

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT

“And Moses took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words.” Ex. 24. 7, 8 ; comp. HEB. 9. 18-20.

HERE is a new aspect in which to regard God’s blessed Book. Before Moses sprinkled the blood, he read the Book of the Covenant, and obtained the people’s acceptance of it. And when he had sprinkled it, he said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made concerning all these words.” The Book contained all the conditions of the Covenant; only through the Book could they know all that God asked of them, and all that they might ask of Him. Let us consider what new light may be thrown both upon the Covenant and upon the Book, by the one thought, that the Bible is the Book of the Covenant.

The very first thought suggested will be this, that in nothing will the spirit of our life and experience, as it lives either in the Old or the New Covenant, be more manifest than in our dealings with the Book. The Old had a book as well as the New. Our Bible contains

both. The New was enfolded in the Old; the Old is unfolded in the New. It is possible to read the Old in the spirit of the New; it is possible to read the New as well as the Old in the spirit of the Old.

What this spirit of the Old is, we cannot see so clearly anywhere as just in Israel when the Covenant was made. They were at once ready to promise: "All that the Lord hath said will we do and be obedient." There was so little sense of their own sinfulness, or of the holiness and glory of God, that with perfect self-confidence they considered themselves able to undertake to keep the Covenant. They understood little of the meaning of that blood with which they were sprinkled, or of that death and redemption of which it was the symbol.

In their own strength, in the power of the flesh, they were ready to engage to serve God. It is just the spirit in which many Christians regard the Bible; as a system of laws, a course of instruction to direct us in the way God would have us go. All He asks of us is, that we should do our utmost in seeking to fulfil them; more we cannot do; this we are sincerely ready to do. They know little or nothing of what the death means through which the Covenant is established, or what the life from the dead is through which alone a man can walk in covenant with the God of heaven.

This self-confident spirit in Israel is explained by what had happened just previously. When God had come down on Mount Sinai in thunderings and lightnings to give the law, they were greatly afraid. They said to Moses: "Let not God speak with us, lest we die; speak thou with us, and we will hear." They thought it was simply a matter of hearing and knowing; they could for certain obey. They knew not that it is only the presence, and the fear, and

the nearness, and the power of God humbling us and making us afraid, that can conquer the power of sin and give the power to obey. It is so much easier to receive the instruction from man, and live, than to wait and hear the voice of God and die to all our own strength and goodness. It is no otherwise that many Christians seek to serve God without ever seeking to live in daily contact with Him, and without the faith that it is only His presence can keep from sin. Their religion is a matter of outward instruction from man: the waiting to hear God's voice that they may obey Him, the death to the flesh and the world that comes with a close walk with God, are unknown. They may be faithful and diligent in the study of their Bible, in reading or hearing Bible teaching; to have as much as possible of that intercourse with the Covenant God Himself which makes the Christian life possible—this they do not seek.

If you would be delivered from all this, learn ever to read the Book of the New Covenant in the New Covenant Spirit. One of the very first articles of the New Covenant has reference to this matter. When God says, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, He engages that the words of His Holy Book shall no longer be mere outward teaching, but that what they command shall be our very disposition and delight, wrought in us as a birth and a life by the Holy Spirit. Every word of the New Covenant then becomes a Divine assurance of what may be obtained by the Holy Spirit's working. The soul learns to see that the letter killeth, that the flesh profiteth nothing. The study, and knowledge of, the delight in, Bible words and thoughts, cannot profit, except as the Holy Spirit is waited on to make them life. The acceptance of Holy Scripture in the letter, the reception of it in the human understanding, is seen to be as fruitless as was Israel's at Sinai. But as the Word of God, spoken by the Living God through

the Spirit into the heart that waits on Him, it is found to be quick and powerful. It then is a word that worketh effectually in them that believe, giving within the heart the actual possession of the very grace of which the Word has spoken.

The New Covenant is a ministration of the Spirit (see Chap. 7.). All its teaching is meant to be teaching by the Holy Spirit. The two most remarkable chapters in the Bible on the preaching of the gospel are those in which Paul expounds the secret of this teaching (1 Cor. 2. ; 2 Cor. 3.). Every minister ought to see whether he can pass his examination in them. They tell us that in the New Covenant the Holy Spirit is everything. It is the Holy Spirit entering the heart, writing, revealing, impressing upon it God's law and truth, that alone works true obedience. No excellency of speech or human wisdom can in the least profit, God must reveal by His Holy Spirit to preacher and hearer the things He hath prepared for us. What is true of the preacher is equally true of the hearer. One of the great reasons that so many Christians never come out of the Old Covenant, never even know that they are in it, and have to come out of it, is that there is so much head knowledge, without the power of the Spirit in the heart being waited for. It is only when preachers and hearers and readers believe that the Book of the New Covenant needs the Spirit of the New Covenant, to explain and apply it, that the Word of God can do its work.

Learn the double lesson. What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. The Bible is the Book of the New Covenant. And the Holy Spirit is the only minister of what belongs to the Covenant. Expect not to understand or profit by thy Bible knowledge without seeking continually the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Beware lest thy earnest Bible study, thy excellent books, or thy beloved teachers take the place of the Holy Spirit! Pray daily, and

perseveringly, and believably for His teaching. He will write the Word in thy heart.

The Bible is the Book of the New Covenant. Ask the Holy Spirit specially to reveal to thee the New Covenant in it. It is inconceivable what loss the Church of our day is suffering because so few believers truly live as its heirs, in the true knowledge and enjoyment of its promises. Ask God, in humble faith, to give thee in all thy Bible reading, the spirit of wisdom and revelation, enlightened eyes of thine heart, to know what the promises are which the Covenant reveals; and what the Divine security in Jesus, the Surety of the Covenant, that every promise will be fulfilled in thee in Divine power; and what the intimate fellowship to which it admits thee with the God of the Covenant. The ministration of the Spirit, humbly waited for and listened to, will make the Book of the Covenant shine with new light, even the light of God's countenance and a full salvation.

All this applies specially to the knowledge of what actually the New Covenant is meant to work. Amid all we hear, and read, and understand of the different promises of the New Covenant, it is quite possible that we never yet have had that heavenly vision of it as a whole, that with its overmastering power compels acceptance. Just hear once again what it really is. True obedience and fellowship with God, for which man was created, which sin broke off, which the law demanded, but could not work, which God's own Son came from heaven to restore in our lives, is now brought within our reach and offered us. Our Father tells us in the Book of the New Covenant that He now expects us to live in full and unbroken obedience and communion with Him. He tells us that by the mighty power of His Son and Spirit He Himself will work this in us: everything has been arranged for it. He tells us that

such a life of unbroken obedience is possible because Christ, as the Mediator, will live in us and enable us each moment to live in Him. He tells us that all He wants is simply the surrender of faith, the yielding ourselves to Him to do His work. Oh! Let us look, and see this holy life, with all its powers and blessings, coming down from God in heaven, in the Son and His Spirit. Let us believe that the Holy Spirit can give us a vision of it, as a prepared Gift, to be bestowed in living power, and take possession of us. Let us look upward and look inward, in the faith of the Son and the Spirit, and God will show us that every word written in the Book of the Covenant is not only true, but that it can be made spirit and truth within us, and in our daily life, This can indeed be.