

Deuteronomy 33:12 (John Ritchie) 54788

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"And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between His shoulders." Deut. 33:12.

Deut. 33 gives "the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death." As the eye glances down the beautiful chapter, no brighter blessing appears than that which belongs to Benjamin. Let us dwell upon it briefly, and look upon it as indicating the blessedness which now belongs to him that believes on Jesus. Benjamin's blessing, as that of all Israel, was undoubtedly of an earthly and a temporal character, whereas ours is heavenly and spiritual; yet the one may be interpreted as giving a simple and beautiful indication of the other.

"THE BELOVED OF THE LORD." Benjamin was a son of sorrow, and so named "Benoni" by his mother (see Gen. 35:18). Yet here he is spoken of as the object of Jehovah's love. "Man is born to trouble." But how precious a thing it is to know that we are the "beloved of God" (Rom. 1:7). Every blessing we possess springs from this. Man when awakened to a sense of his need, and desirous of possessing the blessing of God, looks to his own heart, hoping there to find love to God which may prove a basis for the blessing he desires. Alas! he is bitterly disappointed. In his misery he cries-

The Scripture replies, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us." We rejoice as we learn this, and exultingly say, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us." Then follows in its own due order, "We love Him, because He first loved us." (See 1 John 4:7-21.) Let us not then seek to build anything upon our love to Him, but delight in this-that we are the objects of His changeless, eternal love.

Peter boasted much of the love which he had for his Lord. Doubtless it was sincere; but what bitter experience he had to pass through that he might learn not to trust to the strength of his own affection! John delighted to speak of himself as the "disciple, whom Jesus loved." He who wrote of the full display of God's love in the only begotten Son of the Father's bosom did himself recline on the bosom of Jesus. In all our sorrows therefore, in the sense of our own weakness and when assailed with thoughts of our own utter unworthiness, let this be the comfort and joy of our souls-we are "beloved of God."

"SHALL DWELL IN SAFETY." The mention of safety brings to mind the thought of danger; and we ask, To what danger were we exposed? As sinners, we stood exposed to the judgment of God. Every sin merited eternal perdition; and to the lake of fire we must have gone, had not God's love provided a dwelling place of perfect safety. Such a shelter we were unable to provide for ourselves. All our works, all our endeavors, could not ward off the stroke of justice. What could? Let us go back in the history of Benjamin and Israel for a reply.

Exod. 12 is well known as the chapter which records God's last and sorest plague upon Egypt. It tells of that solemn night when throughout all the land there was not one house where death entered not. God dealt in judgment, maintaining His own character. In the houses of all the Egyptians, the first-born died. For the houses of Israel, the lamb was slain. Death fell upon the unblemished sacrificial victim instead of the first-born. The blood of the lamb was sprinkled at the door, and thus those who would otherwise have fallen beneath Jehovah's stroke had a dwelling place of safety even in the midst of His judgments. "When I see the blood," Jehovah said. He spoke not of their good works or religion or ought beside, but the blood. "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." Surely none can fail to see in that blood a prefiguring of the "precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by Him do believe in God." 1 Pet. 1:19-21. It is that blood which alone can screen from God's judgment. Happy is he who is sheltered by it!

Then are there not foes which trouble and menace? Yes; both evil spirits and wicked men. But God is for us. (Rom. 8:31-39.) The blood which screens us from judgment forms a righteous ground upon which God can manifest Himself as on our part. His love could not triumph at the expense of His righteousness. He could not pass by our sins; but He gave His Son to bear the judgment due to them, and thus declared Himself against our sins, but for us. Who then can be against us? Benjamin, as the other tribes, was sheltered on the night of the Passover, following which God brought him forth from slavery, delivered him from all the harassing foes of the wilderness; and now, as he is about to enter the land, He speaks of a dwelling place of safety. Happy Benjamin! And happy, thrice happy, is he who, through the value of Jesus' blood, has God as his justifier and protector until all danger be past and he is landed in that bright abode of peace!

"BY HIM." The last words were incomplete in beauty; here is their completeness. It is not only a dwelling place of safety which he provides, but it is by Him, at His side. Love must have all distance removed. See how the father ran to meet the wicked son, nor slackened his pace until the weary head of the wanderer was pillowed upon his bosom. Then would he assign to him some place in his house where he might be free from danger? No; if the father acts, he must do so according to the dictates of his own love. What place must the prodigal have? A place near his father.. "Let us eat, and be merry." Oh, blessed picture! What says the sinner? "Oh, if I could but creep in behind heaven's door!" There is no such place. Either, as sinners, we are assigned to the outer darkness where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, or, as redeemed by the blood of Jesus, we are brought perfectly nigh to God. This is the doctrine of the Scriptures: "But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Eph. 2:13. There is the contrast-"far off," "nigh." How near? Just as near as the one blessed word "nigh" can express. It is unqualified nearness.

"AND THE LORD SHALL COVER HIM." In the land of promise Benjamin occupied a small tract of country close beside Jerusalem, and thus they might be covered, as it were, by the shadow of Jehovah's earthly dwelling place. The Lord Himself gave a beautiful figure of the truth which

the words express when, bemoaning Jerusalem, He described the blessing they refused. "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings!" They desired not His presence or blessing, and He solemnly declared that the house under the shadow of which Benjamin had dwelt, should be desolate. But how beautiful the figure, and how precious its application to those who submit to be gathered by Him! Enemies may surround, but none can touch the brood without first attacking the parent bird. Oh, believer, why do you tremble when assailed by foes and temptations? He who lives for you must first be assailed and overcome before you can be overthrown. Nor is protection the only idea in the figure. If we are beneath the shadow of His wing, we are where we are kept conscious of the warmth of His heart. Oh, it is a blessed thing that our Lord so knows how to turn everything to account that He makes the very dark times of tribulation and persecution the occasion for more fully manifesting His love! Surely in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us.

"ALL THE DAY LONG." Yes, throughout the weary day of our sorrow here upon earth. The day has many moments, and each moment may bring its changes and fresh sorrows, but throughout its length He covers us. A young Christian woman who had been lying in bed for many years was cheered through months of weariness by the literal rendering of Matt. 28:20, which was given to her by a visitor: "Behold, I am with you all the days." (J.N.D. Trans.) Whether the bright sunlight gleams upon all things and makes them seem lovely, or whether the sky be overcast and storms rage, He is with us all the days.

"AND HE SHALL DWELL -BETWEEN HIS SHOULDERS." According to God's ordinance, the high priest robed in his garments of glory and beauty, bore upon his breast and upon his shoulders the names of the tribes of Israel. There Benjamin shone, as the rest, a precious stone in the light of the sanctuary, held in pure gold. The priesthood failed in man's hand, but it is all fulfilled in Him who is the great Priest over God's house. He bears His people upon His breast and upon His shoulders. That is to say, all His love is engaged for us, and all His divine power is administered in our behalf to bring us through this weary world. Some may say, "It is indeed precious to think of being sheltered in perfect safety, and kept in the assurance of His love; but oh, we are so feeble!" But it does not require much strength to be carried. We asked an aged woman of over eighty years, "How far did the shepherd carry the sheep when he had found it?" She thought for a moment and then a smile kindled in her face as she joyously answered in that sweet monosyllable-"HOME!" It is His divine power which sustains us in each step we take, and what we need is unfeigned dependence upon Him, and unwavering reliance upon His strength. In His bosom and on His shoulders are the two places where He speaks of carrying His own; the one expressive of His realized love, the other of His unailing strength. (Isa. 40:11; Luke 15:5.)

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