

COMMENTARIES

ON

THE FOUR LAST BOOKS OF MOSES

ARRANGED

IN THE FORM OF A HARMONY

BY JOHN CALVIN

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL LATIN, AND COMPARED WITH THE
FRENCH EDITION; WITH ANNOTATIONS, ETC.

BY THE REV. CHARLES WILLIAM BINGHAM, M.A.,
RECTOR OF MELCOMBE-HORSEY, DORSET, AND FORMERLY FELLOW OF NEW COLLEGE, OXFORD

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fore, Isaiah prophesies His coming, he recounts amongst others this divine blessing, that "the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night,"—that there might be "a tabernacle for a shadow in the day-time from the heat, and for a place of refuge and for a covert from storm and from rain," (Is. iv. 5, 6;) as if he had said, that He would really and substantially fulfil what then was seen under a figurative symbol. And surely that promise,—“The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night,” (Ps. cxxi. 6,) refers not to a single day, but to all ages. The statement of Moses, then, that “He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night,” is a blessing which God extends to us, as well as to them, except only the visible symbol, which was temporary, on account of the infirmity of the people. As to his saying that God always appeared to them, that they might march by night as well as by day, he does not mean that they went on continually without any rest, since he had just before mentioned that their first station was in Succoth, from whence they encamped in Etham, but merely informs us that the flow of God’s grace was continual, since the token of His favour and protection shone forth no less amidst the darkness of the night than at mid-day itself.

CHAPTER FOURTEENTH.

1. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

2. Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea.

3. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They *are* entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in.

4. And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pha-

1. Et loquutus est Jehova ad Mosen, dicendo.

2. Loquere ad filios Israel, ut redeant, et maneant e regione Pi-hahiroth inter Migdol et inter mare, e regione Baalsephon, contra ipsum castrametentur juxta mare.

3. Dicit enim Pharaon de filiis Israel, Irretiti sunt in terra: conclusit illos desertum.

4. Et roborabo cor Pharaonis, ut persequatur eos: et glorificabor in Pharaone, et in universo exercitu

raoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I *am* the Lord. And they did so.

5. And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?

6. And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him.

7. And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them.

8. And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand.

9. But the Egyptians pursued after them, (all the horses *and* chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army,) and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baal-zephon.

ejus: scientque Ægyptii quod ego Jehova. Et fecerunt sic.

5. Nuntiatum est autem regi Ægypti quod fugisset populus: Et verum est cor Pharaonis et servorum ejus in populum, et dixerunt, Cur hoc fecimus ut dimitteremus Israel, ne serviret nobis?

6. Et aptato curru suo populum assumpsit secum.

7. Tulit itaque sexcentos currus electos, omnes currus Ægypti, et duces super quenque illorum.

8. Et roboravit Jehova cor Pharaonis regis Ægypti, et persequutus est filios Israel. Filii autem Israel egressi erant in manu excelsa.

9. Et persequuti sunt Ægyptii illos, apprehenderuntque eos quum castra haberent juxta mare, omnis equitatus curruum Pharaonis, et equites ejus, et exercitus ejus, juxta Pihahiroth, e regione Baalsophon.

1. *And the Lord spake unto Moses.* God, by closing up all the ways by which the Israelites might have escaped, now opens a course for His wonderful power, and by bringing them for one moment to despair, provided for the safety of His Church through a long period of time. This final act, then, marvellously illustrated the grace of God, so that the people, however ungrateful and disaffected they might be, should still acknowledge God as their deliverer; besides, its consequence was, that the forces of Egypt not only being broken, but the whole nation being destroyed, or, at least, the flower of it extinguished, it brought no further trouble upon the people until they were established in the land of Canaan. If they had freely and peacefully gone forth, with the king and the people of Egypt quiet, the former miracles would not have sufficiently availed to testify their redemption; but when, being everywhere shut in, they see nothing but death before them, whilst the sea suddenly and unexpectedly affords them a passage, and overwhelms their enemies pressing on them from behind, they are obliged to con-

fess that they were not only saved from death but from the deepest abysses by the hand of God. But it appears that, when they were commanded by Moses to cast themselves, and, as it were, to engulf themselves in the narrow passage, of which mention is made, they were astonished by the miracles, and like them that dream, since they obeyed without hesitation, although the very aspect of the place must have inspired them with horror. For, if they had apprehended danger, their readiness to obey would not have been so great, as we shall presently see. Wherefore it was the intention of Moses not so much to praise them, as the providence of God. For it is plain, that unless they had been amazed by the miracles, of which they had seen so many, they scarcely could have been induced willingly to throw themselves into, defiles from whence there was no retreat. From the word מִגְדֹּל, *migdol*, we may conjecture that a fortress was built on the rock to prevent access to it. I do not quite understand the meaning of הַחִירוֹת,¹ *hachiroth*, nor do I see why the Greeks should have translated it "the mouth of the valley;" yet from the word signifying "a mouth," it may be probably conjectured that it was contracted by piles. Because the word חוֹר, *chor*, signifies a cave or hole, I know not whether the place might not have obtained its name, as the mouth of the holes or caverns; for the letter ו, *vau*, is often converted into י, *yod*, and the change of the gender in the plural number is frequent with the Hebrews. Or perhaps some may think it more likely, that though it was written הַחִירוֹת, *hachiroth*, the letter ה crept in in place of ח from its similarity. If we so take it, the feminine gender is put for the masculine, and it will be "the mouth of the mountains." But although we may be ignorant of the etymology of the second word, the word "mouth" makes it

¹ פִּי־הַחִירוֹת. C. has not borrowed anything from S. M. here. In Dr. Wilson's "Lands of the Bible," vol. i. chap. 5, he has observed that if Pi-hahiroth is to be supposed to be a name given to the place, in the Hebrew tongue, it is well fitted to describe *the mouth of the defiles*, on emerging from which, the traveller comes in sight of the Red Sea, and enters on ground shut in between mountain barriers and that sea; but he also mentions that Gesenius has said, on the authority of Tablonski, that these syllables form the Egyptian name for a place where sedges grow.—W.

certain that the defile was inclosed by rocks, and of narrow access. Although, if I may tender my own judgment in a doubtful matter, I rather consider that it is derived from the word *חרת*, *charath*, which means to engrave, or to furrow, because the rocks were cut as by a mallet. But on the opposite side, the place was surrounded by the sea, as though the Israelites had been cast into a sepulchre.

3. *For Pharaoh will say.* God here explains to Moses His design; although, in His engagements with Pharaoh, He had so often gained glorious victories, that the last act still remained to overwhelm him and his army in the sea. He says that Pharaoh, then, will be caught in this snare, so as to rush upon his destruction. For, if the people had come into the land of Canaan by a direct course, they could not have been so readily pursued; therefore God, for the sake of magnifying His glory, set a bait to catch the tyrant, just as fish are hooked. The word here used *נבוכים*,¹ *nebukim*, some render "perplexed," others "entangled;" but it may be well explained, that they were to be "confounded in the land," because they would find no way of egress; as being on all sides hemmed in in the narrow passage, with the sea behind them. And where He speaks of the intentions of Pharaoh, He does not, as men do, conceive a mere probability, but He declares the secret mind of the tyrant, as of a thing which He well knew, since it is His attribute to discern our hearts. Afterwards He goes still further; for He signifies not only that He foresaw what would happen, but again repeats what we have so often observed before, that He would harden Pharaoh's heart, that he should follow after the people. Whence it follows, that all this was directed by His will and guidance. But He did not testify this to Moses only in private, but would have them all previously admonished, lest, being terrified by the sudden assault of their enemies, they should despair of safety. But this admonition was less useful to them than it should have been; because, being soon after surprised, they are not less alarmed than

¹ *נבוכים*. Calvin adopts the explanation given by *S. M.*, on the authority of Aben-Ezra, "Passivum est a verbo *בוכ*, quod significat animo perplexum esse, ut nescias quo te vertas."—*W.*

as if they had been brought into danger through the error of God and the ignorance of Moses.

5. *And it was told the king.* Moses does not simply mean, that the king then first heard of the flight of the people, which had been anything but secret; but that the circumstances were reported to him, which stirred him up to make an attack upon them. When, then, he hears that the people fled in haste, he thinks that they may be retained by the slightest obstacle. Nor is he alone influenced by this foolish thought, but all his courtiers blame their own inertness for letting the people go. They inquire among themselves, Why they have let the children of Israel depart? as if they had not endeavoured in every way to prevent their free exit—as if their pertinacity had not been ten times divinely overcome—as if God had not at length torn the people from them, in spite of their reluctance. But this is the stupidity of the wicked, that they only dread God's present hand, and immediately forget all that they have seen. They were worn out by the fierce and dreadful punishments; but now, as if nothing had happened, they discuss why they had not resisted God even to the end, when he had compelled them to submit with extreme reluctance, after they had ten times found out that they struggled against Him in vain. But such is the pride by which the reprobate must be blinded, that they may be driven onwards to their own destruction, while they are persuaded that there is nothing difficult to them, and fight against God.

6. *And he made ready his chariot.* Moses briefly describes the warlike preparation of Pharaoh, not only to magnify the greatness of God's power in delivering the people, but also to shew with what violent and obstinate audacity the wicked go forwards, when they give way to their depraved and criminal lusts. Just now the Egyptians were almost frightened to death, and cried out that all was over with them; scarcely has a day passed, when they collect a powerful army as if their forces were uninjured. If any object that 600 chariots, and even many more, although filled with armed men, were insufficient to conquer 600,000 men: I reply, that, since they knew that the battle would be with an unwarlike

multitude, amongst which, too, women and children were mingled, they relied on this consideration, and hoped that they would have no difficulty in routing this enormous number, since it was both inexperienced and undisciplined. Nor would their hope have been disappointed, had not God been against them. But the event proved how truly Solomon says, "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord," (Prov. xxi. 30;) and how justly Isaiah defies the enemies of the Church: "Associate yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand." (Is. viii. 9, 10.) For this presumption brings the wicked to nought; and, whilst they rush forward with unbridled violence, they conceive not that God has a secret bridle to restrain their lusts.

8. *And the children of Israel went out.*¹ Moses indirectly reproves their too great security, which had freed them altogether from care and fear; and whence even the desire of calling on God had grown cold in them, as security always produces drowsiness and an idle spirit. Hence it came to pass, that this great danger, which they had not expected, produced the greater fear. But, on the other hand, Moses exalts God's grace, because He so opportunely and so critically came to the help of the wretched Israelites exulting in their foolish joy; for otherwise, being suddenly overtaken, they would have fallen at once into confusion at the first shout of the enemy. Thus are we admonished by this example, that, while we are safe under God's protection, the dangers, which might happen, are to be apprehended, not that we may be anxious and alarmed, but that we may humbly repose under His wings, and not be uplifted with inconsiderate joy. In the next verse Moses briefly relates, how formidable a sight presented itself to the Israelites, when they saw themselves shut in on one part by the sea, ingulfed, as it were, on both sides by the jaws of the defile, and the army of Pharaoh at the same time pressing upon them. He expressly mentions the strength of this army, in

¹ Exicrant.—*Dathe.*