

THE MAN WHOSE HAND CLAVE TO HIS SWORD

NO. 3193

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“And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines that were there gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel were gone away: he arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword: and the LORD wrought a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to spoil.”
2 Samuel 23:9-10

IN David’s muster-roll we find the names of many mighties, and they are honored by being found there. These men came to David when his fortunes were at the lowest ebb, and he himself was regarded as a rebel and an outlaw, and they remained faithful to him throughout their lives. Happy are they who can follow a good cause in its worst estate, for theirs is true glory.

Weary of the evil government of Saul, they struck out a path for themselves, in which they could best serve their country and their God, and though this entailed great risks, they were amply rewarded by the honors which in due time they shared with their leader. When David came to the throne, how glad their hearts must have been, and when he went on conquering and to conquer, how they must have rejoiced, each one of them remembering with intense delight the privations which they had shared with their captain.

Brethren, we do not ourselves aspire to be numbered with the warlike, the roll of battle does not contain our names, and we do not wish that it should, but there is a roll which is now being made up, a roll of heroes who do and dare for Christ, who go without the camp, and take up His reproach, and with confidence in God contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and venture all for Jesus Christ, and there will come a day when it will be infinitely more honorable to find one’s name in the lowest place in this list of Christ’s faithful disciples than to be numbered with princes and kings. Blessed is he who can this day cast in his lot with the Son of David, and share His reproach, for the day shall come when the Master’s glory shall be reflected upon all His followers.

I. We will now turn our attention to one particular hero, Eleazar, the son of Dodo, and see what he did for his king and country. Our text records one of his feats. It is very instructive, and the first lesson I gather from it is THE POWER OF INDIVIDUAL ENERGY.

The Philistines had set the battle in array, the men of Israel came out to fight them, but for some reason or other, “being armed and carrying bows, they turned back in the day of battle.” Ignominious is the record, “the men of Israel were gone away.” This man Eleazar, however, made up for the failures of his countrymen, for “he arose, and smote the Philistines.”

He was a man of marked individuality of character, a man who knew himself and knew his God, and did not care to be lost in the common mass, so as to run away merely because they ran. He thought for himself, and acted for himself, he did not make the conduct of others the measure of his service, but while Israel fled, “he arose, and smote the Philistines.”

The personal obligation of each individual before God is a lesson which all should learn. It is taught us in our baptism, for there each believer makes his own confession of faith, and by his own act and deed avows himself to be dead with Christ. Pure Christianity knows nothing of proxies, or sureties in baptism. After our profession of faith is made, the believer is responsible for his own religious acts, and cannot employ priests or ministers to perform his religion for him, he must himself pray, search the Scriptures, commune with God, and obey the Lord Jesus.

True religion is a personal thing. Each man, with one talent or with ten, will on the great day of judgment be called to account for his own responsibilities, and not for those of others, and therefore he should live as before God, feeling that he is a separate personality, and must in his own individuality consecrate himself, spirit, soul, and body, entirely to the Lord.

Eleazar, the Son of Dodo, felt that he must play the man, whatever others might do, and therefore he bravely drew his sword against the uncircumcised Philistines. I do not find that he wasted time in upbraiding the others for running away, nor in shouting to them to return, but he just turned his own face to the enemy, and hewed and hacked away with all his might. His brave example was rebuke sufficient, and would be far more effectual than ten thousand sarcastic orations.

Never let it be forgotten that *our responsibility, in a certain sense, begins and ends with ourselves*. Suppose you entertain the opinion that the church of God is in a very sad state, you are only responsible for that as far as you yourself help to create that condition. Do you regret that many persons with much wealth do not consecrate their substance? I do not wonder that you feel thus, but after all, the most practical thing is to use your own substance in your Master's cause.

It is very easy to pick holes in other people's work, but it is far more profitable to do better work yourself. Is there a fool in all the world that cannot criticize? Those who can themselves do good service are but as one to a thousand compared with those who can see faults in the labors of others. Therefore, if you be wise, my brothers, do not cavil at others, but arise yourself, and smite the Philistines.

Our responsibility is not diminished by the ill conduct of other men, but on the contrary, it is increased thereby. You say, "How so?" I answer—If every man fights his best, then Eleazar may be well content to fight as well as the rest, but if other men are running away, Eleazar is called upon by that unhappy circumstance to rise above himself, and retrieve the fortunes of the day. It will never do to allow the enemy to triumph, and therefore if we have fought well before, we must now gird up our loins for extraordinary battle.

Dear Christian brother, if you are solemnly impressed that the condition of the churches is not what it should be, you must leave no stone unturned to set it right. Are your fellow Christians worldly? You should become more spiritual and heavenly minded. Are they sleepy? Be you the more awake. Are they lax? Be you the more strict. Are they unkind? Be you the more full of love. Set your watch all the more strictly because you see that others are overcome, and be you doubly diligent where you perceive that others are negligent. Dare, like Eleazar, to stand alone, and from the shortcomings of others gather motives for a nobler life.

Perhaps Eleazar on that occasion was the better off for not having that cowardly rout at his heels. When we have good work to do for our Lord, we are glad of the company of kindred spirits, determined to make the good work succeed, but if we have no such comrades, we must go alone. There is no absolute necessity for numbers. Who knows? The friends we invite might be more hindrance than assistance.

When Luther went to a holy man, and told him what he had discovered in the Scriptures, the prudent old gentleman replied, "My brother, go back to your cell, keep your thoughts to yourself, serve God, and make no disturbance." Dear old soul, he little dreamed what disturbance that aforesaid Luther was going to make in the camp. I daresay Luther would not have been able to work such a reformation if he had been surrounded by a host of kind, prudent friends, but when, like the hero of our text, he was clear of all the excellent incapables, he made splendid havoc of the Philistines of Rome.

When dear, good, motherly Christian men are forever saying, "Do not be too venturesome, be careful never to offend, do not overexert yourself," and all that kind of talk, a man is better without them than with them. A Christian man should seek the help of his brethren, but at the same time, if he is called to a service for his Lord, and they will not aid him, let him not be alarmed, but let him consider that if he has God with him he has all the allies he needs. The mighty God of Jacob is better than all the armies of the saints, and if He shall put out His hand, and say, "Go in this thy might," a man may be content to step forth alone, the solitary champion of Jesus and His Gospel.

Solitary prowess is expected of believers. I hope we may breed in this place a race of men and women who know the truth, and know also what the Lord claims at their hands, and are resolved, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to war a good warfare for their Lord whether others will stand at their side or no.

II. Secondly, we have, next, in the text, A LESSON OF PERSONAL WEAKNESS.

This brave man, though he arose, and smote the Philistines, was only a man, and so he fought on “until his hand was weary,” and he could do no more. He reached the limit of his strength, and was obliged to pass. This may somewhat console those noble men who have become brain weary in the service of God. Perhaps they chide themselves, but indeed there is no reason for so doing, for of them it may be said as of Eleazar, that they are not weary *of* fighting, though they are weary *in* fighting. If you can draw that distinction in your case, it will be well.

We wish we could serve our Lord day and night, but the flesh is weak, and there is no more strength left in us. This is no strange thing, and there is no sin in it. Eleazar’s weariness was that of bone, muscle, sinew—the weariness of his arm, but sometimes God’s people grow weary in the brain, and this is quite as painful and quite as little to be wondered at. The mind cannot always think with equal clearness, or feel with equal emotion, or find utterance with equal clearness, and the child of God must not blame himself for this. To blame himself in such a case would be to blame his Master.

If your servant has been in the harvest field from daybreak till the moon has looked down upon him as he binds his sheaves, and if, as he wipes the sweat from his brow, he says, “Master, I am sorely wearied, I must have a few hours’ sleep,” who but a tyrant would blame him, and refuse him the rest? Those are to be blamed who never weary themselves, but those who wear themselves out are to be commended, not censured.

Perhaps Eleazar became weary because of the enormous number of his enemies. He cut dozens of them down with his death bearing sword, but on they came, and still on. It seemed like a repetition of the day when Samson slew heaps upon heaps, and smote Philistia hip and thigh with great slaughter.

Christian friend, you have been the means of bringing some few to Christ, but the appalling number of the unconverted oppresses you till your mind is weary. You have opened a little room, and a few poor people attend, but you say to yourself, “What are these among so many?” When we begin in the Master’s service, we think we shall turn the world upside down in six weeks, but we do not do it, and when we find that we must plod on, and not despise the day of small things, we are apt to become weary. Lifelong service under great discouragement is not so easy as mere dreamers think.

Perhaps Eleazar grew tired because nobody was helping him. It is a great assistance to receive a word of good cheer from a comrade, and to feel that, after all, you are not alone, for other true hearts are engaged in the same battle, zealous for the same Lord. But as Eleazar looked around, he saw only the backs of the retreating cowards who ought to have been fighting by his side, and he had to mow down the Philistines with his lone sword. Who marvels that at length he grew weary?

The mercy of it all is this, that *he only became weary when he could afford to be so*, that is to say, the Lord did not allow his weariness to overcome him till he had beaten the Philistines, and the people had rushed upon the spoil.

We are such very feeble creatures that faintness must come over us at times, but what a mercy it is that the Lord makes our strength equal to our day, and only when the day is over does He let us sink into ourselves. Jacob wrestled with the angel, and he did not feel the shrinking sinew till he had won the blessing.

It was good for him to go halting on his thigh after his victory, to make him know that it was not by his own strength that he had prevailed with God, and so it was a good thing for Eleazar to feel weary, for he would now understand where the strength came from with which he smote the Philistines. Eleazar only failed when there was spoil to be divided, and if you and I only shrink back when there is praise to be awarded, we need not be troubled, for there are plenty who have never done anything else who will be quite ready to claim the credit of all that is achieved.

Let us ask ourselves whether, weak as we are, we have given up ourselves to the Lord. If so, all is well, He will use our weakness, and glorify Himself by it. He will not let our weakness show itself when it could endanger the victory. He gives us strength up to the point where strength is absolutely essential, and if He lets us collapse, as Elijah did after his great conflict was over, we must not be surprised. What a difference there is between Elijah on Carmel triumphant over the priests of Baal, and the same man on the morrow fleeing from Jezebel, and crying "Let me die, for I am not better than my fathers."

Of course, that was the natural result of the strong excitement through which he had passed, just as the weariness of his hand was the natural result of the mighty battle which Eleazar had fought, and when you become downcast, as I often am after having obtained a great blessing, do not be so very terribly alarmed about it. What does it matter? The work is over, you can afford to be laid low before God. It will be well for you to know how empty and how weak you are, that you may ascribe all glory to the Lord alone. He is almighty, however weak you may be.

III. There is a third lesson in the text, and that concerns THE INTENSITY OF THE HERO'S ZEAL.

A singular circumstance is here recorded, his hand clave unto his sword. Mr. Bunyan seems to have thought that it was the congealed blood which fastened the hand and the sword together, for he represents Mr. Valiant-for-Truth as being wounded, till the blood ran forth and his hand was glued to his sword. But perhaps the better interpretation refers to the fact which has occasionally been observed in battles.

I remember reading of a sailor who fought desperately in repelling a boarding attack from an enemy's ship, and when the affair was over it was found that he could not open his hand to drop his cutlass. He had grasped it with such force that until a surgical operation had been performed, it was quite impossible to separate his hand from his sword.

This was the case with Eleazar, this cleaving of his hand to the sword proves *the energy with which he gripped his weapon*. At the first, he laid hold upon it in the right way, so that he could hold it firmly. I wish that some of our converts would get hold of the Gospel in a better manner. A missionary said to me the other day, "There are numbers of revival converts who will never be worth anything till they are converted again."

I am afraid it is so. The work is not deep, their understanding of the Gospel is not clear, and their hold of it is not fast. They have got something which is of great good to them, I hope, but they hardly know what it is, they have need to come again to Him who has abundance of grace and truth to bestow, or they will never be worth much.

Many young people do not study the Word, they pick up texts here and there as pigeons pick up peas, but they do not see the analogy of faith. But he is the man to fight for God who lays hold of the truth by the handle, and grips it as though he knew what he had got, and knew that he had got it. He who intelligently and intensely knows the Word is likely to hold it fast.

Eleazar, having grasped his sword well, *retained his hold*, whatever happened to him in battle, he never let go of his weapon for an instant. If he had once opened his hand, there would have been no cleaving, but he all the way through kept his hand on his weapon. According to some modern teachers, you are wise if you change your doctrines every week, because some fresh light may be expected to break in upon you. The advice is dangerous. O young man, I trust you will get hold of the grand old Gospel, and always hold it, and never relax your grip, and then what will happen to you? Why this, that at last you will not be able to relax your grip.

I have frequently been delighted to observe the perseverance of earnest workers who have loved their work for Christ so heartily that they could not cease from it. They have served the Lord year after year in a particular work, either at the Sunday school or in some other useful labor, and when they have been ill, and could no longer be in their places, their hearts and their thoughts have still been there. We have known them when ill with brain fever talking continually about the schools and the children. In their very dreams their good work has been on their minds, their hand has been cleaving to the sword.

I delight to hear the old man talk about the work of the Lord even when he can no longer join in it, and the dying man with “the ruling passion strong in death,” inquiring about the church and the services, his sword cleaving still to his hand.

Christmas Evans was wont to drive his old pony from town to town in his journeys to preach the Gospel, and when he was about to die, he thought he was riding in the old pony-chaise still, and his last words were, “Drive on.” Napoleon with his dying breath exclaimed, “Head of the army,” and so do Christ’s soldiers think to the last of the grand army of the saints and of Christ their Head. When a certain good man lay dying, he had forgotten his wife and his children, and yet, when the name of Jesus was whispered in his ear, he said, “Oh, I know Him, He has been all my joy these fifty years!” See how the sword cleaves to the hand.

Years ago we, who have believed, grasped the sword of the Lord with such a grip of cheerful earnestness that now there is established an almost involuntary connection between the two which cannot be severed. Every now and then, some wise men think to convert us to skepticism, or what is very like it, modern thought, and they approach us with full assurance that we must give up our old-fashioned faith. They are fools for their pains, for we are at this time hardly voluntary agents in the matter, the Gospel has such hold upon us that we cannot let it go. We now believe because we must. I could sooner die a thousand deaths than renounce the Gospel I preach.

The sophisticated arguments I have met with in skeptical books are not half so strong as the arguments with which the devil has assailed me, and yet I have beaten him. Having run with the horsemen, the footmen cannot make us afraid. How can we give up the Gospel? It is our life, our soul, our all. Our daily experience, our communion with God, our sitting with Christ in heavenly places, have made us proof against all temptations to give up our hope. We hold our sword, it is true, but our sword also cleaves to our hand. It is not possible that the most clever falsehoods should deceive the elect, for the Lord has created such communion between the renewed soul and the truth, that the truth must hold us, and we must hold the truth, even till we die. God grant it may be so with all of you!

IV. I must pass on to notice the fourth lesson, that concerns THE DIVINE GLORY.

Does the text say that his hand clave unto the sword, and that *he* wrought a great victory that day? Look at your Bibles, and you will see that I have been misquoting. It does not ascribe the victory to Eleazar, but it is written, “and *the LORD* wrought a great victory that day.” The victory was not won without Eleazar, and yet it was not won by Eleazar, but by the Lord.

Had Eleazar belonged to a certain class of professors, he would have said, “*We* can do nothing, the Lord will fulfill His own eternal purposes,” and then he would not only have done nothing, but he would have found fault with others if they had been forward in the fight. If he had belonged to another class of professors, he would have said, “I do not believe in the one-man ministry. I will not go alone, but wait till I have gathered a few brethren, who can all take a turn at it.”

Instead of either of these theorizings, he went straight to his work, and the Lord gave him the necks of his enemies, and then he ascribed the victory, not to himself, but to the Lord alone. The right thing to do is to work as if all depended upon us, and yet look to the Lord alone knowing that all depends upon Him. We must have all the humility and all the activity of men who feel that they cannot do anything by themselves, but that God works in them to will and to do according to His own good pleasure. You must be humbly God-reliant, and personally resolute. Trust in God, and keep your powder dry.

Have you won a soul to Christ? Then the Lord has won the victory. Have you upheld the truth against an antagonist? The Lord must have the glory of your triumph. Have you trampled down sin? Can you cry with the heroine of old, “O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength”? Then, lay your trophies at the foot of the throne. I am glad that my text runs as it does, or else some captious critic would have said that I was exalting man, and honoring flesh and blood. Nay, nay, the Lord hath wrought all our works in us, not unto us, but unto His name give all the praise.

V. The last lesson is one of ENCOURAGEMENT. It is said in the text that “the people returned after him only to spoil.”

Dear brethren, does it grieve you to think that many professed Christians seem more like unbelievers than believers? Do you feel sad to see them all run away in the day of battle? Be comforted then, for they can be brought back, and your personal prowess for God may be the means of making them return. The feeble folk, if the Lord makes *you* strong, will gather courage from your bravery. They may not have been able to look a live Philistine in the face, but they know how to strip a dead one. You will get them back, by and by, when the spoil is to be divided.

It is not a small thing, after all, to encourage the Lord's downcast people. Eleazar was pleased to see them in the field again. I daresay he did not say one rebuking word to them, but perhaps remarked, "Well, you have come back, have you? Share the plunder among yourselves. I might claim it all myself, but I will not, you are welcome to it."

It has sometimes happened that one man, speaking in God's name, has turned a community in the right way, one Christian woman, too, has swayed thousands. There are points in the history of England where certain individuals have been the hinge upon which our nation's destiny has turned. If you seek of God to be faithful, and if His grace be in you, then be firm in the day of battle, and you will confirm other wavering souls.

My young sister, you will turn your family round yet, one by one they will come to seek your Savior. Young man, you are entering into that large house of business, it is very perilous to yourself, but if the Lord enable you to be strong in the power of His might, you may transform that whole house into a church of God. You may hardly believe it, but you will have prayer meetings in the large room yet. Remember Mr. Sankey's hymn—

***"Dare to be a Daniel!
Dare to stand alone!
Dare to have a purpose firm!
Dare to make it known!"***

Dare to be an Eleazar, and go forth and smite the Philistines alone, you will soon find that there are others in the house who have concealed their sentiments, but when they see you coming forward, they will be openly on the Lord's side. Many cowards are skulking about, try to shame them. Many are undecided, let them see a brave man, and he will be the standard-bearer around whom they will rally.

Thus have I thought to say a few practical words, which I hope the Lord will bless. I have finished when I have made one observation to a different class of people. It is clear that when a man gets hold of a sword, grips it fast, and holds it for a while, such a thing may happen that he cannot drop it. Has it ever occurred to you—to you especially who have never given your hearts to Christ—that the eager way in which you hold your sin, and the long time that you have held to it, may produce a similar result upon you?

One of these days you may be unable to get rid of those habits which you are now forming. At first, the net of habit is made of cobweb, you can soon break it through. By and by it is made of twine, soon it will be made of rope, and last of all it will be strong as steel, and then you will be fatally ensnared. Beware in time.

Young man, you are hardly yet aware how strong a hold your habits have already taken upon you. I mean your habits of prayerlessness, your practice of secret sin, and your intemperance, nay, I will not mention all your follies, they are best known to yourself. They are fastening upon you like huge serpents, coil upon coil. You have always intended to go so far, and no further, but if you could see a picture of what you will become, you would be horrified.

Did we not read in the papers, a few months ago, the story of a man who was respectable in many ways, and gifted above the average of men, who nevertheless descended by degrees, till he perpetrated a horrible crime, which made the world stand aghast? Little did he dream, at one time, that he would have plunged into such wickedness, but the path to hell is downhill, and if you descend one step at first, you take two steps at once next time, and then you take four, and so by great leaps descend to hell.

O man, cast away the weapon of iniquity before it glues itself to your hand! Cast it away at once and forever. The only way of breaking with sin is to unite with Christ. No man does in heart part with sin till he is one with his Savior, and that comes by trusting Him, simply trusting Him. When you trust Him, He delivers you from sinful habits, and no longer allows you to be the slave of evil. “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” Seek that freedom. May He bestow it upon every one of us, and then may we become heroes for Christ, and He shall have the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 106

In this psalm we have the story of God’s ancient covenant people, and as we read it, we may read our own history in it if we also are His people. It is a looking glass, in which the beholder may see himself.

Verse 1. *Praise ye the LORD.*

The psalm begins with Hallelujah, and the story of the church is a succession of Hallelujahs, and the story of every Christian man’s life, concerning the wonderful forbearance of God to him, is a series of Hallelujahs.

1. *O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

That is the text, and this psalm is the sermon upon it—an exhibition of the goodness and ever-enduring mercy of God.

2-3. *Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? who can shew forth all his praise? Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that does righteousness at all times.*

These are the really blessed people, and we shall see in this psalm, how God’s ancient people so often missed that blessing by their sin, as I doubt not that we also miss much of the sacred, sweet blessedness which would be ours if we walked more closely with God, and were more obedient to Him.

4-5. *Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.*

This is a suitable prayer for each one of us to pray before we go any further. May God hear the cries of His people as we each one seek this fivefold blessing!

6. *We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.*

God has dealt kindly and graciously with us, yet here is an all, too true description of what we have done, “We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.”

7. *Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt;* [See sermon #2204, Sin—Its Spring-head, Stream, and Sea].

Yet they were very plain, easy to understand, for they were the wonders of power that were wrought by God on behalf of His people, but they understood them not.

7. *They remembered not the multitude of thy mercies;*

They had bad memories as well as bad understandings, and it is so often with us, we remember not the multitude of God’s mercies to us.

7. *But provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea.*

That was a bad beginning, they were only just out of Egypt, and they had not yet crossed the Red Sea, but they provoked the Lord even there. Oh, how soon after our first joy does our evil nature betray itself!

8. *Nevertheless he saved them for his name’s sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.* [See sermon #115, Why Are Men Saved?].

He saved them, not for their own sakes, but for His name's sake, for the manifestation of His own power and glory. This is how God still deals with His children, not on the ground of their merits, but for the manifestation of His own mercy and grace toward them.

9-12. *He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness* [See sermon #72, Israel at the Red Sea]. *And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. Then believed they his words; they sang his praise.*

I should think they did believe God's words when they could see His wonderful works, but it is a poor faith that needs prodigies to be wrought each hour or else it fails. No wonder they sang God's praise at the Red Sea, but exultant as the songs of Moses and Miriam were, even better is that praise which rises from a broken and contrite heart which the Lord has delivered out of its troubles.

13-15. *They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.*

So it always is with us when we begin to let our desires outrun the will of God. He will sometimes let us discover our own folly by granting us our desires. The answer to some prayers would be a dire calamity. Some pray for riches, and they get them, but they also get leanness in their soul. Some ask for earthly honors and success, and get them, but with them they also get leanness in their soul, and if a man is lean in his soul, it is not much good being fat anywhere else.

16. *They envied Moses also in the camp,—*

Envy is a gaunt, lean, spectral thing, and when a soul is lean, it soon gets to be envious of others who are better than itself.

16-20. *And Aaron the saint of the LORD. The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked. They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass.*

What a descent it was to come down from worshipping the spiritual God, who had wrought such wonders for them, to the adoration of "an ox that eateth grass." When we put our trust in men, instead of in God, we might have the same sort of ironical description applied to us, "They trusted in a man that must die, and in the son of man that is but dust." Whenever we forsake the Lord, and put our confidence in anyone else, we are fools indeed.

21-23. *They forgot God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt; wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red sea. Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them.*

You remember the intercession of Moses with the Lord, how he cried, "If thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." And beloved friends, what should you and I have done if it had not been for the Mediator, far greater than Moses, who has stood in the breach very often when we have provoked the Lord, and who has so stood in the breach that He has borne the wrath of God which else must have destroyed us?

24. *Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word:*

They said that the land that flowed with milk and honey was a land that did eat up the inhabitants thereof, and that was full of giants, and they could not drive them out.

25. *But murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD.*

Do we ever fall into this sin of murmuring in the family, murmuring in the counting house, murmuring against men, and murmuring against God, as they murmured in their tents?

26-28. *Therefore he lifted up his hand against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness: to overthrow their seed also among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands. They joined themselves also unto Baal-peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead.*

They turned aside from the pure worship of the living God to hold communion with departed spirits, they fell into all the horrible abominations of the heathen among whom they dwelt.

29-30. *Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them. Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed.*

God always has somebody to stand up for Him, it is Moses one day, and Phinehas another day. He will not permit His people utterly to quit their faith and be destroyed.

31-33. *And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore. They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.*

It is not surprising that Moses should have spoken as he did to people who so worried and wearied him with their rebellions and murmurings, yet you see that God dealt sternly with His servant because of his sin, and He will do the same with those of us who bear the vessels of the Lord. The higher our office, the greater our responsibility. One slip of temper in the meek Moses shuts him out of the promised land, so see what sin will do, and see how one who sins in a smaller degree than others may be made a scapegoat for them.

34-36. *They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: but were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them.*

God warned them that it would be so, and that they must drive out those Canaanites, and not make a league with them, or else they would be sure to be led astray by them.

37-38. *Yea, they sacrificed their sons and daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.*

Yet these were God's people, whom He brought out of Egypt, whom He tutored in the wilderness, whom He fed with manna, and to whom He gave miraculous streams from the rock, these were the only people in the world whom God had chosen as His own, the rest were sitting in darkness, yet see to what degradation they had fallen.

39. *Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions.*

They were not true to God, but they plunged into every kind of uncleanness.

40-41. *Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance. And he gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them.*

Read the history of God's ancient people, and see how often this occurred.

42-44. *Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless—[See sermon #1886, God's Remembrance of His Covenant].*

Oh, that wonderful "nevertheless"—

44-48. *He regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry: and he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies. He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives. Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD.*

And well we may.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.