human reason, seem to be very intolerant to act in this way toward other people's religion. We reply, without any hesitation, Yes, it was intolerant; for how could the one only true and living God be otherwise than intolerant of all false gods and false worship? To suppose for a moment that He could permit the worship of idols in His land would be to suppose that He could deny Himself, which were simply blasphemy.

Let us not be misunderstood. It is not that God does not bear with the world, in His long-suffering mercy. It seems hardly needful to state this, with the history of well-nigh six thousand years of divine forbearance before our eyes. Blessed forever be His holy name, He has borne with the world most marvelously from the days of Noah, and He still bears with it, though stained with the guilt of crucifying His beloved Son.

All this is plain, but it leaves wholly untouched the great principle laid down in our chapter. Israel had to learn that they were about to take possession of the Lord's land, and that, as His tenants, their first and indispensable duty was, to obliterate every trace of idolatry. To them there was to be but "the one God." His name was called upon them. They were His people, and He could not permit them to have fellowship with demons. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God; and Him only shalt thou serve."

This might, in the judgment of the uncircumcised nations around, seem very intolerant, very narrow, very bigoted. They indeed might boast of their freedom, and glory in the broad platform of their worship which admitted "gods many and lords many." It might, according to their thinking, argue greater breadth of mind to let every one think for himself in matters of religion, and choose his own object of worship, and his own mode of worshipping also; or, still further, it might give evidence of a more advanced condition of civilization, greater polish and refinement, to erect, as in Rome, a Pantheon, in which all the gods of heathendom might find a place. "What did it matter about the form of a man's religion, or the object of his worship, provided he himself were sincere? All would be sure to come right in the end; the great point for all was, to attend to material progress, to help on national prosperity as the surest means of securing individual interests. Of course, it is all right for every man to have some religion, but as to the form of that religion, it is immaterial. The great question is, what you are yourself, not what your religion is."

All this, we can well conceive, would admirably suit the carnal mind, and be very popular amongst the uncircumcised nations; but as for Israel, they had to remember that one commanding sentence, "The Lord thy God is one God;" and again, "Thou shalt have none other gods before Me." This was to be their religion; the platform of their worship was to be as wide and as narrow as the one true and living God, their Creator and Redeemer. That, assuredly, was broad enough for every true worshipper — every member of the circumcised assembly — all whose high and holy privilege it was to belong to the Israel of God. They were not to concern themselves with the opinions or observations of the uncircumcised nations around. What were they worth? Not the weight of a feather. What could they know about the claims of the God of Israel upon His circumcised people? Just nothing. Were they competent to decide as to the proper breadth of Israel's platform? Clearly not; they were wholly ignorant of the subject. Hence their thoughts, reasonings, arguments, and objections were perfectly worthless, not to be listened to for a moment. It was Israel's one, simple, bounden duty to bow down to the supreme and absolute authority of the word of God; and that word insisted upon the complete abolition of every trace of idolatry from that goodly land which they were privileged to hold as tenants under Him.

But not only was it incumbent upon Israel to abolish all the places in which the heathen had worshipped their gods — this they were solemnly bound to do, most surely; but there was more than this. The heart might readily conceive the thought of doing away with idolatry in the various places, and setting up the altar of the true God instead — this might seem to be

the right course to adopt; but God thought differently. "Ye shall not do so unto the Lord your God. But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put His name there, even unto His habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come; and thither ye shall bring your burnt-offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave-offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your free-will offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks; and there ye shall eat before the Lord your God; and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the Lord thy God hath blessed thee."

Here a great cardinal truth is unfolded to the congregation of Israel. They were to have one place of worship — a place chosen of God, and not of man. His habitation — the place of His presence was to be Israel's grand centre; thither they were to come with their sacrifices and their offerings, and there they were to offer their worship, and find their common joy.

Does this seem exclusive? Of course it was exclusive; how else could it be? If God was pleased to select a spot in which He would take up His abode in the midst of His redeemed people, surely they were, of necessity, shut up to that spot as their place of worship. This was divine exclusiveness, and every pious soul would delight in it. Every true lover of Jehovah would say, with all his heart, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honor dwelleth;" and again, "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God...Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house; they will be still praising Thee... A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of My God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps. 26, 84).

Here was the one grand and all-important point. It was the dwelling-place of Jehovah which was dear to the heart of every true Israelite. Restless self-will might desire to run hither and thither, the poor vagrant heart might long for some change, but, for the heart that loved God, any change from the place of His presence, the place where He had recorded His blessed name, could only be a change for the worse. The truly devout worshiper could find satisfaction and delight, blessing and rest, only in the place of the divine presence; and this, on the double ground — the authority of His precious Word and the powerful attractions of His presence. Such an one could never think of going anywhere else. Whither could he go? There was but one altar, one habitation, one God — that was the place for every right-minded, every true-hearted Israelite. To think of any other place of worship would, in his judgment, be not only a departure from the word of Jehovah, but from His holy habitation.

This great principle is largely insisted upon throughout the whole of our chapter. Moses reminds the people that from the moment they entered Jehovah's land there was to be an end to all the irregularity and self-will that had characterized them in the plains of Moab, or in the wilderness. "Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the Lord your God giveth you. But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the Lord your God giveth you to inherit, and when He giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose, to cause His name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you... Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt-offerings in every place that thou seest; but in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt-offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee" (vv. 4-14).

Thus, not only in the object, but also in the place and mode of Israel's worship, they were absolutely shut up to the commandment of Jehovah. Self-pleasing, self-choosing self-will was to have an end, in reference to the worship of God, the moment they crossed the river of death and, as a redeemed people, planted their foot on their divinely given inheritance. Once there, in the enjoyment of Jehovah's land, and the rest which the land afforded, obedience to His word was to be their reasonable, their intelligent service. Things might be allowed to pass in the wilderness which could not be tolerated in Canaan. The higher the range of privilege, the higher the responsibility and the standard of action.

Now, it may be that our broad thinkers, and those who contend for freedom of will and freedom of action, for the right of private judgment in matters of religion, for liberality of mind and catholicity of spirit, will be ready to pronounce all this which has been engaging our attention extremely narrow, and wholly unsuited to our enlightened age, and to men of intelligence and education.

What is our answer to all who adopt this form of speech? A very simple and conclusive one; it is this: Has not God a right to prescribe the mode in which His people should worship Him? Had He not a perfect right to fix the place where He would meet His people Israel? Surely we must either deny His existence, or admit His absolute and unquestionable right to set forth His will as to how, when, and where His people should approach Him. Will any one, however educated and enlightened, deny this? Is it a proof of high culture, refinement, breadth of mind, or catholicity of spirit to deny God His rights?

If then God has a right to command, is it narrowness or bigotry for His people to obey? This is just the point. It is, in our judgment, as simple as anything can be. We are thoroughly convinced that the only true breadth of mind, largeness of heart, and catholicity of spirit is, to obey the commandments of God. Hence, when Israel were commanded to go to one place and there offer their sacrifices, it most assuredly was neither bigotry nor narrowness on their part to go thither, and to refuse, with holy decision, to go anywhere else. Uncircumcised Gentiles might go where they pleased; the Israel of God were to go only to the place of His appointment.

And oh, what an unspeakable privilege for all who loved God and loved one another to assemble themselves at the place where He recorded His name, and what touching grace shines in the fact of His desiring to gather His people around Himself from time to time! Did that fact infringe their personal rights and domestic privileges? Nay, it enhanced them immensely. God, in His infinite goodness, took care of this. It was His delight to minister to the joy and blessing of His people, privately, socially, and publicly. Hence we read, "When the Lord thy God shall enlarge thy border, as He hath promised thee, and thou shalt say, I will eat flesh, because thy soul longeth to eat flesh, thou mayest eat flesh, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after. If the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to put His name there be too far from thee, then thou shalt kill of thy herd and of thy flock, which the Lord hath given thee, as I have commanded thee, and thou shalt eat in thy gates whatsoever thy soul lusteth after. Even as the roebuck and the hart is eaten, so thou shalt eat them; the unclean and the clean shall eat of them alike."

Here we have, most surely, a broad margin afforded by the goodness and tender mercy of God for the fullest range of personal and family enjoyment. The only restriction was in reference to the blood — "Only be sure that thou eat not the blood; for the blood is the life, and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh. Thou shalt not eat it; thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water. Thou shalt not eat it; that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the Lord."

This was a great cardinal principle under the law, to which reference has been made in our "Notes on Leviticus." How far Israel understood it is not the question; they were to obey, that it might go well with them and with their children after them. They were to own, in this matter, the solemn rights of God.

Having made this exception in reference to personal and family habits, the lawgiver returns to the all-important subject of their public worship. "Only thy holy things which thou hast, and thy vows, thou shalt take, and go unto the place which the Lord shall choose; and thou shalt offer thy burnt-offerings, the flesh and the blood, upon the altar of the Lord thy God; and the blood of the sacrifices shall be poured out upon the altar of the Lord thy God, and thou shalt eat the flesh" (vv. 26-27).

If reason, or self-will, were permitted to speak, It might say, Why must we all go to this one place? Can we not have an altar at home? or, at least, an altar in each principal town, or in the centre of each tribe? The conclusive answer is, God has commanded otherwise; this is enough for every true Israelite. Even though we may not be able, by reason or our ignorance, to see the why or the wherefore, simple obedience is our obvious and bounden duty. It may be, moreover, that, as we cheerfully tread the path of obedience, light will break in upon our souls as to the reason, and we shall find abundant blessing in doing that which is well-pleasing to the Lord our God.

Yes, reader, this is the proper method of answering all the reasonings and questionings of the carnal mind, which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Light is sure to break in upon our souls as we tread, with a lowly mind, the sacred path of obedience; and not only so, but untold blessing will flow into the heart in that conscious nearness to God which is only known to those who lovingly keep His most precious commandments. Are we called upon to explain to carnal objectors and infidels our reasons for doing this or that? Most certainly not; that is no part of our business: it would be time and labour lost, inasmuch as objectors and reasoners are wholly incapable of understanding or appreciating our reasons.

For example, in the matter now under our consideration, could a carnal mind — an unbeliever — a mere child of nature understand why Israel's twelve tribes were commanded to worship at one altar, to gather in one place, to cluster around one centre? Not in the smallest degree. The grand moral reason of such a lovely institution lies far away beyond his ken.

But to the spiritual mind, all is as plain as it is beautiful. Jehovah would gather His beloved people around Himself, from time to time, that they might rejoice together before Him, and that He might have His own peculiar joy in them. Was not this something most precious? Assuredly it was, to all who really loved the Lord.

No doubt, if the heart were cold and careless toward God, it would matter little about the place of worship — all places would be alike; but we may set it down as a fixed principle that every loyal, loving heart, from Dan to Beersheba, would rejoice to flock to the place where Jehovah had recorded His name, and where He had appointed to meet His people. "I

was glad when they said unto me, Let us go unto the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem [God's centre for Israel]. Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together; whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. For there" — and nowhere else— "are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good" (Ps. 122).

Here we have the lovely breathings of a heart that loved the habitation of the God of Israel — His blessed centre — the gathering-place of Israel's twelve tribes — that hallowed spot which was associated, in the mind of every true Israelite, with all that was bright and joyous in connection with the worship of Jehovah and the communion of His people.

We shall have occasion to refer to this most delightful theme again when we come to study the sixteenth chapter of our book, and shall draw this section to a close by quoting for the reader the last paragraph of the chapter before us.

"When the Lord thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land; take heed to thyself, that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God, for every abomination to the Lord, which He hated, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (vv. 29-32).

The precious Word of God was to form a sacred enclosure round about His people, within which they might enjoy His presence, and delight themselves in the abundance of His mercy and loving-kindness, and wherein they were to be entirely apart from all that was offensive to Him whose presence was to be, at once, their glory, their joy, and their grand moral safeguard from every snare and every abomination.

Alas! Alas! They did not abide within that enclosure; they speedily broke down the walls thereof, and wandered away from the holy commandment of God. They did the very things they were told not to do, and they have had to reap the terrible consequences.

## **Deuteronomy 12 — Now**

—*J. van Dijk*

We live in a time that is quite distinct from the days of Israel's entry into the promised land, but we serve an unchangeable God. We serve a God who has told us 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" (Rom. 15:4). In our present study we particularly point to the fact that the Old Testament accounts are given so that we might endure, continue, in the things God has given us. Another Scripture portion spells this purpose out in more detail:

"For I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed [them]: (now the rock was the Christ;) yet God was not pleased with the most of them, for they were strewed in the desert. But these things happened [as] types of us, that we should not be lusters after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt the Christ, as some of them tempted, and perished by serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured, and perished by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them [as] types, and have been written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Cor. 10:1-11).

It is time for some soul searching and asking ourselves: What do we learn from Deuteronomy 12, and do we practise what we have learned? In the preceding article by the well-known author C. H. Mackintosh we note that the first thing we learn from Deuteronomy is obedience to all that God tells us. It is not up to us to determine what God wants: God makes His wishes and desires known to man. If the Israelites wanted to live happily, they were to obey God's instructions. Further, it is significant that God does not only tell them that they are not to serve the idols. No, God tells them not just to shatter their images and burn their groves, but also to destroy the places where the idols were served (vv. 2-3).

God admonished them firmly to destroy the Gentile places of worship because He knows that the human heart is inclined to do otherwise. God would not have to tell them to destroy these places if their hearts were naturally inclined to do so. God knows the human heart — He knows yours and mine. Obviously those things which the heathen have developed in their religious rituals are very attractive to the human heart. Without this definite instruction from God, Israel would have adapted what they found at these places of worship to use in their service for God. Their history shows that they did so despite these clear words, and they bore the bitter consequences of their disobedience — they lost their land!

"What then? Are we better?" (Rom. 3:9). No! Sad to say, No! We ought to realize that our own heart is similarly inclined. Christians, too, like to use things in their religious services that the ungodly have invented as useful helps in the worship of their gods. Has not the Christian church shown itself quite prepared to do so? Anyone who has traveled in, or read about, South America will know how thoroughly interwoven old idolatrous customs are with so-called "Christian" practices. We hardly dare to mention Christmas and Halloween in this connection for fear many will not read further. But all honest persons must admit that these feasts, with their trimmings, have their origin in pagan customs. Would God have changed His mind about these matters because we are living in the day of grace? We doubt it very much.

We therefore see that the tendency of the human heart — then and now — is the same. There is so much attraction in the ways the Gentiles serve their gods that it becomes a snare to the people of God, both then and now.

Then God spoke on a more positive note about "the place which Jehovah your God will choose out of all your tribes... His habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come" (v. 5). From this we learn something about God's heart. God not only longs to dwell among His people, He also has a very particular place in mind as centre of worship for His people, and there He wants to dwell among them. That place He calls "His habitation." Previously, this same God had given very detailed descriptions of the tabernacle and its service. Now this God tells His people that there is a particular place where the altar of burnt-offering has to be erected. As before, we note that without this clear instruction the people would have done just as they pleased and gone where it seemed best to them. Yet at this time, God did not give more detailed information. We believe it is because He wanted to arouse in His people an inquiring heart. He wanted to hear the question some spoke many years later: "Where abidest Thou?" (Jn. 1:38).

In this regard, too, the people failed. Once they had entered the land, no one asked where the place was to be which God had in mind. They set up the tabernacle in Shiloh. And we note how God in His grace bore with His people. Yet, God soon left that place, and still no one asked: Why? Or: Where is the place where God wants to dwell? All just bore with the separation of the ark (typifying Christ) and the altar (the place where God had promised to meet His people). Many years later a young man, David, vowed that he would not sleep until he found "a place for Jehovah, habitations for the Mighty One of Jacob" (Ps. 132:5). God tells us that this youngster (too young to participate at the sacrifice feast — at least so his father thought) was "a man after His own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). God then showed him that it was to be in Zion (Ps. 132:13). Later, at the threshing floor of Oman, God even showed him the exact place for the altar of burnt offering (1 Chr. 22:1).

Sadly, history repeats itself. Today too, very few of God's people are inquiring about the place where God wants to dwell. Moses had to warn the people not to follow the pattern that God had borne with in the wilderness: "each one [doing] whatever is right in his own eyes" (v. 8). Yet, today we find this attitude back in such words as: "Go to the church of *your own choice*." But what about God's choice in the matter? Has the God who has given such detailed instructions in the Old Testament not given any instructions for us today?

One thing is certain: There is no unity within the Christian camp; denominations abound. Oh, yes, efforts are made to walk together in ecumenical movements, some old, some classed as biblical, but all having this in common: they are an amalgamation of human arrangements that in themselves do not answer to what God has shown in His Word.

How utterly timely are the words of Deuteronomy 12! How we miss that firm determination that caused our last-century's brother Mackintosh to write with such conviction. Where, oh where, is the place where God wants to dwell in the midst of His people? Is there such a place at all? Or does God dwell there where His people choose to go? Are they the ones who determine where God is to dwell? We firmly believe that every truehearted Christian must be able to prove from Scripture that the place where he or she worships is the place God has shown us in His Word, but most cannot do this, and few care.

Where would that place be today? It is not our intent to answer this question here. Our wish is to arouse in our brothers and sisters an inquiring spirit: Where does God want to dwell today? We will, however, give some pointers.

Today the Assembly, the Church, is the habitation of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:22). This means that God's habitation is formed by all who are born again, all who have trusted in Christ for forgiveness of sins. Wherever all those are together, there is God's habitation, provided their coming together is solely on the basis of their being God's house (cf. Dt. 12:5) and

their practice is in accordance with God's instructions (cf. Dt. 12:6). For the Church we find these instructions in 1 Corinthians.

God's dwelling place is no longer a geographic entity. The Lord showed this in His discourse with the woman at the well of Sychar (Jn. 4). The geographical locality is no longer the issue. Further, just as Israel was to sacrifice at God's dwelling place, so the Christian company is to offer up their sacrifices of praise (the fruit of the lips — Heb. 13:15) and the communication of their substance (Heb. 13:16), in the place of His choosing. There they are to worship Him in spirit and in truth. This stands in contrast with what was done in the Old Testament times, for then they brought animal sacrifices and used cymbals when praising God. Now the heart is to be engaged, the affections need to go out to God in worship and adoration.

When Christians come together, they are instructed to come together unto the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for there the Lord has promised to be in the midst (Mt. 18:20). Thus, for the Lord to dwell there, to be in the midst of that company, they need indeed to be gathered together unto the name of the Lord Jesus. The Lord did not say: Where two or three Christians are gathered, there am I in the midst of them. The essential clause in His promise is: "...unto (or: in) My name." This means He is to be the Leader; He has to function practically as the Head. His Spirit is to be the One who operates all things there (1 Cor. 12). It also means that all is to be done according to His will in agreement with His Word, and that no human ideas are to be introduced in that place. No one can rightfully do anything in my name unless it has my full agreement. Similarly, Christians cannot claim to be gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus if their basis of meeting does not flow from the instructions of Scripture, and their practices are not guided by Scripture. Only there where these things are faithfully attended to can we expect Him to be in the midst, according to His promise.

For practical reasons not all Christians can be together at one place. And so the Lord graciously said: "Where two or three..." Yet, together they represent the whole Church; their manner of behaviour ought to keep in mind that they are but a part of the whole which they represent. These are some of the essential characteristics of God's dwelling place today.

Meanwhile, what we see in Christianity is that, like Israel at Shiloh and Gibeon, Christians have put up other places where they worship God. All Christian companies meet together in one way or another. But on what basis do they meet? Do they come together because they all believe in a certain mode of baptism? That is not a criterion God gives in His Word. Do they come together because they all are members of that denomination? That is not a biblical basis either. The Bible does not know denominations and, consequently even less, members of denominations. It only speaks of members of the body of Christ. Paul has clearly said that to say, "I am of this or that group" is carnality, and that is still true today.

Just as in Old Testament times, a faithful child of God should not go anywhere other than to the God-appointed place. Yet, in the present day of confusion in the Christian camp, many who are faithful in all other areas of their life have never even thought of such things. Those who have understood God's will regarding the place of worship, and have acted on God's instructions in this regard, should realize this. God is as gracious, forgiving, and forbearing as He was when Israel had just entered the land. He will certainly be gracious toward all faithful ones who, through lack of instruction in these matters, have never thought of these things. Yet, God is always the Teacher who desires not only that all men may be saved, but also that they may come to know all the truth about Himself and His desires (1 Tim. 2:4). All who have a godly walk will be welcomed by Him, though now, as then, He will not put up with indifference about His desires. He has always disapproved of individuals doing what is right in their own eyes.

Some have worshipped for many years according to God's expressed desires, without really being aware what it means to the heart of God. Now the reasoning our late brother Mackintosh spoke of enters their minds. Are not the other places just as good? Is it not pretentious for one to claim that he or she knows what God desires in this respect? Is it not sufficient that the worshipper is sincere? Now, as then, the answer is: God has given instructions in His Word and we may not trifle with them. Paul writes to the Romans that he sought to lead them to the obedience of faith; he begins and ends his epistle with this. Today, too, God wants obedience from His people in respect of the place of worship. Therefore, we ought to take care that we know God's desires!

Now, as then, the departure from this firm conviction, and the subsequent affiliation with all places where God in His sovereign grace blesses, leads to devastation. We cannot mix a God-given path with a man-invented one. We need to know God's thoughts, and they can be known if we desire to do His will, setting all of self aside (Jn. 7:17). Let us not forget that they who worship in places other than the God-appointed one do so generally from ignorance of God's desires. They can therefore do so with an honest and upright heart (though not entirely without fault — they really do not have an excuse for their ignorance of God's will regarding this). For that reason God in His grace can bless them where they are. For those, however, who know (or have known) God's thoughts about these things, it is different. Their considering these

places as acceptable because God blesses there, is an outright setting aside of what they have learned of God's desires. And what is involved in this?

Hear what Moses says to the people. In the wilderness God had borne with them when each one did whatever was right in his own eyes. The reason for it was: "For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which Jehovah thy God giveth thee. But *when ye have gone over the Jordan, and dwell in the land* which Jehovah your God causeth you to inherit... then there shall be a place which Jehovah your God will choose to cause His name to dwell there" (vv. 9-11). Obviously, the whole matter has to do with two things: Going over the Jordan, and taking possession of the inheritance. Today, too, these are exactly the things that are at stake in this question.

In the last century brethren began to see that God had indeed a place where He wanted to gather His own and dwell in the midst of them. This was accompanied by a clear understanding of what it is to cross the Jordan in a spiritual sense. As a result, they not only met on a basis and in a way very distinct from the usual denominational patterns, but also their whole way of life bore the stamp of death to self. Their changed behaviour even had an economic impact on the entertainment world. The Lord blessed them for it. They knew what it meant to have died to self, to the world, and to sin, and both their personal and collective practice showed it. Today this is usually no longer so, even among those who still meet for worship in the same manner as these last-century brethren did. Today many are like the two-and-a half tribes who went back across the Jordan. But how has this come about? It is the result of their no longer valuing the land, the spiritual blessings they have received. Now they need, beside these blessings, worldly entertainment or recognition — perhaps only in the religious world. So Satan has made his inroads! It is impossible to maintain the godly pattern rediscovered in the last century while living the lifestyle of the average Christian of today. Anyone trying to do so will make shipwreck in either of two ways. Some become legalistic, seeking to maintain the pattern in the strength of the flesh by a setting up a list of do's and don'ts. Others become highly inconsistent because of complete lack of spiritual appreciation of what behaviour is in harmony with that path, their separation becoming ecclesiastical only.

Is it any wonder then that in the place of worship we see a return to the things that belong to the wilderness — the law and self-will? Should it surprise us that many act as if meeting unto the name of the Lord Jesus alone is just one way of doing things that really stands on an equal footing with gathering on any other (and therefore human-devised) basis? No! It is but the logical outcome of today's generally accepted "Christian" lifestyle. And with it comes turmoil, disagreement, lack of forbearance, division! As it did then, so it does today: departure from God's way brings God-dishonouring calamity, and... God's judgment!

We need to repent! We serve a merciful God; He will heal and bind up. But if we continue, let us remember the Lord's words to Laodicea: "I am about to spew thee out of My mouth" (Rev. 3:16). Perhaps this is what we are experiencing today.

"Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking; if anyone hear My voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with Me. He that overcomes, to him will I give to sit with Me in My throne; as I also have overcome, and have sat down with My Father in His throne. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies."

*The End*

## **The Battle of Conquerors (6)**

—G. H. Elbers

### *Chapter 6*

"For the rest, brethren, be strong in [the] Lord, and in the might of His strength. Put on the panoply of God, that ye may be able to stand against the artifices of the devil: because 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 6:10-12).

In the previous chapter we saw that the armour is not standing just by itself. We make a big mistake if we set chapter 6:10-18 of Ephesians apart as something standing by itself, as if that portion especially ought to keep us standing firm in battle. By paying special attention to these first three words of verse 10 ("for the rest"), we see that the spiritual battle can be seen in all areas of life; that there is much more to be taken into account!

## *Be Strong in the Lord!*

Now we will take a good look at the following words of verse 10, which have much to tell us.

"For the rest, brethren, *be strong in [the] Lord, and in the might of His strength.*" It certainly is remarkable that we find strong similarity between the words in the book of Joshua. In Joshua 1 we find the words that the Lord spoke to Joshua just before he was to take possession of the Promised Land. We may compare that land to the "heavenlies" in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Did Paul, perhaps, think of those words or Joshua 1:6,7, and 9? In that section we find three times: "Be strong and courageous," and verse 9 shows what 'in the might of His strength' means. The explanation of it is no less than: "Be not afraid, neither be dismayed; for Jehovah thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest..."

These are encouraging words, which cause us to think of the Lord's parting words in Matthew 28:18,20: "All power has been given Me in heaven and upon earth... And behold, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age."

To be strong in the Lord means, therefore, that we must also be dependent upon the Lord. Anything we try to do in our own strength will fall short from the outset. It may look impressive to the outside world, but in God's eyes our own input is worthless, and... Satan laughs at us! No, only being 'strong in the Lord' is the answer to the attacks of the wicked one.

## *Once again David*

We find a clear example of being 'strong in the Lord' in 1 Samuel 17. David, the man after God's heart, took on the battle with Goliath, a real giant King Saul had not dared to engage the battle although he too knew the God of Israel very well. His failure was that gradually he had come to trust his *own* wisdom and his *own* armour. Now he weighed his own chances against the weapons and muscles of Goliath. And his correct conclusion was: "Goliath is much stronger, I can't cope with him."

With David the case was entirely different. For a moment he had, at Saul's insistence, donned the humanly reasonable armour. But he quickly realized that he could not work with it. He knew something better! He entered the battle with the words: "I come to thee in the name of Jehovah of hosts," and he conquered! (1 Sam. 17:39-50). King Saul was not able to speak such words. His spiritual power was totally gone because he had come to rely only on man's ability. That's how far he had strayed from God. Apparently it no longer dawned on him that the Lord had to give deliverance.

## *A Serious Lesson*

This is a serious lesson for us! If we, like Saul, let go, bit by bit, of the things of the Lord, if our personal relationship with Him starts to weaken, then our spiritual strength will disappear too! How can God's Spirit bring things to mind when we do not even trouble ourselves to read the Bible? In Psalm 25:14 we read that God's secret (an intimate relationship) is with them that fear Him. To them He makes known His covenant. Therefore, if we slack in this, how will it go when the battle gets heavy? Let us be like David and faithfully go our way with the Lord. Or like Gideon (Judg. 7), who entered the battle with a handful of men against a superior enemy. What did they shout when they attacked? "For Jehovah and for Gideon... The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon." This battle, too, was decided in the strength of the Lord. Of this strength we read in Ephesians 1:19-20 that it was sufficiently great to raise the Lord Jesus from among the dead and to give Him a place at God's right hand in the heavenlies. Would we be able to engage in battle without that enormous strength?

## *An Important Little Word: 'Whole'*

We continue with Ephesians 6:11. There we read: "Put on the panoply (i.e. the *whole* armour) of God."

Before we continue we need to observe that in the New Translation the word "panoply" hides for many of our readers the significance of the word full. The Greek word is made up of two words: '*pan*' meaning '*full*,' or '*whole*,' and the word '*hopla*,' meaning '*arms*.' As we continue this study we will see why the idea of '*whole*' is so important.

In Ephesians 6:10-18 the entire composition of the armour is made known. Each part is mentioned. Now let us compare this with a modern army that sets out for battle. Each soldier receives so-called 'personal standard equipment'. Of course it must be *wholly* complete! A rifle without bullets has not much value. A soldier without helmet is very vulnerable. Shoes without laces are even dangerous. And so we could continue. When a soldier is sent into the battlefield his armour must be complete. In other words: he must have the *whole* armour (and use it for that matter).

So it is with the spiritual armour in the spiritual battle: God gives such an armour that meets all the requirements. And then it needs to be accepted and put on in its *entirety*.

When we now read quickly through verses 10-18, we find several things listed about which God's Word teaches us that we cannot miss a single part. We need the truth, righteousness, salvation, the sword of the Spirit — yes, everything — to be able to stand firm in battle.

### *Which Armour?*

In Ephesians 6:11 we must not overlook another little word. Note that it says that we must put on the whole armour of *God*. Perhaps you find this remark a little far-fetched, but it certainly is not! Unfortunately, many Christians have backslidden because they wore their own armour rather than God's. They underestimated the strength of the enemy or overestimated their own. They thought that being zealous for the Lord and friendly to their neighbours would be an adequate shield against the temptations of Satan. Others think that Bible-knowledge, insight, or experience are part of the armour. But this is definitely not so! God's armour is precisely described in God's Word. Let's not use anything else; it will cause us to fall! Remember the example of Saul we mentioned earlier.

### *Once More: Stand Against*

Verse 11 shows that the words we have looked at so far introduce the purpose, which is: *to stand against*. Just take a look: "Put on the panoply of God, that ye may be able *to stand against* the artifices of the devil."

Those artifices, temptations, are all too real! The devil is shrewd! In Matthew 4:3-11 we read how he came to tempt the Lord Jesus. Yes, his words were indeed very tempting, flattering, and challenging. The devil even used the Bible! He already misused God's words when he spoke to Eve: "Is it even so, that God has said...?" (Gen. 3:1).

The Lord Jesus, however, saw through those wicked plans of Satan. He recognized him as the so-called angel of light and as the roaring lion (2 Cor. 11:14; 1 Pet 5:8). And because He knew the Word of God (the sword of the Spirit) so very well, He used it. It provided a conclusive answer to Satan's wiles.

In Matthew 4:11 we read that Satan left the Lord Jesus alone. At that moment it was not (yet) a question of fighting against the devil, but of resisting, of standing firmly against. We, too, are called to resist the devil so that he will flee from us (Jas. 4:7).

For this, the Lord Jesus used God's armour. Could we have any better means? Impossible!

### *Difficult? There is Help!*

We may be glad that we have the Lord Jesus as our example. In Hebrews 2:18 and 4:15 we read how He, too, was tempted in all things. For that reason He can help better than anyone else. Therefore we ought always to keep our eyes on Him as our example. He has already fought the battle; He is the Conqueror! How about us?

*To be cont'd*

## **Worthwhile Weighty Words.**

*We felt these worthwhile weighty words by F. T. H., first published in 1893 in "The Voice" and slightly modified to suit today's readers, might give food for thought and encouragement to many in these days of ecclesiastical turmoil on all fronts.*

We should not only know but also feel the breakup of the church. Those who walk the path of obedience, being well aware as to why God led them into it, will never turn from it. To do the right thing effectively, we must have a sense of what has brought about the doing. Why did the remnant of old hang their harps upon the willows (Ps. 137)? It was because they had a sense that they were in a strange land and Israel was in captivity. Others who merely might have joined them would have been little interested in so disposing of their music, because they would not have felt the burden of their circumstances. So it was, too, with the remnant in Malachi 3:16. They acted correctly because they intelligently

grasped what was befitting to the Lord's interests here. Now the church is in ruins, but God has a path for His own. However great the failure, there is a state and service that please Him as well as if all were in Pentecostal order. If some only follow God's path because they are attracted by those who have intelligently entered thereupon, we need not be surprised that they fall when that path is challenged.