

## Chapter 20

### Moses' Parting Gift— Yahweh's Prophetic Song of Witness

BEFORE TAKING final leave of Moses, we will do wisely to look at the visible hand of God in the Memorial Song which he left in the mouth of Israel as his parting gift, before ascending to his unknown resting place on the summit of Nebo. This song was a prophecy; and therein lies the visibility of the divine hand; for no man can prophesy. But it was not only necessarily divine because prophetic; it was ostensibly and authentically communicated in a remarkable way as God's own forecast of their history for His own justification in aftertimes in the attitude He should take to them. All prophecy is the visible hand of God; but there are features about this prophecy that mark it off in a way different from others as self-evidently and uncontradictably divine. The time it was delivered, the circumstances of its delivery, its unsparing disparagement of the national character, its true foreshadowing of the actual course of their history, and the evidence of its fulfilment before our eyes at the present hour, are aspects of the matter that combine in the exercise of a capable discernment, to mark it with a peculiar pre-eminence among the many unmistakable exhibitions of the visible hand of God that have characterised the history of the Jewish nation.

As already stated, it was at the very end of Moses' life that the Memorial Song was delivered. His work all done, he was abruptly summoned by Yahweh to present himself at the tabernacle of the congregation along with Joshua, for a few finishing words, in which Yahweh was the sole speaker. The two presented themselves without delay, and Yahweh appeared in the pillar of cloud over the door of the tabernacle in the way already noticed several times ([Deut. 31:14–15](#)). Wonderful were the words addressed to Moses, such as no man could have conceived in his heart to say; that is, when the meaning of the words is considered: "Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, and this people will rise up and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land whither they go, to be among them, and *will forsake me and break my covenant, which I have made with them*. Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I *will hide my face from them*, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?... Now, therefore, write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: Put it in their mouths that *this song may be a witness FOR ME against the children of Israel.*"

Yahweh proceeded to inform Moses that "when many evils and troubles" should befall the nation, on account of their apostacy from Him, "this song shall *testify against them as a witness*: for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed." Here is an extraordinary patriotic song—a song established at the very start of a nation's history as a testimony against the doings of a nation in advance, and incorporated as a permanent reproof of their iniquity in the national constitution (for that it has been permanent, we who live at the present day are witnesses). Such a thing is absolutely unheard of in the history of any other nation; such a thing is inconceivable and unaccountable, apart from the fact that it was a divine doing. With what human motive, either at the commencement of their history or at any other time, could the leaders have

introduced such a literary monument into the archives of the nation? Introduced it was; for there it is, and has been, ever since these documents were known to the world. Human imagination is fertile sometimes; but it would puzzle the most prolific to hazard a plausible explanation of such a passage in Israel's history, apart from the view that it stands there in simple truth as a piece of naked historical veracity.

Moses having received and written the wonderful literary composition that was to put Israel's condemnation in the mouth of posterity, convenes the Levites in no complimentary or even conciliatory mood, and addresses them in this strain, inexplicable on every principle except that he was acting as the agent of God: "I know thy rebellion and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the Lord; and how much more after my death? Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death, ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you: and evil will befall you in the latter days: because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands."

With this introductory sternness—yet not the sternness of petulance, but the calm sternness of a sad perception of truth—Moses rehearses the MEMORIAL SONG which occupies the first forty-three verses of the thirty-second chapter of Deuteronomy. The interested reader will read the song. It will not be necessary to do more here than indicate the leading features.

Firstly, there is an entire absence of the patriotic sentiment to be found in the literature of all other nations. There is nothing here to glorify the race or its achievements; quite the reverse—in which alone there is evidence of an extra-human origin; for the Jews are no exception to the Gentiles in their tendency to be impressed with the superiority of their racial stock and to glorify the deeds of ancestors or vaunt contemporary greatness. Verses [1-2](#) arrest the attention with promise of discourse that shall distil gently and purely as the rain.

The first note struck is the kernel of all Jewish constitutions and institutions and renown—GOD. "Ascribe ye greatness to our God"—verse [3](#). Not without reason: He is declared "THE ROCK, his work, perfect; his way without iniquity"—verse [4](#).

But as for Israel, "*They have corrupted themselves ... they are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus requite Yahweh, O foolish people and unwise? ... hath He not made thee and established thee?*"

Then follows a rehearsal of God's goodness to Israel, culminating in the strange climax: "But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked ... he forsook God which had made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger ... When Yahweh saw it, HE ABHORRED them.... And he said, *I will hide my face from them; for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.... I will heap mischiefs upon them: I will spend mine arrows upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger and devoured with burning heat and with bitter destruction ... for they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them.*"

Here is a predicted career of disobedience and trouble. Israel would forsake God; God would hide His face from them, and trouble, sent by Him, would overtake them. The song in which these things are written is more than three thousand years old. Has it not been verified in Israel's history? If men were not in ignorance of the Scriptures—ignorant of the common history of the Jews since the days of Moses, they would be astounded at the exact correspondence between the course of their (Israel's) national life and the outline exhibited prophetically in this Memorial Song. Things have come out exactly as the song foreshadowed. Israel turned aside from the

commandments God had given them, and has come through such a sea of trouble as no other nation upon earth has passed through. The wonder is they are not extinct. That they have not been overwhelmed and destroyed by the troubles that have befallen them is directly due to divine prevention, as this song testifies—Verse [26](#), “The sword without and terror within shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also, with the man of grey hairs. I said I would scatter them into corners: *I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men,* WERE IT NOT THAT I FEARED THE WRATH OF THE ENEMY, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and *lest they should say,* Our hand is high: YAHWEH HATH NOT DONE ALL THIS.” Israel’s punishment—not their destruction—has been the object of the tribulation sore and great that God has brought upon them. He thus speaks by Jeremiah: “Though I make a full end of all the nations among whom I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee, but will correct thee in measure and not leave thee altogether unpunished” ([Jer. 30:11](#)). Their subjection to foreign nations has been God’s doing; but foreign nations know this not, and are inclined to say, as this Song represents, “Our hand is high: Yahweh hath not done all this.” This is an additional reason for Yahweh not allowing Israel’s total extirpation from among the nations of the earth. At first sight, it seems strange that the Creator, or His angelic representatives, should be at all affected by the foolish opinions of the enemy; but we get to learn higher views of Yahweh’s relation to men as we increase in age, knowledge, and wisdom. Yahweh is not only pleased with the intelligent adoration of the creatures He has formed in His own image: He is displeased with the irrational fumes and attitudes of ignorant men. Can any man show why He should not be the one and the other? The objector can only bring to us his transcendental— (*i.e.*, imaginary, self-evolved) conceptions as to what God ought to be, which no more affect the facts as they are than a man’s opinion of the moon affects its constitution. Yahweh “feared the wrath of the enemy” in fearing both the enemys boasts and the indefinite postponement of His own glorious purpose upon earth, had He allowed “Israel to be scattered into corners, and their remembrance to have ceased from among men.” Yahweh’s purpose turns upon the house of Israel. “Salvation is of the Jews,” as Jesus said. Consequently, to have suffered them to be annihilated would have been to give entire place to “the wrath of the enemy.” God’s anger with Israel has been restrained for His own purposes. As He said by Isaiah, “For my name’s sake will I *defer mine anger,* and for my praise will I *refrain from thee that I cut thee not off...* For mine own sake, even for mine own sake will I do it; for how should I give my name to be polluted?” ([Isaiah 48:9](#)).

The preservation of the Jews in the midst of the nations is therefore a guarantee to every man who can see with an enlightened eye that the ultimate purpose of Yahweh in their choice will be realised. Their temporary exile from the God of their fathers has meanwhile been the occasion of another dispensation of Yahweh’s will, which has also been made contributive to the working out of that purpose when the whole earth shall be filled with His glory. The turning away of Israel has been made the occasion of inviting the Gentiles to divine relationship and hope. We refer to this here because it is a matter visible in this prophetic Memorial Song. At verse [12](#), we read: “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God: they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with *those which are not a people.* I will provoke them to anger with *a foolish nation.*” Without apostolic guidance, we might be at a loss how to understand this intimation. Enough would be obvious to prepare the way for their application of this announcement. To excite to jealousy is to pay attention to another object of love than the first. Israel was the object of Jehovah’s long attention for many centuries, during which, the Gentiles were left to themselves ([Acts 14:16](#); [17:30](#)), without God and without hope

([Eph. 2:12](#)). How was this intimation to be fulfilled—that when Israel’s apostasy should prove incorrigible, He would excite them to jealousy by them that were no people—except by making advances to the Gentiles who had been beforetime neglected? This is what happened in the apostolic age. To the Jews first, the gospel was preached after generations of disobedience; and the Jews rejecting it, the apostles, by divine direction, turned to the Gentiles ([Acts 28:25–28](#)). Christ even called an apostle who should be specially his apostle to the Gentiles ([Acts 22:21; 26:17, 18](#)), in which character Paul frequently put himself forward ([Rom. 11:13](#)). Thus Paul, referring to the matter, brings this very Memorial Song to bear ([Rom. 10:19](#)), and remarks: “Through Israel’s fall *salvation is come unto the Gentiles*, to PROVOKE THEM TO JEALOUSY” ([Rom. 11:11](#)).

Consequently, here is a matter included in the scope of this Memorial Song which comes to our very own day and touches ourselves. Wherever there are Gentiles rejoicing in the hope of Israel and approaching God as His people, there is this Song verified; there we have a monument of the visible hand of God as shown in this Song; for who but God could have foreseen, and at the very beginning of Israel’s history foretold such a thing? The Gentiles, however, have carried the thing a little too far. They are much too complacent of their position before God. By the power of immortal soulism and other errors, they have come to feel themselves as much entitled to divine recognition as ever Israel was, and more: and the standing of Israel as an affair far down out of their sight. The nations of the Gentiles are destined to have a rude awakening on this point. They have forgotten the words of Christ by Paul to them: “If some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well, because of unbelief, they were broken off, and *thou standest by faith*. Be not high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches, *take heed lest he spare not thee*. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, *if thou continue in his goodness*: OTHERWISE, THOU ALSO SHALT BE CUT OFF” ([Rom. 11:17–22](#)). The end of the times of the Gentiles is upon us, and the world is gradually verging, and that not very slowly, towards the moment when the entire Gentile polity, with all the pretensions and arrogance and unrighteousness of its people, will be violently wrenched from its position of privilege: and the old stock of Israel will have a wonderful reviving, with a graft from heaven, in the manifestation of the countless immortal sons of God in their midst. Thus invigorated and watered from above with the richest of heaven’s blessing, the old and rejuvenated tree, replanted on the hills of Palestine, will grow and flourish and fill the face of the world with fruit. In that day, Gentile greatness will have passed away as a dream, to return no more, but for a moment at the hour of its final extirpation from the earth ([Rev. 20:7–9](#)).

This wonderful consummation is also contained and shadowed forth—and that not dimly—in this wonderful Memorial Song. Bringing down the history of Israel to the point at which all their power is prostrate, and the enemy everywhere triumphant, the Song breaks away on a new line which exhibits vengeance as the final dispensation in store for the prosperous adversary: “To me belongeth vengeance; their foot (the foot of the enemy) shall slide in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For Yahweh shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants when He seeth that their power is gone, and that there is none shut up or left.” Then there is an appeal to their experience as to the vanity of their historical idolatries—an appeal that may yet be made in a very real way with thrilling

effects. The lesson is forced home: “*See now that I, even I, am He*, and there is no God with me. I kill and I make alive: I wound and I heal... I lift up my hand to heaven and say, I live for ever.” There is something more than a declaration of power in the words: “I kill and I make alive: I wound and I heal.” It is an enunciation of His purpose towards Israel, as well as the assertion of His greatness. He has killed and wounded Israel in their generations past, and His purpose is to heal and make alive when the time comes for His power to be recognised. This appears from what immediately follows: “I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh, with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy. *Rejoice, O ye nations with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries*, AND WILL BE MERCIFUL UNTO HIS LAND AND TO HIS PEOPLE.”

Here the song ends—with the return of mercy to Israel’s land and people. We have remarked on the evident divinity of its composition. See how the fact brings the Hope of Israel with it, borne aloft through all the confusion and tears of ages. Israel’s history, as here outlined, has unfolded and realised itself in the past wilderness of human life on earth. The prophetic Memorial Song has been vindicated in the desolations of the scattered race and down-trodden land. It stands monumentally as God’s witness in the earth. Witness to what? Not only to the truth and justice of His demands on the seed of Jacob—not only to His right to all He has asked and His justice in all He has brought upon them, but a witness to His purpose to overthrow the kingdoms of men—the power of the adversary); and a witness to His purpose, written for ages and generations, to be “merciful to His land and to His people.” As surely as the body of the song has been verified, so will its glorious ending. Mercy will return to the race of Israel, and with it, blessedness for all the world called upon, after judgment, to rejoice with the race now scattered, then restored to favour and to joy. This is also pledged in the song which (placed on record by Moses at the divine dictation over 3,000 years ago) is the veritable miracle of literature—an explanation and vindication of the wrath which has been Israel’s portion in the weary centuries of their exile—and a pledge of the cloudless day of glory that in the purpose of Yahweh awaits all the world, when the fulness of the time has come.