

This is a portion of a larger book. In this version, the Bible texts have been modified into modern English, the punctuation improved, headings and emphasis may have been added, and some sentences realigned.

Chapter 9

John in Exile

The wonderful success which attended the preaching of the gospel by the apostles and their fellow laborers increased the hatred of the enemies of Christ. They made every effort to hinder its progress, and finally succeeded in enlisting the power of the Roman emperor against the Christians. A terrible persecution ensued, in which many of the followers of Christ were put to death. The apostle John was now an aged man, but with great zeal and success he continued to preach the doctrine of Christ. He had a testimony of power, which his adversaries could not controvert, and which greatly encouraged his brothers [and sisters].

When the faith of the Christians would seem to waver under the fierce opposition they were forced to meet, the apostle would repeat, with great dignity, power, and eloquence, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; . . . that which we have seen and heard declare we to you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-3).

The bitterest hatred was kindled against John for his unwavering fidelity to the cause of Christ. He was the last survivor of the disciples who are intimately connected with Jesus, and his enemies decided that his testimony must be silenced. If this could be accomplished, they thought the doctrine of Christ would not spread; and if treated with severity, it might soon die out of the world. John was accordingly summoned to Rome to be tried for his faith. His doctrines were misstated. False witnesses accused him as a seditious person, publicly teaching theories which would subvert the nation.

The apostle presented his faith in a clear and convincing manner, with such simplicity and candor that his words had a powerful effect. His hearers were astonished at his wisdom and eloquence. But the more convincing his testimony, the deeper the hatred of those who opposed the truth. The emperor was filled with rage, and blasphemed the name of God and of Christ. He could not controvert the apostle's reasoning or match the power which attended the utterance of truth, and he determined to silence its faithful advocate.

God's Witness Not Silenced

Here we see how hard the heart may become when obstinately set against the purposes of God. The foes of the church were determined to maintain their pride and power before the people. By the emperor's decree, John was banished to the Isle of Patmos, condemned, as he tells us, "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:9). But the enemies of Christ utterly failed in their purpose to silence His faithful witness. From his place of exile comes the apostle's voice, reaching even to the end of time, proclaiming the most thrilling truths ever presented to mortals.

Patmos, a barren rocky island in the Aegean Sea, had been chosen by the Roman government as a place of banishment for criminals. But to the servant of God this gloomy abode proved to be the gate of heaven.

He was shut away from the busy scenes of life and from active labour as an evangelist, but he was not excluded from the presence of God. In his desolate home he could commune with the King of kings and study more closely the manifestations of divine power in the book of nature and the pages of inspiration. He delighted to meditate upon the great work of creation and to adore the power of the Divine Architect. In former years his eyes had been greeted with the sight of wood-covered hills, green valleys, and fruitful plains; and in all the beauties of nature he had delighted to trace the wisdom and skill of the Creator. He was now surrounded with scenes that to many would appear gloomy and uninteresting. But to John it was otherwise. He could read the most important lessons in the wild, desolate rocks, the mysteries of the great deep, and the glories of the firmament. To him all bore the impress of God's power and declared His glory.

The Voice of Nature

The apostle beheld around him the witnesses of the Flood, which deluged the earth because the inhabitants ventured to transgress the law of God. The rocks, thrown up from the great deep and from the earth by the breaking forth of the waters, brought vividly to his mind the terrors of that awful outpouring of God's wrath.

But while all that surrounded him below appeared desolate and barren, the blue heavens that bent above the apostle on lonely Patmos were as bright and beautiful as the skies above his own loved Jerusalem. Let man once look upon the glory of the heavens in the night season and mark the work of God's power in the hosts thereof, and he is taught a lesson of the greatness of the Creator in

contrast with his own littleness. If he has cherished pride and self-importance because of wealth, or talents, or personal attractions, let him go out in the beautiful night and look upon the starry heavens, and learn to humble his proud spirit in the presence of the Infinite One.

In the voice of many waters – deep calling to deep – the prophet heard the voice of the Creator. The sea, lashed to fury by the merciless winds, represented to him the wrath of an offended God. The mighty waves, in their most terrible commotion restrained within the limits appointed by an invisible hand, spoke to John of an infinite power controlling the deep.

And in contrast he saw and felt the folly of feeble mortals, but worms of the dust, who glory in their wisdom and strength and set their hearts against the Ruler of the universe, as though God were altogether such a one as themselves. How blind and senseless is human pride! One hour of God's blessing in the sunshine and rain upon the earth will do more to change the face of nature than man with all his boasted knowledge and persevering efforts can accomplish during a lifetime.

In the surroundings of his island home the exiled prophet read the manifestations of divine power, and in all the works of nature held communion with his God. The most ardent longing of the soul after God, the most fervent prayers, went up to heaven from rocky Patmos. As John looked upon the rocks, he was reminded of Christ, the rock of his strength, in whose shelter he could hide without a fear.

A Sabbathkeeper

The LORD's day mentioned by John was the Sabbath, the day on which Jehovah rested after the great work of creation, and which He blessed and sanctified because He had rested upon it. The Sabbath was as sacredly observed by John upon the Isle of Patmos as when he was among the people, preaching upon that day. By the barren rocks surrounding him, John was reminded of rocky Horeb, and how, when God spoke His law to the people there, He said, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8).

The Son of God spoke to Moses from the mountain-top. God made the rocks His sanctuary. His temple was the everlasting hills. The Divine Legislator descended upon the rocky mountain to speak His law in the hearing of all the people, that they might be impressed by the grand and awful exhibition of His power and glory, and fear to transgress His commandments. God spoke His law amid thunders and lightnings and the thick cloud upon the top of the mountain, and His voice was as the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud. The

law of Jehovah was unchangeable, and the tablets upon which He wrote that law were solid rock, signifying the immutability of His precepts. Rocky Horeb became a sacred place to all who loved and revered the law of God.

Shut in With God

While John was contemplating the scenes of Horeb, the Spirit of Him who sanctified the seventh day came upon him. He contemplated the sin of Adam in transgressing the divine law, and the fearful result of that transgression. The infinite love of God, in giving His Son to redeem a lost race, seemed too great for language to express. As he presents it in his epistle he calls upon the church and the world to behold it. "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not" (1 John 3:1). It was a mystery to John that God could give His Son to die for rebellious man. And he was lost in amazement that the plan of salvation, devised at such a cost to Heaven, should be refused by those for whom the infinite sacrifice had been made.

John was shut in with God. As he learned more of the divine character through the works of creation, his reverence for God increased. He often asked himself, Why do not men, who are wholly dependent upon God, seek to be at peace with Him by willing obedience? He is infinite in wisdom, and there is no limit to His power. He controls the heavens with their numberless worlds. He preserves in perfect harmony the grandeur and beauty of the things which He has created. Sin is the transgression of God's law, and the penalty of sin is death. There would have been no discord in heaven or in the earth if sin had never entered. Disobedience to God's law has brought all the misery that has existed among His creatures.

Why will not men be reconciled to God?

It is no light matter to sin against God, to set the perverse will of man in opposition to the will of his Maker. It is for the best interest of men, even in this world, to obey God's commandments. And it is surely for their eternal interest to submit to God, and be at peace with Him. The beasts of the field obey their Creator's law in the instinct which governs them. He speaks to the proud ocean, "Hitherto shall you come, but no further" (Job 38:11); and the waters are prompt to obey His word. The planets are marshaled in perfect order, obeying the laws which God has established.

Of all the creatures that God has made upon the earth, man alone is rebellious.

Yet he possesses reasoning powers to understand the claims of the divine law and a conscience to feel the guilt of transgression and the peace and joy of obedience. God made him a free moral agent, to obey or disobey. The reward of everlasting life – an eternal weight of glory – is promised to those who do God's will, while the threatenings of His wrath hang over all who defy His law.

The Majesty of God

As John meditated upon the glory of God displayed in His works, he was overwhelmed with the greatness and majesty of the Creator. Should all the inhabitants of this little world refuse obedience to God, He would not be left without glory. He could sweep every mortal from the face of the earth in a moment, and create a new race to people it and glorify His name. God is not dependent on man for honour. He could marshal the starry hosts of heaven, the millions of worlds above, to raise a song of honour and praise and glory to their Creator. “The heavens shall praise your wonders, O LORD: your faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints. For who in the heaven can be compared to the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him” (Psalm 89:5-7).

A Vision of Christ

John calls to remembrance the wonderful incidents that he has witnessed in the life of Christ. In imagination he again enjoys the precious opportunities with which he was once favored, and is greatly comforted. Suddenly his meditation is broken in upon; he is addressed in tones distinct and clear. He turns to see from whence the voice proceeds, and, lo! he beholds his LORD, whom he has loved, with whom he has walked and talked, and whose sufferings upon the cross he has witnessed. But how changed is the Saviour's appearance! He is no longer “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). He bears no marks of His humiliation. His eyes are like a flame of fire; His feet like fine brass, as it glows in a furnace. The tones of His voice are like the musical sound of many waters. His countenance shines like the sun in its meridian glory. In His hand are seven stars, representing the ministers of the churches. Out of His mouth issues a sharp, two-edged sword, an emblem of the power of His word.

John, who has so loved his LORD, and who has steadfastly adhered to the truth in the face of imprisonment, stripes, and threatened death, cannot endure the excellent glory of Christ's presence, and falls to the earth as one stricken dead. Jesus then lays His hand upon the prostrate form of His servant, saying, “Fear not; ... I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore”

(Revelation 1:17, 18). John was strengthened to live in the presence of his glorified LORD, and then were presented before him in holy vision the purposes of God for future ages. The glorious attractions of the heavenly home were made known to him. He was permitted to look upon the throne of God, and to behold the white-robed throng of redeemed ones. He heard the music of heavenly angels, and the songs of triumph from those who had overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.

John's Humility

To the beloved disciple were granted such exalted privileges as have rarely been vouchsafed to mortals. Yet so closely had he become assimilated to the character of Christ that pride found no place in his heart. His humility did not consist in a mere profession; it was a grace that clothed him as naturally as a garment. He ever sought to conceal his own righteous acts and to avoid everything that would seem to attract attention to himself.

In his Gospel, John mentions the disciple whom Jesus loved, but conceals the fact that the one thus honored was himself. His course was devoid of selfishness. In his daily life he taught and practiced charity in the fullest sense. He had a high sense of the love that should exist among natural brothers and Christian brothers [and sisters]. He presents and urges this love as an essential characteristic of the followers of Jesus. Destitute of this, all pretensions to the Christian name are vain.

John was a teacher of practical holiness. He presents unerring rules for the conduct of Christians. They must be pure in heart and correct in manners. In no case should they be satisfied with an empty profession.

He declares in unmistakable terms that to be a Christian is to be Christlike.

The life of John was one of earnest effort to conform to the will of God. The apostle followed his Saviour so closely, and had such a sense of the purity and exalted holiness of Christ, that his own character appeared, in contrast, exceedingly defective. And when Jesus in His glorified body appeared to John, one glimpse was enough to cause him to fall down as one dead. Such will ever be the feelings of those who know best their LORD and Master. The more closely they contemplate the life and character of Jesus, the more deeply will they feel their own sinfulness, and the less will they be disposed to claim holiness of heart or to boast of their sanctification.