Lectures Introductory
To the Study of
The Old Testament

by
William Kelly

Three volumes in one
Introduction to the One Volume Edition

William Kelly gave introductory lectures to the study of parts of the OT, printed in three volumes, and also covered all of the NT, printed in three volumes (available in a one volume edition from Present Truth Publishers).

It is because someone has typeset and proofread this volume, and has added the Scripture references in braces { } in the text, that Present Truth Publishers has been able to provide this edition of the combined three books of introductory lectures to the study of the NT in one volume. Footnotes in braces have been added by the editor of this one volume edition.

The combination of the three volumes into one volume accomplishes two things: it is cheaper to produce one book than three books; and, the Subject Index and Scripture Index created for this edition covers the three OT volumes together.

The original volumes each had a detailed table of contents but these are not included in this edition.

Present Truth Publishers, August 2005
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Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Pentateuch

1871
Preface

The Lectures which follow were delivered in London, during the month of May, 1870, and corrected from notes taken in shorthand, with additions. It may be painful to some that so much notice is taken of sceptical assaults on the Pentateuch. My object, however, is not only to promote the direct edification of the Christians who are quite unaffected by such puny efforts of unbelief, but to furnish helpful hints to those who feel either need of a candid answer to captious objections, or a wish to aid the feeble entangled by such snares of the enemy. These remarks, chiefly in the form of footnotes, unless I err greatly, will not be unwelcome to many souls; for to my mind the defense made by those friendly to revelation is in general almost as feeble, and in many cases quite as painful, as the attacks of its foes. May He whose grace is rich to all that call upon Him bless every reader, as He bears with my shortcomings, though earnestly desiring to magnify Himself and His word!

Guernsey, December, 1870.
Modern criticism has ventured to undermine and assail almost all the books of holy scripture, but none with such boldness as the Pentateuch, unless it be the prophecy of Daniel. The incredulity of not a few theologians in our own day, abroad and at home, outstrips while it follows that of Celsus and Porphyry, of Spinosa and Hobbes, of Bolingbroke and Hume. The remote antiquity of Moses especially seemed to invite their unhappy efforts in the dark; for as the prowling birds of night shun the day, so the sceptics of all ages love darkness rather than light for a reason which is plain to every eye but their own -- a reason on which the Judge of quick and dead has already pronounced, if not on themselves because of it.

We need not cite the heathen critics, nor the famous Rabbis outside Christianity who rise up to rebuke such unconscionable doubts. We would not summon the whole nation of Israel, whose testimony is in this all the stronger, because from a date far earlier than the father of Grecian history it is given with double force to the law if not to the prophet. We would not glean from the widespread field of tradition, east, west, north, south, nor appeal even to the unwritten but emphatic records of Egypt itself, that once renowned mistress, but now according to one of Jehovah’s prophets the basest of kingdoms, which hides no doubt the shame of its rulers, but confirms in the most minute way the finest details of the Mosaic report of Israel’s hard bondage before their triumph. Let us take our stand on the fact, broad, deep, and conclusive, that the authority of Christ has decided before their triumph. Let us take our stand on the fact, broad, deep, and conclusive, that the authority of Christ has decided the question for all who own Him to be God as well as man. It is well that we should know with what sort of men we have to deal; for all have not faith. He who spoke of charity, and to judge Him and His word, instead of submitting, as divinely formed faith always does, to be judged by Him. If the testimony be of God, it is the truth; and if so, he who cavils and opposes is ipso facto proved to be in such a state morally that he has no congeniality with the truth of God, and if mathematics demand a strict and necessary demonstration, and comprehensive grouping under general principles or laws, if we set up the heathen critics, nor the famous Rabbis outside Christianity who rise up to rebuke such unconscionable doubts. We would not summon the whole nation of Israel, whose testimony is in this all the stronger, because from a date far earlier than the father of Grecian history it is given with double force to the law if not to the prophet.

If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ; let him be Anathema Maranatha {1 Cor. 16:22}.

Our Lord then has spoken with particular care of Daniel toward the close of the Old Testament canon, but of Moses at the beginning as the writer of the law (Mark 10:5, 12:26; Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:46, 47, 7:19). It is not merely that He does not contest the position of the Jews as to Moses; He affirms it and insists on it repeatedly Himself in the plainest terms. Think of the coolness of a man, professedly not an infidel but a Christian and a Christian minister, who, after quoting Christ’s words, can say, “Here the allusion is to Ex. 3:6, which was not written by Moses, as we suppose! 1

Fully admitting the value of reasoning to convict gainsayers and expose the futility of their captious arguments, I lay it down as an axiom that in revealed truth it is and must be simply a question of a divine testimony, which is given to be believed, and which binds the conscience even of him who rejects it through unbelief. If physics require patient induction and comprehensive grouping under general principles or laws, if the mixed sciences admit of both, the written word of God claims faith in His testimony which tests the moral state of him who hears. The faith which receives it traditionally and with indifference is of no value, and will under pressure give it up with the same otiose facility in which it assented. Certainly to doubt is not to believe; yet one could almost allow the saying to pass, that there is more faith in some doubts than in such traditional faith as characterizes Christendom, save those in it who are born of God. For the soul which begins to be really in earnest is apt to hesitate till it has adequate motive to believe; while the flesh which so promptly offered to obey at Sinai is just as ready to say its Amen to the Athanasian creed.

Again, God does give sufficient evidence to render the unbelief of the objector inexcusable; but the faith which rests on such human motives is merely of nature, not of the Holy Spirit as its source. One may be arrested or attracted by such evidence; but God’s testimony must be received because and if the mixed sciences admit of both, the written word of God claims faith in His testimony which tests the moral state of him who hears. The faith which receives it traditionally and with indifference is of no value, and will under pressure give it up with the same otiose facility in which it assented. Certainly to doubt is not to believe; yet one could almost allow the saying to pass, that there is more faith in some doubts than in such traditional faith as characterizes Christendom, save those in it who are born of God. For the soul which begins to be really in earnest is apt to hesitate till it has adequate motive to believe; while the flesh which so promptly offered to obey at Sinai is just as ready to say its Amen to the Athanasian creed.

Have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, &c. &c. {Mark 12:26, 27}. 1

1. An Introduction to the Old Testament, Critical, Historical, and Theological; containing a Discussion of the most important Questions belonging to the several Books. By Samuel Davidson, D.D., of the university of Halle, and L.L.D., vol. i. 124.
such hardness of heart against His word, that it is enough to resist all testimony, and he can only be left to the judgment which he despises.

From this it will be plain to the reflecting mind why in the things of God it is a question of believing a divine testimony, while in pure science we have to do with necessary inference and in applied science with observed facts also. Hence in these latter it is a question of course of knowledge or ignorance; they are not the subject of doubt or belief as is testimony. But it is a horrible and fatal error thence to infer that any conclusion of science is more certain than every word of God in itself and so to the believer. There are measures of faith as of knowledge; but, though no Pyrrhonist in the domain either of the senses or of science, or even of honest and competent history, I maintain that (pure science apart where the premisses necessitate the conclusion) the word of God alone gives absolute certainty, and faith receives accordingly. Revelation is the word of a God who cannot lie; and if man can with comparative ease convey his mind correctly, how much more can God His, infinite though it be? The human element is fully admitted: but the essence of inspiration is that the power of the Holy Spirit excludes error in the writer. It is too much forgotten that there is ignorance in every reader; and that this ignorance as to divine truth is really and always, spite of appearances, in the ratio of our self-sufficiency.

Further, that there are difficulties, not only great but possibly insoluble by you, me, or any other man, is not only allowed but affirmed. It may well, not to say it must, be so in a system so immense as that of which revelation treats from the creation of all, and before it, till the new heavens and earth of eternity. But he is unwise who would surrender the positive proofs of revelation, or of the truths it contains, because of difficulties which perplex the human mind. There is no divinely formed province even in nature, and this in its lowest or least forms, where there are not enigmas beyond the wit of man; and these the wisest are the most ready to confess. If writings which professed to be revelation had no depths beyond man’s plummet, it would be a juster conclusion to writings which professed to be a revelation had no depths beyond man; and these the wisest are the most ready to confess. If proofs of revelation, or of the truths it contains, because of difficulties which perplex the human mind. There is no divinely formed province even in nature, and this in its lowest or least forms, where there are not enigmas beyond the wit of man; and these the wisest are the most ready to confess. If writings which professed to be a revelation had no depths beyond man’s plummet, it would be a juster conclusion to infer that this ignorance as to divine truth is really and always, spite of appearances, in the ratio of our self-sufficiency.

Scripture claims to be the communication of the mind of God to man, not setting aside the character or circumstances of the writers, but giving the full and absolute truth of God in and through all. Such is the doctrine asserted in 1 Cor. 2, 2 Tim. 3; and with this agrees the uniform use of the passages cited for special purposes throughout both the Old and the New Testaments. So above all said He who spoke as never man spoke; and no wonder; for He was God as well as man, and man as truly as God. But it is to be feared that unbelief as to the written word bodes ill for the faith which is professsed in the Word, the personal Word of life. In both cases it is the Infinite brought into the finite by grace; of which the ruinous speculations of unbelief would deprive us, as their authors have been themselves deprived of it by an enemy subtler than they are. Thus, if incarnation be the Word made flesh (a divine person yet a real man, born of His mother, and this by the power of the Spirit), revelation is the mind of God in the language of man, but perfectly guided and guarded by the Spirit. It were to lose the truth in both respects, if we accepted the foolish cheat of Satan that the finite drags down the Infinite. Not so; both were given in God’s love to meet the finite in its actual state of sin, degradation, and distance from God; and in both the finite is so governed by the Infinite, which has joined it to itself in holy and perfect union, that grace and truth alone exist and appear without the smallest admixture of human evil or error.

The Lord had been declaring Himself the object of faith, who as Son of God becomes the source of life to him that believes, but is the judge of him that believes not to his utter destruction. This leads Him to open out the various testimonies to Himself: first, John the Baptist; secondly, the works which the Father gave the Son to do; thirdly, the Father’s own witness to the Son; and, lastly, the scriptures. Even the Jews owned their all-importance for their souls; yet did they testify concerning Christ. Self and the world were and are the true hindrances to the love and the glory of God, and hence also render faith impossible. Their accuser would be not Jesus [who will judge all] but the very Moses in whom they had their hope. If they had believed Moses, they would have believed Jesus;

for he wrote of me. If you believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? (John 5:46, 47).

Thus the Lord puts the highest honor conceivable on the written word, if it were only the law, and not the latest and fullest communications of God. For scripture as a testimony has a permanence in this respect which can belong to no spoken words. Christ did not therefore expect them to receive His own words if they did not believe the writings of Moses.

It will be observed, however, how many modern questions are here by anticipation answered. The scriptures as a whole testify about Christ. He is the object continually before the inspiring Spirit, directly or indirectly. Good or evil is noticed relatively to Him, the brighter and only complete exemplar of the one, the absolute contradiction and finally the judge of the other. The Old Testament therefore is in the fullest sense prophetic. Christ is the end of the law: is He not of the Psalms also, as well as of the Prophets? So indeed He

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2 I do not refer to questions of readings, translations or expositions, which are quite distinct from divine revelation, and belong solely to man’s responsible use of revelation.
risen from the dead tells His disciples (Luke 24:27, and 44, 45). I know that these unhappy rationalists dare to think that in the days of His flesh He, the Lord God, was not above the prejudices of that time and place from which they, dupes of Satan, flatter themselves somewhat freed. Thus they conceive either that He did not know the truth, or that, knowing it, He deigned to -- . No; I refuse to stain even this paper of mine with their infamy of the Lord of all.

Yet, earnestly desiring not their destruction but their edification, I entreat them to weigh the last citation, and the fact, to them surely as reasonable men most momentous, that Jesus is declared so to speak as risen from the dead. If they have failed so lamentably in faith and reverence for His personal glory during His earthly service, at least they must believe, if they believe anything divine, that no human prejudices survive the grave, that in the risen state even we shall know as we are known. If then they are pleased to accord also to Jesus risen that perfection, which it is to be supposed they hope for themselves, I call on them with me to denounce the shameful, nay shameless, notion that He stooped to “a wise accommodation to popular views.”

Again, no one alleges that “Christ and His apostles came into the world to instruct the Jews in criticism” (Introduct. O.T. i. 126, 127). But does not faith in Christ bind us to accept His authority as superior to any criticism? He declares both during His ministry and in the risen state that Moses wrote of Him, that the books commonly called the law, the Pentateuch, are Moses’ writings. Was He in this fostering an error of the day, and supporting it by His authority? Certainly it was no part of Christ’s mission to prove that the Pentateuch did not proceed from Moses! But it is impossible to believe Christ’s words and to deny that He declares those books to be written by Moses, which the rationalist declares are not and distributes between Moses, if not earlier hands, the primitive Elohist after the expulsion of the Canaanites, the junior Elohist in the days of Uzziah, the Jehovist in the reign of Uzziah, the Elohist after the expulsion of the Canaanites, the junior Elohist in the days of Uzziah, the Jehovist in the reign of Uzziah, the still later redactor who was nor Ezra, and the unfortunate Deuteronomist in the reign of Manasseh who employed the “innocent fiction,” “which an uncritical age rendered easy,” of attributing to the legislator utterance of the contents of Deuteronomy as well as the authorship of the first four books, in both of which Dr. Davidson (i. 118) deliberately imputes to him what is a fraud.

I trust the pious reader will pardon my copying such views, which I may fairly call the Christian or unchristian mythology of the nineteenth century. They have found entrance and even taken root in certain quarters beyond their native soil; and I am sure that they will work to yet greater ungodliness, and contribute to the growing denial and rejection of divine authority in the world as well as in holy things, the counterpart of the haughty and effete superstition which has just pretended to claim the infallibility of God, which no apostle had nor all together, for its chief priest: two main streams of evil which will pour their impure waters into the stagnant pool of “the apostasy” that is at hand for ungrateful and self-vaulting Christendom.

But the Christian will turn with increasing confidence and singleness of purpose to the living oracles; and loving Christ he will keep His word, even as he who loves Him not keeps not His words, little thinking that the word he thus despises is the Father’s who sent the Son, and will judge him at the last day.

Even the Jews who to their ruin refused Christ, because they did not hear Moses and the prophets, and who resisting them were not persuaded when He Himself rose from the dead -- even they never went so far in presumptuous yet petty criticism as to shut their eyes to the most abundant evidence, external and internal, to the writings of Moses, never dared to deny (as rationalists do) the only light we have for more than half this world’s obscure history, besides its highest function of bearing witness to Christ. Never did they presume to say that there is little external evidence for the Mosaic authorship; that what little there is does not stand the test of criticism; or that the succeeding writers of the Old Testament do not confirm it! -- all this in the face of such evidence as neither Greek nor Latin classics possess; whose authorship none would dispute but vain or crazy dreamers. Again, no intelligent man questions the claims of Mahomet to writing the Koran, probably not alone but by the help of an unprincipled Jew. The reason of the difference is plain: not that there is nearly such an amount or excellence of proofs for the authorship of the Koran as for Moses’ writings, but that these, not that, appeal so loudly to conscience. The Koran flatters human nature, bribing its own party and bullying others; but the law brings in God, the true God, and testifies of Christ, which flesh fears and dislikes and therefore instinctively seeks to defame, unconscious too often of its sin and shame.

But if it is monstrous to deny the immense and unbroken chain of external evidence to the Pentateuch, were it only in the fact that the entire political and religious life of the Jewish nation turned on it in prosperity and adversity, captive and restored, for fifteen hundred years before Christ, not to speak of what goes on before our eyes till this day; if it is equally so to deny that from Joshua through the Psalms to Malachi the strongest links and the most express statements are given wherever they could be found naturally, what can we think of one who does not shrink from saying with the scripture before his eyes that “the venerable authority” of Christ has no proper bearing on the question? I should have thought that the effort to represent Moses as not the writer of the law as a whole, as a lawyer, not a historian, was manifestly and hopelessly at variance with His authority who condemned the unbelief of the Jews on the ground that Moses not only wrote the law, but wrote it concerning Himself. If there are various irreconcilable

3. Authority in rule or appointment, and inspiration which they might share (continued…)

(continued…)

with the prophets, are very different things, neither of which is denied. None but God however is infallible.
contradictions; if there are convincing traces of a later date (beyond such as an inspired editor put for the help of the reader after an immense change in the condition of the people as all admit, Jews and Christians); if the narratives are partly mythical and legendary and only usually trustworthy; if the miracles are the exaggerations of a later age; if the voice of God cannot without profanity be said to have externally uttered all the precepts attributed to Him; if Moses’ hand laid the foundation but he was not even the first of those who penned parts, where is Christ’s authority? Did He not mean, did not the Jew understand Him to mean, the five books of the law by the writings of Moses? Was He deceived? Does the evangelist John deceive us (unwittingly it could not be if the Holy Spirit inspired him) through Christ’s words? Certainly, if Dr. D. be true, He who is the truth is not true; and the Gospels are as untrustworthy and misleading as it is possible to be. To state the blasphemy is to refute it; yet such is the inevitable issue if there be one word of reality in what is thus alleged against the Pentateuch.

But if the Lord is and spoke the truth, no real believer can fail, though with grief and amazement, to see that the rationalist stands in the most deplorable and fatal hostility to Christ’s authority and to God’s word. For if Moses testified the truth of Christ some fifteen centuries before He lived and died, he was a prophet, and inspired of God in what he wrote; and if God gave him, according to the Lord Jesus, to prophesy truly of Him, is it credible that he has written falsely of that of which even an ordinary man might have written truly? If the rationalist speaks aright, the Pentateuch is not Moses’ writing, but a bundle of tales true and false, and in not one word written really of Christ: else it would be bonâ fide prophetic, which the system denies in principle; because true prophecy implies God’s supernatural communication, and this would be necessarily a deathblow to the criticism of the rationalist.

It is needless to say that the objections derived from internal structure are only conclusive proofs of the rash ignorance of those who make them, and leads us, when cleared away by the light of Christ, into (not mere evidence of the Mosaic authorship, which is ruled definitively to all who respect the word and authority of Christ, but an increasing sense and enjoyment of the testimony which the honored servant bears to his Master, the Lord of all described from far but most distinctly by the power of the inspiring Spirit.

If scripture itself gave the slightest intimation to that effect, there would be no difficulty in supposing ever so many writers contributing to the Pentateuch. The Psalms also consist of five books for an incomparably better reason than, as the Rabbis say, in order to correspond with the five books of the law. I have no doubt that their order is as divine as are the contents and character of each; and that they can be shown to have internal grounds for it of very great interest, instead of being a mere collocation of David’s first, and of others afterwards, which in no way accounts for some of David’s in the last book, and for one of Moses himself the introduction of the fourth book. But we have the sons of Korah, Ethan, Asaph, perhaps Solomon, and others unnamed in addition to the writers already named. But then we know the authors as far as they are mentioned from the inspired account in each case; and the grouping will be found to carry along with it the self-evidencing light of God; for none but He, I am persuaded, could have distributed to each as He has done, or have so tempered them as a body together, securing a moral and prophetic progress in the greater divisions as well as in the unity of the entire collection.

No believer would refuse to the Pentateuch what he owns unhesitatingly in the Psalter, if there were similar grounds of faith. But the declarations of God are clearly and expressly opposed to any such conclusion, and the internal structure of the law too has nothing in common with that of the Psalms, but to my mind falls in so simply and naturally with the single authorship of Moses, that the real difficulty would have been to suppose more than one if the question otherwise had been absolutely open. If the Lord and the apostles had not corroborated irrefragably the Mosaic authorship, both the style and the line of inspired Jewish witnesses, not to speak of the evident claim of Moses to all implied in Deuteronomy, would point to this conclusion.

If Moses had been led of God to use a quantity of earlier documents for the writing of Genesis, of contemporary records for Exodus or Numbers, I do not see how this could impair the inspiration of the Pentateuch. For we know little of the mode in which God wrought inspiration, though we are authoritatively taught the result, and we cannot but be sensible of its essential difference from all other writings in the working out of the divine purpose, and in the exclusion of human imperfections stamped on it. But even the more sober, who contend for the tessellated composition of the Pentateuch, have as yet presented no evidence but what can be better accounted for otherwise: especially as they confess “a unity of plan, a coherence of parts, a shapeliness, and an order” which satisfy them that, as e.g. Genesis stands, it is the creation of a single mind. Is it not forgotten that the opening chapters for instance, largely at least, could not have been narrated by Adam himself any more than by Moses from personal knowledge? God necessarily must have communicated the account of creation, as also of the flood, two of the parts most attacked, and I will add with least reason, by infidel temerity.

On the peculiar use of the divine names, and a certain accompanying difference of style, we need not enter much, as this is noticed frequently in its place. I will only say that the Jehovah-Elohim section (Gen. 2:4 – Gen. 3) presupposes the so-called Elohist one that precedes, as both are assumed in what follows; and the difference of motive truly and fully accounts for all; and that it is the very reverse of the fact that the name of Elohim almost ceases to be characteristic of whole sections after Ex. 6:2; Ex. 7:7. On the contrary, it holds good wherever similarly required throughout not the Pentateuch only but the Psalms (compare books first and second) and the Prophets (see Jonah especially). It is impossible to account for all the facts (not to say for any of them) by the documentary or fragmentary hypothesis.

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4. Introd. O.T. i. 131.
But it is worthy of note that the Lord distinctly attributes to Moses not merely the substance but the writing of Deuteronomy (Mark 10:5). There can be no doubt that the Pharisees refer to the injunction in Deut. 24; on which the Lord declares that not “a later writer,” but Moses, wrote you this precept [Mark 10:5].

How grievous the unbelief then which does not tremble to say after such an utterance, “it is certain that Moses himself could not have written the book of Deuteronomy, nor made such changes in the old legislation as are contained in the discourses of the book!” To say that the work was impossible to one whose eye was not dimmed nor his natural force fled till he died is unwise. Besides, had it been otherwise, or had he seen fit as it was, an amanuensis (one or more) would not detract any more from Moses’ writing than Tertius did from Paul’s.

As to the fact of changes, such as Num. 18:18 compared with Deut. 12:17, 18; 15:19, 20, they are due to the difference in the character and object of the books; the one having the wilderness in view, the other the settlement in the land, where we see not only the importance given to the central place of worship which Jehovah their God would choose, but also the joining of all, including the priests the Levites, in the exulting joy of blessings already possessed. To infer, from the circumstance of Moses addressing the people in the affecting form of a homiletic recapitulation, that he of his own motion rescinded what Jehovah had ordained, is as wanton as to deny Jehovah’s title to modify according to moral design in a changed state of things. Yet this puerility is made much of more than once. 5

It may be also observed that the Lord Jesus (Matt. 19:4, 5) attributes to God the words cited from Gen. 2:24:

He which made them . . . said, For this cause shall a man leave father, &c. [Matt. 19:4-6].

It was Moses that wrote: but it was God speaking none the less. Rationalism denies both through confiding in an ignis fatuus of criticism.

But the inspired apostles also are explicit. Thus Peter (Acts 3:22, 23) cites the famous passage as to the prophet from Deut. 18, and affirms that Moses said so. Rationalism shrinks neither from refusing the book to Moses nor from declaring that the correct interpretation rejects all but the one sense -- the succession of prophets or prophetic order in general, while it allows the adaptation to Jesus to be reasonable, or an argumentum ad hominem! It adds no more weight to minds of this bias that Stephen too quotes it as the language of Moses, and with evident reference to the Messiah (Acts 7:37).

Paul again cites freely from the law, and in the same chapter of Romans (Rom. 10:5, 19) cites twice from portions in a sense diametrically opposed to neological criticism: in the former, Lev. 18:5; in the latter, Deut. 32:21, which it relegates to two different and much later writers. It is not a question of Paul as a man, but of Paul writing in the Spirit. Did not He know the truth? Has He told it? We cannot speak of the Holy Spirit thinking this or that: He knew all. To suppose that He did not know as false as that He kept up a fiction is impious. No, it is only man who has deceived himself again through trusting his own thoughts against the plain word of God.

1 Cor. 10:1-11 is a passage of much moment for the consideration and correction of those influenced against the theopneustic or inspired character of the history of Exodus and Numbers. The passage of the Red Sea is denied to be literal history. The cloud; the manna; the water from the smitten rock; the punishment of the murmurers, &c., are viewed as more or less legendary. The apostle affirms that all these things happened to them as types, and that they are written for our admonition. Thus he attaches a divinely prophetic character to the accounts which rationalism slights. Ought it to be a question whether the apostle or a neologian has the mind of God?

Heb. 11 is quite as weighty a test, and yet more comprehensive in its survey of the Pentateuch and the historical books of the Old Testament. The apostle (Heb. 11:3) accepts creation as a literal fact; the rationalist endeavors to show “its mythical character.” But both Prof. Powell and Dr. Davidson misstate the case in order to place Gen. 1 in opposition to facts. It is not correct that “the chapter can only convey the idea of one grand creative act, of a common and simultaneous origin of the whole material world, terrestrial and celestial, together with all its parts and appendages, as it now stands, accomplished in obedience to the divine fiat, in a certain order and by certain stages, in six equal successive periods,” &c. So the late Mr. P., in whose wake follows Dr. D., who says that “the first verse of Genesis is a summary account of the six days’ work which follows in detail. On the first creative day God produced the matter of the world, and caused light to arise out of it. Hence it is implied that the world was created only about six thousand years ago. But geology teaches most incontrovertibly that the world must have existed during a long period prior to the races of organized beings now occupying its surface. Thus geology and scripture come into collision as to the age of the earth” (Introd. O.T. i. 152).

I affirm, on the contrary, that Moses was inspired so to write Gen. 1:1-3 as to avoid with the greatest precision and certainty the very error which these writers attribute to him. It is easy to see their desire to array geology against the Bible. But the incontrovertible fact is, that the usus loquendi proves that Gen. 1:1 is not a summary of what follows in the six days’ work, but an initiatory act sui generis, the groundwork of all that follows no doubt, and as distinct from Gen. 1:2 as both clearly are from Gen. 1:3, where the first day’s work begins. The copulative vau connects each verse, but of itself in no way forbids an immense space, which depends on the nature of the case where no specification of time enters. In the first two verses there is no limitation whatever; and hence in these instances all is open indefinitely. Had the conjunction (which I translate “and” in all these cases, not “but”) been

5 Introd. O.T. i. 75, 76; 356, 357, 364; 377, 378; 395, 396.
wanting, the idea of a summary heading would have naturally followed in accordance with the phraseology elsewhere, as at the beginning of Gen. 5: 6-9, &c.; 10:1, &c., passim; 11:10, &c., 27, &c.; 25:12-17, 19, &c.; 35:22-26; 36:1, &c., passim; Gen. 46:8, &c., passim; Ex. 1, 6, &c. It is needless to pursue the proof. It is the necessary phraseology not of Hebrew only but of every conceivable language. In no tongue could one rightly prefix such a clause as Gen. 1:1 as “a summary account of the six days’ work.”

The truth is that the first verse of the chapter states with noble simplicity the creation of the universe -- not of matter on the first day, but of the heavens and the earth -- without the smallest note of days. There is another and wholly different note of time, in the beginning {Gen. 1:1},

reaching back to the farthest point when God caused (not crude matter, nor chaos, but) the heavens and the earth to be. The second verse coupled with it describes, as even Dr. D. admits, a state of chaos or destruction, but not universal; for the earth only, not the heavens, was the scene of the utter confusion. I am surprised that a sensible man did not see the incongruity of this with his previous position, and still more with the admirably perfect statement of Gen. 1:1. Contrary to the style of Moses, and to the genius of Hebrew and indeed of universal grammar, he asserts the first verse to be a summary of the entire six days’ work. But if so, such a summary cannot be the bare creation of matter. For matter is not said to be produced on any one of these days, but contrariwise its previous existence is assumed throughout their course from first to last. On the other hand, if he says that Gen. 1:1 means the production of matter, he abandons his own thesis that it is a synoptical view of the six days’ work. Does he then take Gen. 1:2 as God producing the matter of the world? How, if so, can it also mean universal chaos or destruction? Perhaps he thinks that the first clause of Gen. 1:2 means this, and that the last points to the production of matter; but here again he is entangled in the strange conclusion that the universal chaos or destruction -- destruction of what? -- precedes the production of matter. If he concede, as I think he must on reconsideration, that God producing the matter of the world is not the meaning either of the first or of the last clause of Gen. 1:2, it follows that his exposition is fundamentally erroneous, and that matter must have been produced before, unless he fall back on the Aristotelian absurdity of eternal matter, which is a virtual denial of creation in the proper sense, and indeed betrays an atheistic root. From this he saves himself by the statement that “on the first creative day God produced the matter of the world, and caused light to arise out of it.” The reader, however, has only to read the record in order to see that Dr. D. interpolates here the production of matter without the least warrant from the inspired account of the first day, and contrary to the clear intimation of the verses that precede it. The production of matter is supposed before the chaos of Gen. 1:2, and is involved in the creation of Gen. 1:1.

Thus scripture is more exact than the natural philosophy of Mr. Baden Powell, or the system of Aristotle, or the exegesis of Dr. S. Davidson. It asserts the grave truth of the creation of the heavens and the earth, but expressly not “as it now stands,” nor with the “parts and appendages” which were formed in the days which preceded Adam. We have no connection of day or night in this earliest phase, any more than the state of disruption and ruin that is described so graphically in Gen. 1:2. Vast tracts of time may have passed before Gen. 1:3 -- not “innumerable periods of past duration in one unbroken chain of regular changes.” But Dr. D. is ill-informed in the facts which geology is slowly building up into a consistent science, if he ignores the proofs of repeated and extraordinary breaks and upheavals, when anarchy was again followed by fresh creative energy, and then by order. So it was, if M. D’Orbigny and other men of the highest reputation may be trusted, for some thirty successive and stupendous revolutions of this earth before the week when man stands at the head of a suited realm subjected to him by the Creator.

It is granted that the Bible does not reveal these sequences of order and convolution. But it shows us the principle of both in Gen. 1 and 2 anterior to the Adamic earth. This was enough for us to know; and this we know more clearly and certainly from these few words of scripture than science ever taught till very lately. In fact some geologists seem recently in danger of overlooking the best established facts of their own and all other science, and of drifting into that strange delusion -- the

6 It is not true that “law, order, uniformity, slowness, partiality characterize those changes; not suddenness or universality. Universal destruction and reconstruction -- anarchy followed by order -- are things unknown to science, and opposed to all its fundamental conclusions.” A little learning is a dangerous thing. Had it been said that, once established, such is the way of the Creator as long as a given state of things is permitted to endure, Dr. D. would have been right; but to put matters thus absolutely is only the science of infidel progressionists or unwary souls, like the late Hugh Miller, beguiled in a measure by them. Laws of phenomena are quite distinct from causes; and the reason why moderns merge the last in the first is the instinctive desire to escape from the thought of creation, and hence of the true God. Positivism is the lowest form of all, and hence is essentially atheistic.

But the reader who desires to find a calm and full and exact exposition of the facts can find it in D’Orbigny’s “Cours de Paléontologie et de Géologie Stratigraphiques,” especially chapter ix, vol. ii, pp. 251-258. There is hardly a finer instance of patient induction, nor in more distinct contradiction of the alleged law of continuity, and this without an allusion to Genesis or a thought beyond the largest collection of the facts of geological science known to me. Even the tertiary period alone he shows must be divided into five distinct successions, and in them, of 6042 species 91 only common to two or more, but all distinct from the existing species of the Adamic earth. “Une première création s’est montrée avec l’étage silurien. Après l’aménissement de celle-ci, par une cause géologique quelconque, après un laps de temps considérable, une seconde création a eu lieu dans l’étage devonien; et successivement vingt-sept fois des créations distinctes sont venues repeupler toute la terre de ses plantes et de ses animaux, à la suite de chaque perturbation géologique qui avait tout détruit dans la nature vivante. Tel est le fait nous bornons à constater, sans chercher à percer le mystère surhumain qui l’environne.” This witness is true; but the Bible conducts the simplest believer with sure foot and opened eyes where the mere man of science finds himself arrested by an impenetrable veil. Scripture asserts original creation, and then destruction: how often renewals and destructions may have followed it does not say; but, having given us the key to both facts, it does tell us, what it most concerned us morally to learn, the details of the construction of the world where the human race was to be tried and fall, where the Creator was to become in sovereign grace the woman’s Seed, and by His suffering and death win more than was lost for the creature’s blessing to the glory of God.
Darwinian form of Lamarkian development which necessarily destroys faith in creation altogether.

But Genesis leaves room for all the changes, calm or violent, which passed over this earth before the race. Creation, and creation of the universe, Gen. 1:1 does state; how long it went on, and with what changes, till the state of chaos described in Gen. 1:1, 2, we are not informed. Let science tell if she can. There is ample space here without danger of collision: God has effectually guarded against the mistakes of hasty expositors, friends or enemies. Gen. 1:3 begins the account of the hasty days; and here, after a chaos (we know not how long or often), we hear of light caused to be on the first day. The state of things is so contrasted in each of the verses that the conjunction which simply introduces each new statement can produce no difficulty whatever.

Far from contradicting the large bearing of Gen. 1:1, texts such as Gen. 14:19-22, Ex. 20:11, 31:17, 2 Pet. 3:13, can in no way be restrained to “the earth itself.” It is careless to confound the making of heaven and earth in six days (which I grant is always for Adam) with the original creation of Gen. 1:1. Gen. 2:4 speaks of both. As to the objection founded on animals of previous states seeing, and plants too requiring light, before the work of the first day or of the fourth, it suffices to say that not a word implies that light was created or the heavenly bodies either on these days. Light was caused to act, as the luminaries later still. But of the geologic periods, after creation but antecedent to the earth made for man in six days, we have nothing either affirmed or denied, though in my opinion the strikingly guarded language leaves room for all. The statements of Dr. D. are as unfounded in science as they are careless in taking account of the exactitude of scripture.

That the sense just given to the inspired account of creation is unforced and exact it would require hardihood to question; so it would to deny the looseness of the rationalistic interpretation, inconsistent as it also is with itself and with facts, and thus exhibiting the usual faults of what is wholly misunderstood. I advocate no stooping to a barely admissible meaning, nor call in the wisdom of the world to ascertain the force of scripture. The believer need neither court nor fear human science. Nowhere however has a single fact of geology been proved to be at variance with the words of Moses: those who affirm it have only exposed themselves, whether they attack or apologize for Gen. 1:1-3.

Further, from Gen. 2:4 we have the necessary complement of Gen. 1. The terms of Gen. 2:4, though a most natural commencement of another aspect which follows with fresh particulars of the greatest moral weight, refer unmistakably to what had been already written. It is certainly not a summary of what is to come, for this does not describe the production of the heavens and the earth, but introduces us to the transitional state of things before rain fell or man was there to till the ground; it then gives us the specific difference which is the ground of human responsibility, and therefore forthwith describes the garden of Eden with its two trees, where the first Adam was about to be tried. It is plain accordingly that Gen. 2:4, while it gives a retrospective glance at Gen. 1 with its orderly chart of the creation, leads us into the scene of relationships. Even according to the earlier outline, far from being lost in the graduated series of creative acts, the pre-eminent place of man in the scale of the creature is carefully guarded for male and female -- of man made in the image of God, 7 after His likeness, with dominion over the fish and birds and cattle and earth and reptiles, not worshiping them all like the sages of Egypt. But the detailed formation of man, in his body from the dust of the ground, in his soul from Jehovah-Elohim's breathing into his nostrils, alone of living creatures, the source of an immortal immaterial nature proper to him, is found in the later account only. Here too we have Darwinian form of Lamarkian development which necessarily destroys faith in creation altogether.

In Gen. 3 accordingly the issue of the trial soon appears. Abruptly and mysteriously an enemy of God and man enters, and by his subtle insinuations deceives the woman, who in turn becomes the instrument of the man’s disobedience. It is a simple but profound, and the only satisfactory, solution of the problem on which human philosophy and religion have labored in vain, on which all have made shipwreck who have not submitted to the word of God. It can surprise none that it is the same serpent playing his old deceits and destroying souls by the hope of knowing good and evil as God, yea better if they refuse His account for their own thoughts, even though they yield no more than that coldest and most irreverent of results, negative criticism. Satan, availing himself of the serpent {Gen. 3:1}, thus dragged down our first parents into sin and ruin not for themselves only but for the lower creation dependent on Adam’s maintenance of his relation to God, as also for the race yet to be born.

Does not this approve itself as worthy of God? Is it not in harmony not only with all the Old Testament, but only more conspicuously with the New? The earliest inspired account reveals God creating and fashioning the universe in wisdom and goodness no less than omnipotent power, the earth in detail as man’s abode to whom the word is given. But man is tried and fails irrevocably as far as original innocence and Eden are concerned, but not without righteous conviction, not without a judgment which accounts for the great present facts of humanity even to the difference of woman’s lot from man’s, yet with their common sentence of death and the sorrowful change which has passed over the creation now subjected to vanity and groans; but not without the gracious revelation of a Deliverer, who should be in some special sense Seed of the woman, yet (after suffering) conqueror of the enemy the serpent, who had done this foul and otherwise fatal

7. It is the grossest ignorance to confound the knowledge of good and evil (i.e. conscience), which was acquired by the fall, with the image and likeness of God in which Adam was made.
dishonor to God as well as man.

Without this key what have the greatest wits of this world made of it all? I do not speak only of monstrous cosmogony, or the (if possible) still falscr and less rational assertion of the world’s eternity. But take the mental workings of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle; nay take the latest philosophic enemies, who have stolen all their best from the Bible but who have not learnt its first lesson, without which all is vain -- that fear of Jehovah which is the beginning of wisdom. But what have any ancients or moderns said up to this day to be named in comparison of the Mosaic account, which ungrateful rationalism would fain behead, draw and quarter? Sin and ruin, suffering and death, are facts in God’s earth as it is: inspiration did not make them; rationalism cannot unmake them. To suppose that a Being of infinite power and goodness made the race and the earth as they are is to imply an absurdity, which philosophy (where it admits God at all) accepts. But scripture is in no way responsible for a conclusion which is opposed not only to His word but to all right reason and sound morality, for mind and conscience cannot but own the truth when revealed, though superstition and philosophy essay to explain it away again. Such a Demiurge as every system supposes but scripture (or what follows scripture) would be a malicious demon, not the true God.

Bow to Gen. 1–3 and the difficulty is explained, yet even then just as it ought to be, in the measure of our faith. If thine eye be single, thy whole body is full of light {Matt. 6:22}:

the want of this is the real source of confusion, error, contradiction and every other fault which rationalism loves to heap on the Bible. They exist in their own minds and system, not in God’s word. Impossible to understand scripture without seeing the divine design which accounts for distinct aspects, repetitions, and all the other peculiarities over which they ignorantly stumble. God, being love, is considerate of the poor, the lowly, the young, the old, while He puts down the haughty who count themselves learned and deep, wise and prudent. He has revealed Himself in writings whose unity of thought and moral purpose is only and infinitely more striking because they consist of books in more than one language and spread over the greatest variety of writers through fifteen centuries. Hence, whether dealing by law through Moses, or by grace in His Son, one half in both Old Testament and New consists of facts profoundly instructive for the most reflective, but withal coming down to the level of a child. Only God could have done or thought of this beforehand: now that it is before us in the Bible, we can see that there is nothing like it (save in poor measure what is borrowed from it) for simplicity or for depth, for rising up to God or for coming down to the secrets of man’s heart.

What reader can fail, for example, to see that God made all around and above Adam and pronounced it all very good; that man the chief and most favored of all in a paradise (not such as blind Mahometanism holds out but of purity and innocence) disobeyed Him who gave him all and tried him by the least conceivable test, and thus brought in the vanity and death of all this lower creation? Who can be deaf to the solemn voice that searches out the truth from lips which, spite of deceit and insolence, cannot but condemn themselves? Who can forget the accents of grace implied even in the hopeless condemnation of the arch-foe, and assuring the guilty of a Savior who must suffer first but at last crush the serpent’s head? None but the rationalist; none but the man who prefers his own reasonings to scripture, -- himself the first man to Christ the Second and last Adam.

The unreasonableness and utter poverty of the separate document-hypothesis is also plain by joining Gen. 5 to the end of Gen. 2:3. What can be more meagre? The entrance of death is unaccounted for, the moral trial in Eden is lost, sin is left out, and God’s ways as to it: the prophetic revelation of the Savior and of the destruction of Satan’s power is gone; the solemn history of Cain and Abel disappears; also faith in a sacrifice, and this the index and accompaniment of righteousness, God testifying of the gifts: the suffering of the godly; the worldliness and progress in material things of those who are far from God. And Seth is introduced in a way which derives an immense accession of weight from the intervening chapters, if even it be really intelligible without them.

On the other hand, if the entire narrative be taken as a whole, consisting of distinct parts, each having its own definite character, yet only seen in their proper value as conspiring from different points to the one result, how immense the gain in beauty, force, and harmony! Creation properly falls under Elohim; the relationship of man and his trial and fall, as well as the ruin of creation, under Jehovah-Elohim; the discrimination of the just from the unjust, both morally and above all in worship, with the issues here below, under Jehovah, the distinctive name of God in the government of man on the earth. Gen. 5 returns naturally to Elohim since the perpetuation of the line from Adam is in question, but with Jehovah in Gen. 5:29 where we see special relationship.

Mr. Perowne (Smith’s Dict. of the Bible, ii. 775) thinks that the alleged design in the use of the divine names will not bear a close examination. Not so; it only seems to fail, I venture to say, for want of a searching analysis. He allows that it does suit the earlier chapters, but not Noah’s history, on comparing Gen. 6:7 with Gen. 6:8: why should it be said that

Noah found grace in the eyes of Jehovah {Gen. 6:8}, yet that he

walked with Elohim {Gen. 6:9}?

Now he might have seen in Gen. 5:23, 24, that the expression walked with God

is not casual but designed. Not only is it appropriate to simple historical mention, but to moral contrast with those characterized by the violence and corruption of all flesh in the earth (Gen. 6:11, 12). Jehovah is required where not nature but relative feelings and position are meant to be conveyed. The principle is true in the New Testament equally as in the
Old. Thus our Lord Himself always says
Father
in His life or ministry; He says
God
on the cross when bearing the judgment of sin against which all that God is in holy antagonism was arrayed; He says both when He arose from the dead and placed His disciples in His own place and relationship as far as this could be, now that sin was put away by the sacrifice of Himself, and He could take the place formally of a quickening Spirit in resurrection. So John’s epistles employ
God
and
Father
concerning the Christian with invariable distinctiveness and propriety. It is evident to me then that to
walk with God
is just the right phrase for moral character; while we may also see, by comparing Gen. 6:5, 12, that the introduction of His special relationship applies a more severe and intimate test.

Again, the other cases Mr. P. has named (Gen. 6:21, 22; 7:5, 9) are plain examples used from internal motives, while Gen. 7:16 exposes the futility of referring the matter to distinct documents. In the former Elohim speaks with authority of destroying creation, preserving as Creator only enough to perpetuate species. In the latter He reveals what became Him in special connection with Noah; but even there, where care of the creature only is in question, we read of
the male and the female as Elohim commanded Noah {Gen. 7:9},

male and female of all flesh as Elohim had commanded; and Jehovah shut him in
{Gen. 7:16}.

The change in the last is plain and necessary, as in Gen. 7:6 also, closing the directions which provide for the exigencies of sacrifice in the

beasts and birds preserved not by a pair but by sevens. The existence of both titles in the same verse is most unnatural on the document-hypothesis, but as explicable as elsewhere when we see that a divine design guides from internal reasons in every case. 8

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8. Neither the name of El-Elion (the most High God) nor any other trait in Gen. 14 is a sufficient reason to warrant the notion that it is a “monogram” from another pen. It is bound up in the closest moral connection with Gen. 13. Lot chose for himself, and, soon tasting the sorrows of the world, is only delivered through the prompt love of him who walked in faith while he himself had yielded to covetousness. Further I cannot doubt that Jehovah’s declaration in Gen. 15:1,

I am thy shield, thy exceeding great reward,

is an allusive answer on His part to the noble and generous disinterestedness of Abram recorded at the close of Gen. 14. Thus the account appears to be so bound up with the chapters before and after as to refuse the idea of its being (continued...)

Such then is the true explanation of the duplicate accounts, as they have been styled. If difference of authors or of documents had any real evidence, it in no way covers the facts; it really introduces mere imagination to set aside the positive declarations of the Lord and the apostles, who attribute to Moses expressly what a groundless fancy distributes among 2, 3, 5, 10 or even more imaginary writers of the disjecta membra of the Pentateuch severed from each other by considerable intervals of time.

It would not be edifying to discuss too minutely the neology of Dr. Davidson’s book, chiefly culled from German sources: a few specimens must suffice. To him the fall, for instance, is a national mythos. The apostle repeatedly treats it as a fact of the gravest import, which none can slight with impunity (2 Cor. 10; 1 Tim. 2). But what of that? Paul knew nothing of the higher criticism, and must be condened for his ignorance. The nature of the serpent, the manner in which he is said to have proceeded, the dialogue between him and Eve, the sentence pronounced, militate against that mode, the apostolic mode, of interpretation! Thus, however plain the scriptures, these men are not ashamed to count it a vulgar error if one insist on their authority and sacredness. It has nothing, say they, to do with personal religion; it conduces in their judgment to a right view of inspiration if one accepts their word that the Bible abounds in almost every sort of error on the one hand, and on the other that all religious men were counted inspired. Talk no more of Paul in the first century: did not “the immortal De Wette” come to opposite conclusions so long ago as the year 1805? Paul, no doubt, treats the history as the origin of man’s universal sinfulness (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21, 22); but why heed so antiquated an idea? The Anglo-German scribe had not yet appeared to expound a right the philosophical myth in which a reflecting Israelite sets forth his views on the origin of evil! Such, my reader, is the spirit of modern rationalism.

Of course the apostle’s use of Gen. 4 in Heb. 11:4 is of no account. It is an accommodation. We are told by our new oracle that “the mythic view of the first three chapters is corroborated by the succeeding narrative.” Gen. 4 “presupposes a different theory of the origination of mankind” -- this because of Gen. 4:14, and the supposed inconsistency of Gen. 4:2 and Gen. 4:20! The infatuation of this pseudo-criticism culminates in the judgment that the Sethite line in Gen. 5 and the Cainite one in Gen. 4:17, 18 “are parallel accounts resolvable into one and the same genealogy!”

The solemn account of antediluvian apostasy and corruption in Gen. 6 is naturally treated with levity; and the flood (Gen. 7, 8) affords the usual material for free handling. “What gave rise to the mythus was the yearly inundations which happen in most countries. . . . If the account of the deluge be a poetical myth, it is of no importance to inquire whether the catastrophe was partial or universal. . . . Authentic (!) Egyptian history [for with these men Egyptian

8. (...continued)
an ancient monument transferred to this book of Moses.
history (?) is authentic, scripture is not) ignores the existence of a general flood, to which there is no allusion in the annals from the epoch of Menes, the founder of the kingdom of Egypt, B.C. 3463 (!), till its conquest under Darius Ochus, B.C. 340; whereas the period of the Noahian deluge is said to be about 2348 B.C." I presume that the writer is not much acquainted with these matters, and that he means Baron Bunsen's date for the accession of Menes, B.C. 3643. But the reader should know that in the same work the world's history before Christ is set down at twenty thousand years, and that Egypt is supposed to have been ruled provincially for more than five thousand years before Menes. On such a scale, in contempt of all that is known in or out of the Bible, one must consider that it is a moderate flight in this imaginative system to claim for Menes no more than a few centuries before the flood. It may be added that the basis of it is a passage of Syncellus, and a manifest error, as has been shown by others. But there is no need of learning or logic here; for the divine testimony of Christ has sealed the truth of the flood as an authentic fact, and a most solemn warning to unbelief (See Matt. 24:37-39; Luke 17:26, 27). The apostles Paul (Heb. 11:7) and Peter (1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5) have confirmed the witness to it, if this were wanted.

The freest thinker will not complain that, when I cite the testimony of Baron Bunsen, he is likely to give an opinion unfairly to the prejudice of Egyptian records as compared with the Old Testament. "The written character is prolix; the repetition of fixed phrases makes it still more so. Little is lost by occasional lacunæ; but comparatively little advance is made by what is preserved. There are few words in a line, and, what is still worse, little is said in a great many lines. Inscriptions on public buildings were not intended to convey historical information. They consist of panegyrics on the king and praises of the gods, to each of whom all imaginable titles of honor are given. Historical facts are thrown into the shade as something paltry, casual, incidental, by the side of such pompous phraseology as Lords of the World, Conquerors of the North, Tamers of the South, Destroyers of all the Unclean, and all their enemies. The case of the papyri is certainly different. But written history, such as the historical books of the Old Testament, so far as our knowledge of their writings goes, was certainly unknown to the old Egyptians."

Let us briefly review a quantity of smaller points. The unbelieving criticism on the earlier chapters of Genesis has been noticed the more, as being in fact the most confidently urged, and, if refuted, involving the rejection of much the greater part of the rest. Prophetic insertions, brief and rare as they are, are rather a confirmation than a weakening of the Mosaic authorship, and in no way an infringement of inspiration, which is a far more important thing: for all were equally inspired of God, whether Moses or Samuel, Ezra, Jeremiah, or any other prophet. But it is not certain that some of the notices supposed to be of this kind were not original, as, for instance, Gen. 13:18, &c. One can easily understand the original name, for a time overlaid by the name of Arba, finally restored; as we can conceive a curious coincidence in the name of Dan, as it seems to have been an element in Jor-dan and Dan-jaan, apart from the tribe.

The passage in Gen. 36:31, on which most stress has been laid seems to be undoubtedly of Moses. To call the notice of kings that reigned in Edom

before there reigned any king over the land of Israel {Gen. 36:31}

a trifling proposition ⁹ is not only irreverence, but evinces that fatal defect of all rationalists -- the absence of moral perception. Israel had the promise of kings, which Esau had not; yet Esau had many successive kings long before a sign of royalty was seen in the object of that promise. Had the passage been written after Saul or David's line began to reign, the phraseology would have been different, not "any" or "a" king, but "the king" or "the kings."

Again, Ex. 16:35, 36; 22:29; Lev. 26:34, 35, 43; Deut. 19:14, are only difficult to one who denies the essential claim of scripture. Lev. 18:28 is cleared in its true sense by simply reading Lev. 18:24, 25. Num. 15:32 is quite plain if written, as it probably was, in the plains of Moab. Gen. 40:15 is most natural in the lips of Joseph looking back on the land where his father and himself were once together, and designating it by

the Hebrews

- a name familiar among the Gentiles.

Nor do notices of ancient inhabitants or actual rulers and their history, as in Deut. 2, 3, present the smallest difficulty. They are of the highest interest in themselves, and Moses might well speak and write of them.

Ex. 6:26 has nothing to do with the lapse of a considerable time after Moses, but is due to the sense of God's condescension in using such men by the writer who was one of the two. This may seem trifling to a modern critic: what does the petitfoggery (and as far as I have had leisure to sift very incorrect minims) seem to those who rejoice in the divine truth of God's dealings with man for this world and for eternity? So, if the Bible were a human book, such texts as Ex. 11:3, Num. 12:7, might seem strange. Nevertheless the history proves their strict truth; and the language of Paul in 2 Cor. 11 may cause one to hesitate in counting them later additions by Ezra or some other authorised hand, as no one doubts of the formula

unto this day.

But none of these in the smallest degree touches the claim of Moses to have written the Pentateuch by inspiration.

It is not only that the "higher criticism" fails to explain justly the divine names, and does not pretend to any remark on their employment beyond the superficial and, as we have seen, unfounded notion of different dates, but another notable trait is its extreme carelessness, and, I must say, its misstatements as to alleged matter of fact. Thus even opponents of neology are too apt to repeat the assumption that the supposed Elohist always says (אֲנָפוֹן בָּלָה בְּלֵי כָלָה) like the supposed

⁹. Introd. O.T. i. 3, 4.
Jehovist. Now the fact is that Padan occurs but once (Gen. 48:7) in an address opened and therefore governed by the name El-Shaddai, the distinctive title of relationship to the patriarchs. Next the very first occurrence of Padan-Aram is in Gen. 25:20, where it is severed from Elohim by seven verses (Gen. 25:12-18), which set forth the generations of Ishmael and his sons, and where it has in its own immediate sequence and connection (Gen. 25:21) the name of Jehovah. In Gen. 28:2 it is followed in the next verse, not by Elohim but by El-Shaddai though after that no doubt comes Elohim. But Jehovah appears repeatedly in the middle of the same short chapter, as does Elohim at the close. The only criticism therefore to which the new school can resort is the very mechanical device of the scissors, by which they divide these few verses, though bound up intimately, among at least three different writers -- Gen. 25:1-9, the Elohist (which does not at all account for the quite distinct title of El-Shaddai); Gen. 25:10-12, 17-22, the junior Elohist (which overlooks the most emphatic use of Jehovah in the chapter, Gen. 25:21); and Gen. 25:13-16, the redactor. Why the Jehovah should be discarded and the compiler or editor substituted where the Jehovah title is so prominent is not explained or apparent. But such is the artificial hypothesis which Dr. D. borrows from his German leaders. Gen. 31:18 is the next occurrence of Padan-aram, which here follows Jehovah’s word to Jacob. Jacob calls him repeatedly God; but it is impossible to deny that the passage turns on what Jehovah said (Gen. 31:3). The ground taken therefore is wholly false; and the attempt to cut out Gen. 31:18 for the Elohist, and to assign the rest of the chapter to the younger Elohist, the Jehovah, and the redactor, as Dr. D. does (Introd. O.T. i. 58, 59), only proves the desperation as well as the poverty of thought to which such criticism reduces its partisans. In Gen. 33:18 Padan-aram occurs again, but the title with which it stands most nearly connected is the remarkable compound El-elohe-Israel, which is certainly not purely Elohistic on their system. But singularly connected is the remarkable compound El-elohe-Israel, which occurs again, but the title with which it stands most nearly criticism reduces its partisan s. In Gen. 33:18 Padan-aram stands most nearly connected is the remarkable compound El-elohe-Israel, which occurs again, but the title with which it stands most nearly criticism reduces its partisan s. In Gen. 33:18 Padan-aram stands most nearly connected is the remarkable compound El-elohe-Israel, which occurs again, but the title with which it stands most nearly.

On the other hand, the basis for pronouncing Aram-naharaim Jehovah is of the weakest, as the reader will feel when assured that it occurs but twice in all the five books of Moses, Gen. 24:10, Deut. 23:4. Even in this word the same fatality of error haunts the neologist; for one of the three occurrences of the word outside the Pentateuch is in the title to Psa. 60, one of the most intensely Elohistic compositions in the Bible. Besides, it is not at all proved that Padan-aram is identical with Aram-naharaim. The high land of the two rivers may well include the ploughed high land or plateau of Syria, though both might with sufficient accuracy for ordinary use be translated Mesopotamia. Aram, simply, is the most comprehensive term of all, and occurs but once in the Pentateuch (Num. 23:7) distinctly in the sense of a country, and this in Balaam’s speech, who uses Elohim, Jehovah, Elion, and Shaddai in such a way as to put to the rout the idea of a Jehovahistic document.

I grant that, in general, terms expressive of natural species, distinctions of sex, generations (save in an exceptional case such as Gen. 2:4), historic specifications of time, &c. occur in scriptures where Elohim is used rather than Jehovah. But this flows from the nature of things, and must therefore be on the supposition that Moses wrote the five books. It is a question of propriety and exactness of speech, not of different documents. For in describing for instance production as such, or the perpetuation of the creature, or facts as such, Elohim is required, and the name of special relationship would be out of place.

Again, we are told that אָרָם פַּדְעַן (or פַּדְעָן) “establish a covenant,” is the Elohistic expression, the Jehovahistic אָרָם פַּדְעַן, “to make (literally ‘cut’) a covenant.” Now, not to say more of Gen. 17:7, 19, the strongest evidence possible against the exclusive Elohim of the first formula is, that it is employed in immediate sequence after the formal revelation of the name of Jehovah (Ex. 6:2-4). I am aware that our scissors-critics never fail for want of boldness, and that Dr. D. ventures to bracket this very passage to the redactor in v. 1, and to the Elohist in vv. 2-7, leaving v. 8 to the Jehovahist. But to treat scripture thus, to represent the passage as such an ill-assorted farrago, is mere wilfulness, and contrary to their own principle which professes to draw its proofs wholly from internal evidence. For, if so, nothing can be more certain than the Jehovahistic character of this chapter, though care is taken, as we have seen elsewhere, to show that Elohim is Jehovah, as well as El-Shaddai, henceforward to be looked to nationally according to all that the name of Jehovah implies as their God. Ezek. 16:6, 62 cannot be pretended to be Elohistic. So as to the alternative form (אָרָם פַּדְעַן), it occurs twice only in the Pentateuch, Gen. 9:12, Num. 25:12. Of this last chapter I am aware that Dr. D. calls Num. 25:1-5 Jehovahistic, Num. 25:6-18 Elohist. The best answer is to read Num. 25:10-12, which open thus:

And Jehovah spake.

As to the exclusively Jehovahistic phrase, the disproof is equally sure. (See Gen. 21:27, 32.) Junior or senior, it is Elohistic, contrary to the alleged distinction. It occurs again in Gen. 31:44, which is certainly not Jehovahistic; though I am not able to make out how Dr. D. (58, 59) tabulates verses Gen. 31:43-47. He assigns parts of Gen. 31:41 and 48 to his redactor. At any rate the use here contradicts the system. So the connection is Elohistic, not Jehovahistic, in Ezra 10:3; Psa. 83:5. In short the reader has only to sift in order to prove how unfounded is the hypothesis in its conclusions.

I do not judge it to be called for just now to examine all the other phrases supposed to characterize the Elohistic or the
Jehovistic passages respectively. But of this the reader may be assured, that it is wise in no case, were it the most immaterial statement, to trust the assertions of rationalism. Even where there may be a true element, it is invariably misapplied and in general exaggerated to the last degree. Thus much is made of ἀπόσπασμα “possession;” and דְּנַיִם לַעֲנָנָה, “land of sojournings,” as peculiarly Elohistic. Unfortunately for the theory, their first occurrence in the same chapter and in the same verse (Gen. 17:8) disproves the assertion, unless indeed one is weak enough to allow a chapter to be counted Elohistic which begins thus: “And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am El-Shaddai” &c. How can this be Elohistic, either elder or younger? It begins with Jehovah revealing Himself to Abram by that special name in which he and the other fathers had to walk, and then showed Himself to be none other than Elohim (Gen. 17:12 {97}, 15, 18, 19), which was of the utmost importance. I could hardly conceive of a more satisfactory disproof of distinct documents as well as of confining the phrases cited to Elohistic passages. Any good Hebrew concordance will multiply cases of it.

Another remark may be here made, and not without cause. The uncertainty of these speculations is such that hardly two rationalists agree tolerably, nay, hardly one agrees with himself for any length of time even as to broad outlines and points of very great importance. Thus Dr. Davidson, in his contribution to the tenth edition of Horne’s Introduction, contended for two documents, the Elohistic of Joshua’s day, and the Jehovahistic during the Judges, which he supposed to have been combined in one work under Saul’s or David’s reign. What is of still greater moment, he then ascribed the authorship of Deuteronomy to Moses. Traditional orthodoxy may have yet exercised a check on his mind; for one can hardly speak of faith, when in six years all was changed for the worse in his own Introduction to which reference has so often been made. I am far from insinuating that the author did not believe what he wrote in his second volume for the late Mr. Horne’s work. But one can only save his honesty by blaming both the extreme want of judgment in questions of very great consequence (for the denial of this, i. 129, will satisfy none but the light-minded), and the instability which could make such a revolution in so short a space. Were it a stripping, allowance might be made for inexperience or the influence of stronger minds: as it is, even a heathen could say, facilis descensus Averni. The pretentiousness which accompanies the worst insinuations against God’s word, when these rest on the flimsiest of reasons, is deeply painful. Every one in the least familiar with the manner in which the Holy Spirit has deigned to instruct us in scripture knows that it is frequently by taking up the same subject and presenting another line of association, so as to give us the truth fully through viewing it on all sides. Not otherwise do the wisest men, as far as their small measure is capable of a method so exhaustive. Instances of this we may see frequently, not only in the five books of Moses, but in every part of the scriptures, and nowhere more conspicuously than in the inspired accounts of our Lord; for it is true of whole books, as well as of retracings of particular themes within them. One can easily understand the lack of spiritual perception which overlooks such a mode of instruction. But what can one think of those who fear not to sit in judgment on what, just because it is divine, must be beyond the natural mind; and, instead of looking to God that the entrance of His words might give the needed light, venture to speak of an author, in such a case, stultifying himself by announcing an important distinction which he had uniformly observed in certain sections, and as uniformly violated in others?

It is a joy on the other hand to learn on, I suppose, good authority that De Wette, speculative as he once was, I will not say led captive every thought to the obedience of Christ, but certainly turned to Him and His blood, with much simplicity some time before his decease; and that the late Baron Bunsen, after a career of almost wilder theorizing on scripture than Origen’s, found rest at last in that Savior who alone can and does give it to the weary and heavy-laden.

On the whole, then, no support is given by any or all such passages to the scheme of Astruc, who deserves no credit for a critical eye, but rather reprobation for yielding to an unbridled imagination, which has already wrought no small mischief among his followers; and so much the more because, untaught and ill-established in divine truth, they sometimes expend great industry and ample erudition on the mere surface of the scriptures which they wrest to their own destruction.

Another opportunity may offer to prove how far the minute philology applied to Deuteronomy really weakens Moses’ title to have written it. I am satisfied myself that the phenomena supposed to be adverse are but a cover for the main object underneath all the muster of difficulties and objections -- the desire to get rid of divine authoritative truth, which probes the conscience as nothing else can; and the more so, as not the prophets only but the Lord of glory also have affixed a seal, which profanity alone would think of breaking, to the Pentateuch as God’s word written by Moses.

We have seen that the positive objections, when sifted, either fall to the ground, or become rather witnesses in favor of the Mosaic authorship and inspired character of the first five books of the Old Testament. The alleged omissions, rightly viewed, bear testimony to the same. An inspired writer can and does habitually leave such blanks as we find in the history of the sojourn in the wilderness, the journeys and stations, the desired particulars of Hur and Jethro, &c. This is never so, save by defect of information, in human annals; but it flows immediately from the moral design of scripture. Man loves to stimulate and indulge curiosity; God inspires for the communication of His mind, the link of connection being in the divine purpose and objects, not in the facts which may

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10 The supposed confirmation of the Elohistic and Jehovahistic hypothesis drawn from the few proper names compounded with Jehovah before Samuel and David (Introd. O.T. i. 19) is null. It was natural they should use the name more when revealed to them in national relationship, though it did not become general till Samuel in measure, and David, faithful and obedient, fully set up what Moses had enjoined, but what had been grossly neglected for centuries before.
of Abraham to the Christian era, which is capable of being treated like the history of any other nation. 14

From this spirit of the scripture history, the writer not designing to give a full account of all transactions, but only to dwell on that portion in which the divine character was marked, many things which we might desire to know are omitted, and on many occasions a mere outline of the history is preserved (Fasti Hellen. i. pp. 283-285).

These are in the main, without vouching for every thought or expression, words of truth and soberness. Not only were God’s ways with Israel above mere nature, but His word as to the patriarchs and them has throughout a prophetic character. Even so ordinary a transaction as the domestic trouble of Sarah and Hagar as to Isaac and Ishmael we know on inspired authority to be an allegory of the two covenants, and the opposition of the flesh to promise and the Spirit. So we are taught that Melchisedec in Gen. 14 represents a higher priesthood than that of Aaron verified now in Christ, and to be displayed in His kingdom. In short, everywhere God selected by the inspired writers such facts as were adequate to bring out fully what man is as morally judged of Himself, and what God is in grace or in government, of which Christ is the only complete expression. All scripture is the expansion of this as its central idea — not that the several writers knew the bearing of all they wrote, especially those before Christ, but that He did who inspired them all to write.

14. “Because during this period divine interpositions were withheld, and the Jews were left to the ordinary course of things. And we may remark that in all ages of their history divine inspiration was vouchsafed in exact proportion to the necessity of the case. Inspiration was afforded to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses; and from Moses to Malachi there was an uninterrupted communication of the divine will through inspired ministry to the chosen people. By this chosen people the knowledge of the Deity was preserved through so many ages in the midst of the darkness and idolatry and polytheism of the other nations of the world. And the measure of inspiration was always in proportion to the exigency. The greatest prophets arose in the most difficult times. The reign of Ahab was distinguished by Elijah and Elisha. Isaiah continued to prophesy through the time of Ahaz. And during the captivity many eminent prophets consoled and instructed the Jews in their calamity. But with Malachi inspiration ceased, and the Jews were left to the exertions of their own faculties. Inspiration appears to have been withdrawn because it was no longer necessary for the purposes of Providence.

“The character of the Jews in their captivity had undergone a remarkable change. During the period of their judges they had been easily seduced into the idolatries of their neighbors; but, after their return from Babylon, they exhibited a spirit of attachment to their law and to their sacred books which they maintained under all circumstances with incredible firmness. A people of such habits as they had now acquired was eminently fitted for the office for which they were designed, of guardians of the oracles of God, επιστρεφόντα τά δόγματα Θεοῦ (Rom. 3:2). Josephus Apion, i. 8, remarks of his countrymen, πάντα συμφωνών εἶναι Θεοῦ, ἐνοχήσαντα τοὺς σωτῆρας παντὸς εἰς τὸν πλῆθος γενέσεως Θεοῦς, ἔδωκαν ἄνθρωποι τοὺς σωτηρίους τούτους. Miraculous aid was now therefore no longer necessary to fit them for their office, and was accordingly withheld. As in the material world Providence had everywhere proportioned the means to the end, the forces being not greater than the occasion requires, so it would seem that in his spiritual communications extraordinary aids are only granted when ordinary influence is insufficient. At the birth of the Messiah the greatness of the occasion demanded that divine communication, after a suspension of four centuries, should again be made; and the evangelists and apostles were armed with supernatural gifts and powers adequate to the duties which they were to perform.”
Hence there is a vast system of which the several books form part, and fill up each the place assigned in the purpose of God. While every book has an unity of its own, and certain books may supplement each other in a way evidently beyond the writers’ thought, they all compose a divine whole.

Thus in Genesis, couched under the simplest forms of word or deed, are seen the great principles of divine action and relationship with man from the earliest days, which look on typically to the last: creation, human responsibility, sin, revelation of a Deliverer in grace, sacrifice in faith, the world in its worship and in its outward progress, translation to heaven, corruption and violence on earth, providential judgment and deliverance through it, covenant with the earth, human government ordained but of God, combination of men in pride, dispersion into nations, tribes, and tongues by divine judgment; calling by grace as a separate witness for the God of promise; the risen son and heir with the calling of the bride; the election for the earth cast out for a time, but after humbling experiences restored and blessed and a blessing; and this in connection with a holy sufferer rejected by his brethren, sold to the Gentiles, but by this very path of sorrow exalted over the world while unknown to Israel, and receiving a Gentile bride, but finally making himself known to his brethren preserved through their secret trouble, and now owning in him the grace and glory they had so long despised and hated.

In Exodus we see, not individuals or a family, but a people, God’s people, redeemed from the house of bondage and brought to God from the world which falls under His mighty hand, and inflictions in an ever-rising character till chastening slighted ends in exterminating judgment; but the people of God themselves failing to appreciate His grace which led them all the instructive way from Egypt to Sinai, and voluntarily accepting conditions of obeying the law as the means and tenure of divine privilege, yet even in the shadows of the tabernacle, &c., having His grace in Christ typified with striking variety and fulness.

Leviticus next presents God from the tabernacle laying down the means and character and consequences of access to Himself by sacrifice and priesthood and ordinances for food, birth, disease, infirmity, &c., and feasts for the people in the midst of whom He dwells, with the prophecy of their ruin and exile for rebellious and idolatrous unbelief, but of their restoration when they should repent by His grace, and so enjoy the promises made to their fathers.

The book of Numbers gives us the sojourn and march of the people through the desert, with the provisions of grace, the full account of their unbelief as to both the way and the end, the judgment of presumption and rebellion, and the effort of the enemy to hinder turned of God into the grandest vindication of His people and assurance of future glory when He judges the world, with facts and ordinances which look onward to their possession of the promised land.

Deuteronomy is not only a farewell moral rehearsal of the law, but also of God’s ways with Israel, enforcing obedience as the way of blessing; as the last words of him who was the chief type of Messiah as Prophet, it urges on the people, just about to enter the land, a more direct relationship with Jehovah their God, and, while predicting their ruin through disobedience, points darkly to the resources of divine mercy in which He will more than retrieve all to their blessedness and His own glory in the latter day.

There is thus a deep inward connection as well as progress in the five books of Moses, and the reader who looks below the surface will find proofs of this multiplying on his prayerful study; but the same principle is true of the entire Bible from Genesis to the Revelation, the links between which are as strong as they are numerous, and those comparatively indirect or latent so much the more undeniable a testimony to the One Divine Author of them all.
Lectures on the Pentateuch

Lecture 1

Genesis 1 – 11

There is one characteristic of divine revelation to which attention may be profitably called as a starting point. We have to do with facts. The Bible alone is a revelation of facts, and, we can add (not from the Old Testament, but from the New), of a person. This is of immense importance. In all pretended revelations it is not so. They give you notions -- ideas; they can furnish nothing better, and very often nothing worse. But they cannot produce facts, for they have none. They may indulge in speculations of the mind, or visions of the imagination -- a substitute for what is real, and a cheat of the enemy. God, and God alone, can communicate the truth. Thus it is that whether it be the Old Testament or New, one half (speaking now in a general way) consists of history. Undoubtedly there is teaching of the Spirit of God founded on the facts of revelation. In the New Testament these unfoldings have the profoundest character, but everywhere they are divine; for there is no difference, whether it be the Old or the New, in the absolutely divine character of the written word. But still it is well to take note that we have thus a grand basis of things as they really are -- a divine communication to us of facts of the utmost moment, and, at the same time, of the deepest interest to the children of God. In this too God’s own glory is brought before us, and so much the more because there is not the smallest effort. The simple statement of the facts is that which is worthy of God.

Take, for instance, the way in which the book of Genesis opens. If man had been writing it, if he had attempted to give that which pretended to be a revelation, we could understand a flourish of trumpets, pompous prolegomena, some elaborate means or other of setting forth who and what God is, -- an attempt by fancy to project His image out of man’s mind, or by subtle à priori reasoning to justify all that might follow. The highest, the holiest, the only suitable way, once it is laid before us, evidently is what God Himself has employed in His word:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth

Not only is the method the most worthy, but the truth with which the book opens is one that nobody ever did really discover before it was revealed. You cannot, as a rule, anticipate facts; you cannot discern the truth beforehand. You may form opinions; but for the truth, and even for such facts as the world’s history before man had an existence in it -- facts as to which there can be no testimony from the creature on the earth, we find the need of His word who knew and wrought all from the beginning. But God does communicate in such a way as at once meets the heart, and mind, and conscience. Man feels that this is exactly what is appropriate to God.

So here God states the great truth of creation; for what is more important, short of redemption, always excepting the manifestation of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God? Creation and redemption bear witness to His glory, instead of communicating aught of His own dignity. But short of Christ’s person and work, there is nothing more characteristic of God than creation. And in the manner in which creation is here presented what unspeakable grandeur! all the more because of the chaste simplicity of the style and words. How suited to the true God, who perfectly knew the truth and would make it known to man!

In the beginning God created.

In the beginning matter did not co-exist with God. I warn every person solemnly against a notion found in both ancient and modern times, that there was in the beginning a quantity of what may be called crude matter for God to work on. Another notion still more general, and only less gross, though certainly not so serious in what it involves, is that God created matter in the beginning, according to Gen. 1:2, in a state of confusion or “chaos,” as men say. But this is not the meaning of Gen. 1:1 and Gen. 1:2. I have no hesitation in saying that it is a mistaken interpretation, however prevalent. Nor indeed is such dealing according to the revealed nature of God. Where is anything like it in all the known ways of God? That either matter existed crude or God created it in disorder has not, I believe, the smallest foundation in the word of God. What scripture gives here or elsewhere seems to me altogether in unison with the glory of God Himself, and with His character; more than that, they are in perfect harmony with itself. There is no statement, from beginning to end of scripture, as far as I am aware, which in the smallest degree modifies or takes away from the force of the words with which the Bible opens --

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Some have found a difficulty (which I simply touch on in passing) from the conjunction with which Gen. 1:2 commences. They have conceived that, coupling the second verse with the first, it suggests the notion that when God
created the earth it was in the state described in the second verse. Now not only is it not too strong to deny that there is the least ground for such an inference, but one may go farther and affirm that the simplest and surest means of guarding against it, according to the style of the writer, and indeed propriety of language, was afforded by here inserting the word ἦν

and.

In short, if the word had not been here, it might have been supposed that the writer meant us to conclude that the original condition of the earth was the shapeless mass of confusion which Gen. 1:2 describes with such terse and graphic brevity. But, as it is, scripture means nothing of the sort. We have first the great announcement that in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. There is next the associated fact of an utter desolation which befell not the heavens, but the earth. The insertion of the substantive verb, as has been remarked, expresses no doubt a condition past as compared with what follows, but pointedly not said to be contemporaneous with what preceded, as would have been implied in its omission; but what interval lay between, or why such a desolation ensued, is not stated. For God passes rapidly over the early account and history of the globe -- I might almost say, hastening to that condition of the earth in which it was to be made the habitation of mankind; wherein also God was to display His moral dealings, and finally His own Son, with the fruitful consequences of that stupendous event, whether in rejection or in redemption.

Had the copulative not been here, the first verse might have been regarded as a kind of summary of the chapter. Its insertion forbids the thought, and, to speak plainly, convicts those who so understand it either of ignorance, or at the least of inattention. Not only the Hebrew idiom forbids it, but our own, and no doubt every other language. The first verse is not a summary. When a compendious statement of what follows is intended, the ἦν “and” is never put. This you can, if you will, verify in various occasions where scripture furnishes examples of the summary; as, for instance, in the beginning of Gen. 5,

This is the book of the generations of Adam.

There it is plain that the writer gives a summary. But there is no word coupling the introductory statement of Gen. 1:1 with what follows.

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man [Gen. 5:1].

It is not “And in the day.” The copulative would render it improper, and impossible to bear the character of a general introduction. For a summary gives in a few words that which is opened out afterwards; whereas the conjunction and introduced in the second verse {Gen. 1:2} excludes necessarily all notion of a summary here. It is another statement added to what had just preceded, and by the Hebrew idiom not connected with it in time.

First of all there was the creation by God -- both of the heavens and of the earth. Then we have the further fact stated of the state into which the earth was plunged -- to which it was reduced. Why this was, how it was, God has not here explained. It was not necessary nor wise to reveal it by Moses. If man can discover such facts by other means, be it so. They have no small interest; but men are apt to be hasty and shortsighted. I advise none to embark too confidently in the pursuit of such studies. Those who enter on them had better be cautious, and well weigh alleged facts, and above all their own conclusions, or those of other men. But the perfectness of scripture is, I am bold to say, unimpeachable. The truth affirmed by Moses remains in all its majesty and simplicity withal.

In the beginning God created everything -- the heavens and the earth. Then the earth is described as void and waste, and (not as succeeding, but accompanying it) darkness upon the face of the deep, contemporaneously with which the Spirit of God broods upon the face of the waters. All this is an added account. The real and only force of the ἦν

and

is another fact; not at all as if it implied that Gen. 1:2 spoke of the same time, any more than they decide the question of the length of the interval. The phraseology employed perfectly agrees with and confirms the analogy of revelation, that the first verse speaks of an original condition which God was pleased to bring into being; the second, of a desolation afterwards brought in; but how long the first lasted, what changes may have intervened, when or by what means the ruin came to pass, is not the subject-matter of the inspired record, but open to the ways and means of human research, if indeed man has sufficient facts on which to ground a sure conclusion. It is false that scripture does not leave room for his investigation.

We saw at the close of Gen. 1:2 the introduction of the Spirit of God on the scene.

The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. He appears most consistently and in season, when man’s earth is about to be brought before us. In the previous description, which had not to do with man, there was silence about the Spirit of God; but, as the divine wisdom is shown in Prov. 8 to rejoice in the habitable parts of the earth, so the Spirit of God is always brought before us as the immediate agent in the Deity whenever man is to be introduced. Hence, therefore, as closing all the previous state of things, where man was not spoken of, preparing the way for the Adamic earth, the Spirit of God is seen brooding upon the face of the waters.

* * *

Now comes the first mention of evening and morning, and of days. Let me particularly ask those who have not duly considered the matter to weigh God’s word. The first and second verses make allusion to these well-known measures of time. They leave room consequently for a state or states of the earth long before either man or time, as man measures it. The days that follow I see no ground for interpreting save in their simple and natural import. Undoubtedly day
may be used, as it often is, in a figurative sense. No solid reason whatever appears why it should be so used here. There is not the slightest necessity for it. The strict import of the term is that which to my mind is most suitable to the context; the week in which God made the heaven and earth for man seems alone appropriate in introducing the revelation of God. I can understand, when all is clear, a word used figuratively; but nothing would be so likely to let elements of difficulty into the subject, as at once giving us in tropical language what elsewhere is put in the simplest possible forms.

Hence we may see how fitting it is that, as man is about to be introduced on the earth for the first time, as the previous state had nothing whatever to do with his being here below, and indeed was altogether unfit for his dwelling on it, besides the fact that he was not yet created, days should appear only when it was a question of making the heavens and the earth as they are. It will be found, if scripture be searched, that there is the most careful guard on this subject. If the Holy Spirit, as in Ex. 20:11, refers to heaven and earth made in six days, it always avoids the expression “creation.” God made heaven and earth in six days: it is never said He created heaven and earth in six days. When it is no question of these, creating, making, and forming may be freely used, as in Isa. 45:18. The reason is plain when we look at Gen. 1. He created the heaven and earth at the beginning. Then another state of things is mentioned in Gen. 1:2, not for the heaven, but for the earth.

The earth was without form and void.

The heavens were in no such state of chaos: the earth was. As to how, when, and why it was, there is silence. Others have spoken -- spoken rashly and wrongly. The wisdom of the inspired writer’s silence will be evident to a spiritual mind, and the more, the more it is reflected on. On the six days which follow I shall not dwell: the subject was before many of the hearers, and the more, the more it is reflected on. On the six days the work of creation was done. It is not the slightest necessity for it. The strict import of the term is that which to my mind is most suitable to the context; the week in which God made the heaven and earth for man seems alone appropriate in introducing the revelation of God. I can understand, when all is clear, a word used figuratively; but nothing would be so likely to let elements of difficulty into the subject, as at once giving us in tropical language what elsewhere is put in the simplest possible forms.

First of all (Gen. 1:3) light is caused to be or act. Next the evening and the morning {Gen. 1:5}

But we have on the first day light, and a most remarkable fact it is (I may in passing just say) that the inspired historian should have named it. No one would have done so naturally. It is plain, had Moses merely formed a probable opinion as men do, that no one would have introduced the mention of light, apart from, and before all distinct notice of, the heavenly orbs. The sun, moon, and stars, would certainly have been first introduced, had man simply pursued the workings of his own mind, or those of observation and experience. The Spirit of God has acted quite otherwise. He, knowing the truth, could afford to state the truth as it is, leaving men to find out at another day the certainty of all He has said, and leaving them, alas! to their unbelief if they choose to despise or resist the word of God meanwhile. We might with interest pass through the account of the various days, and mark the wisdom of God in each; but I forbear to dwell on such details now, saying a word here and there on the goodness of God apparent throughout.

First of all (Gen. 1:3) light is caused to be or act. Next the evening and the morning {Gen. 1:5} -- a statement of great importance for other parts of scripture, never forgotten by the Spirit of God, but almost invariably let slip by moderns; which forgetfulness has been a great source of the difficulties that have encumbered harmonies of the Gospels. It may be well to glance at it just to show the importance of heeding the word of God, and all His word. The reason why persons have found such perplexities, for instance, in relation to our Lord’s, as compared with the Jews, taking the passover and with the crucifixion, is owing to their forgetting that the evening and the morning were the first day, the second day, or any other. Even scholars bring in their western notions from the familiar habit of counting the day from the morning to the evening. It is the same thing with the account of the resurrection. The difficulty could never arise had they seen and remembered what is stated in the very first chapter of Genesis, and the indelible habit graven thereby on the Jew.

We find then light caused to be -- a remarkable expression, and, be assured, profoundly true. But what man would have thought it, or said it, if he had not been inspired? For it is much more exactly true than any expression that has been invented by the most scientific of men; yet there is no science in it. It is the beauty and the blessedness of scripture that it is as much above man’s science as above his ignorance. It is the truth, and in such a form and depth as man himself could not have discerned. Being the truth, whatever man discovers that is true will never clash with it.

On the first day light is. Next a firmament is separated in the midst of the waters to divide the waters from the waters. Thirdly the dry land appears, and the earth bringing forth grass, and herb, and fruit-tree. There is the provision of God, not merely for the need of man, but for His own glory; and this in the smallest things as in the greatest. On the fourth day we hear of lights in the firmament. The utmost possible care appears in the statement. They are not said to be created then; but God made two great lights (it is no question of their mass, but of their capacity as light bearers), for the Adamic earth -- the stars also. Then we find the waters caused to bring forth abundantly

the moving creature that hath life {Gen. 1:20}.

Vegetable life was before, animal life now -- a very weighty truth, and of the greatest moment too. Life is not the matter out of which animals were formed; nor is it true that matter produces life. God produces life, whether it be for the fish that people the sea, for the birds of the air, or for the beasts, cattle, or reptiles, on the dry land. It is God that does all, whether it be for the earth, the air, or the waters. And here in a secondary sense of the word is the propriety of the phrase created

in Gen. 1:21; and we shall see it also when a new action comes before us in imparting not animal life but a rational soul (Gen. 1:27). For as we have on the sixth day the lower creation for the earth, so finally man himself the crown of all.

But here comes a striking difference. God speaks with the peculiar appropriateness which suits the new occasion, in

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contradistinction from what we have seen elsewhere.

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness {Gen. 1:26}.

It is man as the head of creation. It is not man placed in his moral relationships, but man the head of this kingdom of creation, as they say; but still even so with remarkable dignity.

Let us make man in our image.

He was to represent God here below; besides this he was to be like God. There was to be a mind in him, a spirit capable of the knowledge of God, with the absence of all evil. Such was the condition in which man was formed.

And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon earth {Gen. 1:26}.

God created man in His own image: in the image of God created He him. In conclusion, the Sabbath day, which God 16 sanctified, closes the great week of God’s forming the earth for man, the lord of it (Gen. 2:1-3).

Then, from Gen. 2:4, we have the subject from another point of view, -- not a repetition of the account of creation, but what was even more necessary to be brought here before us, -- the place of relationship in which God set the creation He had formed, not mutually alone, but above all, in reference to Himself. Hence it is here that Eden is first spoken of. We should not have known anything of paradise from the first chapter. The reason is evident. Eden was to be the scene of the moral trial of man.

From Gen. 2:4, therefore, we first meet with a new title of God. To the end of Gen. 2:3 it was always God (Elohim) as such. It was the name of the divine nature, as such, in contrast with man or the creature; not the special manner in which God may reveal Himself at a particular time, or deal in exceptional ways, but the general and what you may call historical name of God, --

God

as such.

For this, as for other reasons, it is manifest that Gen. 2 ought to begin with the verse which stands fourth in the common English Bible. God is here styled Jehovah-Elohim; and so uniformly to the end of the chapter.

I must be permitted here to say a word on a subject which, if it has called out enormous discussion, betrays in its course, I am sorry to say, no small amount of evident infidelity. It has been gathered from the varying names of God, &c., by speculative minds that there must have been different documents joined together in this book. Now there is not really the very least ground for such an assumption. On the contrary, supposing there was but one writer of the book of Genesis, as I am persuaded is the truth of the case, it would not have borne the stamp of a divine communication if he had used either the name of Jehovah-Elohim in Gen. 1–2:3, or the name of Elohim only in Gen. 2:4-25. The change of designation springs from distinct truths, not from different fabulists and a sorry compiler who could not even assimilate them. Accepting the whole as an inspired writing, I maintain that the same writer must have used this distinctive way of speaking of God in Gen. 1 and Gen. 2, and that the notion of there being two or three writers is merely a want of real intelligence in scripture. If it were the same writer, and he an inspired one, it was proper in the highest degree to use the simple term Elohim in Gen. 1–2:3, then the compound Jehovah-Elohim from Gen. 2:4 and onward through Gen. 2. A mere historian, like Josephus of old -- a mere commentator, like Ewald now -- might have used either the one or the other without sensible loss to his readers through both chapters. An inspired author could not have expressed himself differently from Moses without impairing the perfect beauty and accuracy of the truth. 16 If the book were in each of these different subjects written according to that most perfect keeping which pervades scripture, and which only God is capable of producing by His chosen instruments, I am convinced that, as Elohim simply in Gen. 2, so Jehovah-Elohim in Gen. 1, would have been wholly out of place with their respective positions in Gen. 1 and Gen. 2. As they stand, they are in exact harmony. The first chapter does not speak of special relationships, -- does not treat of any peculiar dealings of God with the creature. It is the Creator originating what is around us; consequently it is God, Elohim, who alone could be spoken of as such in Gen. 2:1-3, taking the Sabbath as the necessary complement of the week, and therefore going on with the preceding six days, not with what follows. But in Gen. 2, beginning with verse 4, where we have special position and moral responsibility coming to view for the first time, the compound term which expresses the Supreme putting Himself in relation with man, and morally dealing with him here below, is first used, and with the most striking appropriateness.

So far is the book of Genesis, therefore, from indicating a mere clumsy compiler, who strung together documents which had neither cohesion nor distinctive propriety, instead of there being merely two or three sets of traditions edited by

15 Jehovah here, rather than Elohim, would have spoilt the beauty of the divine account. No doubt afterwards God did as the Jehovah of Israel impose the remembrance of the Sabbath every seventh day of the week on His people. But it was important to shew its ground in the facts of creation, apart from special relationship; and that made Elohim alone appropriate in this place.

16 We may judge how little the LXX. can claim credit for accuracy from their inattention to this difference in the Greek version. Holmes and Parsons show, however, the omission of κρητος supplied in not a few MSS., whether by the translators or by their copyists may be a question.
another party, there is really the perfect statement of the truth of God, the expression of one mind, as is found in no writings outside the Bible. The difference in the divine titles is due to a distinctness of object, not of authorship; and it runs through the Psalms and the Prophets as well as the Law, so as to convict of ignorance and temerity the learned men who vaunt so loudly of the document hypothesis as applied to the Pentateuch.

Here accordingly we find in Gen. 2, with a fulness and precision given nowhere else, God’s entering into relationship with man, and man’s relation to Eden, to the animal realm, and to woman specially. Hence, when notice is here taken of man’s formation, it is described (as all else is) in a manner quite distinct from that of Gen. 1; but that distinctiveness self-evidently is because of the moral relationship which the Spirit of God is here bringing before the reader. Every subject that comes before us is dealt with in a new point of view suitably to the new name given to God -- the name of God as a moral governor, no longer simply as a creator. Could any person have conceived such wisdom beforehand? On the contrary, we have all read these chapters in the Bible, and we may have read them as believers too, without seeing their immense scope and profound accuracy all at once. But when God’s word is humbly and prayerfully studied, the evidence will not be long withheld by the Spirit of God, that there is a divine depth in that word which no mere man put into it. Then what confirmation of one’s faith! What joy and delight in the Scriptures! If men, and men too of ability and learning, have tortured the signs of its very perfection into proofs of defective and clashing documents, ridiculously combined by a man who did not perceive that he was editing not fables only but inconsistent fables, what can believers do but wonder at his evident ignorance and temerity? They speculate; they write and publish in their own name as the true key. When men reason instead of receiving the revealed light of the Bible, I care not who or what they may be, they only mistake God and even man. They speculate; they give you ideas -- and very foolish ideas they often are. The word of God presents to the simplest Christian the perfect confirmation of one’s faith! What joy and delight in the depth in that word which no mere man put into it. Then what confirmation of one’s faith! What joy and delight in the Scriptures! If men, and men too of ability and learning, have tortured the signs of its very perfection into proofs of defective and clashing documents, ridiculously combined by a man who did not perceive that he was editing not fables only but inconsistent fables, what can believers do but wonder at human blindness, and adore divine grace! For themselves, with glowing gratitude they receive it as the precious word of God, where His love and goodness and truth shine in a way beyond all comparison, and yet meeting the mind and heart in the least, no less than in the most serious, wants that each day brings here below. In every way it proves itself the word not of men, but as it is in truth of God, which effectually works in them that believe.

In this new section accordingly it is written,

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created [going up to the first], in the day 17 [here the writer comes down] that Jehovah-Elohim made the earth and the heavens {Gen. 2:4}.

It is not in this connection “created,” it will be observed, but made

17. Is it not the mere captiousness of criticism to set the general phrase “the day,” &c., against the precision of the six days in the previous section? It is unfounded to say that in the second narrative the present world is supposed to be brought forth at once. The history is in Gen. 1–2:3; from Gen. 2:4 to the end of Gen. 2 is not so much a history of creation as a statement of the relations of creation, and especially of man, its center and head. Gen. 2 assumes Gen. 1, but adds moral elements of the utmost importance and interest.

18. It seems almost too trivial to notice what Dr. Davidson and Bishop Colenso (or their German sources) say of Gen. 2:5, 6, as if inconsistent with Gen. 1:9, 10. If divine power separated the earth from the waters, why should it remain saturated? In Gen. 1 it is said that “the dry land” was called earth; in the others, that though no rain yet fell, a mist went up. What can be more consistent?
himself, and above all as to his relationship with God. Give up the immortality of the soul, and you deny the ground of that relationship, man’s special moral responsibility to God.

But there is more than this, though this be of exceeding interest; because we see with equal certainty and clearness why Jehovah-Elohim is introduced not before but here, and why man’s becoming a living soul by the inbreathing of God was said here and not in the first chapter. Neither would have suited the chapter; both are perfectly in season in Gen. 2. Further, we now hear of the garden that was planted by Jehovah-Elohim eastward in Eden, where He put the man whom He had formed. And here we find the solemn truth, that not only did Jehovah-Elohim cause to grow every tree that is pleasant and good for food, but

the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil {Gen. 2:9}.

I call your attention for a moment to this. It is often a difficulty with souls that God should have made the moral history of the world to turn on touching that tree or eating of that fruit. The mere mind of man thinks it a mighty difficulty that what appears to be so small a matter should be pregnant with such awful results. Do you not understand that this was the very essence of the trial? It was the essential feature that the trial should be simply a question of God’s authority in prohibition, not one of grave moral evil. There was the whole matter. When God made man, when Jehovah-Elohim breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, man had no knowledge of things as right or wrong in themselves. This was acquired (have you never known, or have you forgotten, the solemn fact?) by the fall. An innocent man could not have had the knowledge of good and evil; it pertains necessarily to a fallen one. He who is innocent -- a man absolutely without any evil either in himself or in that which was around him, where all was from God -- (and this is the revealed account of things), how could he have a knowledge of evil? How possibly have that discrimination which decides morally between what is good and what is evil? How perfect therefore is the intimation of scripture! Yet none did or could anticipate it.

The condition of man was altogether different then from what it became immediately after. All is consistent in revelation, and nowhere else. Men, the wisest -- those of whom the world has most boasted, never had even the least adequate thought of such a state of things; yet enough of tradition remained even among heathens to witness to the truth. Nay, more, now that it is clearly revealed, they have no competency to appreciate it -- never take in its force; and for this simple reason, that man invariably judges from himself and from his own experience, instead of submitting to God and His word. It is only faith that really accepts what comes from God; and faith alone gives the clue to what is around us now, but then it guides us through all present entanglements by believing God whether as to what He once made or what He will yet do. Philosophy believes neither, in a vain effort to account for all by what is, or rather appears; for it knows nothing, not even the present, as it ought to know. Consequently the attempt of man’s mind by what is now to judge of what was then always ends in the merest confusion and total failure. In truth only God is competent to pronounce; and this He has done.

Hence the believer finds not the slightest difficulty. He may not be able perhaps to meet objections. That is another matter, and by no means of such consequence as many suppose. The great point, my brethren, is to hold fast the truth. It is all well, and a desirable service of love, if a Christian can happily and with God-given wisdom meet the difficulties of others; but hold you the truth yourselves. Such is the power and simplicity of faith. Adversaries may no doubt try to embarrass you: if they will, let them do so. Do not be troubled if you cannot answer their questions and dispose of their cavils; you may regret it in charity for injured or misled souls. But, after all, it is the positive truth of God which it is the all-important business to hold, and this God has put in the heart of the simplest child who believes in Jesus.

I affirm then that, when God thus made man, when He put him in Eden, the actual test was the interdict not of a thing which was in itself evil, but simply and prescriptively wrong for man because God had forbidden it. Such is the very essence of a test for an innocent man. In fact any other thought (such as the law) is not only contrary to scripture, but when you closely and seriously think of it as a believer, it will be seen to be an impossible state of things then. Consequently a moral test such as the wise and prudent would introduce here, and count a worthier reason why there should be so vast a ruin for the world ensuing, is out of the question. No, it was the simple question whether God was really Jehovah-Elohim, whether He was a moral governor or not, whether man was to be independent of God or not. This was decided not by some grave and mighty matter, of which man could reason and see the consequences, but simply by doing or not doing the will of God. Thus we see how the simple truth is after all the deepest wisdom.

It is of great interest and importance to observe that God distinguished from the first between responsibility on the one hand, and life-giving on the other, in the two trees (Gen. 2:9). Even for Adam, innocent as he was, life did not depend on abstinence from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Death followed if he disobeyed God in eating of this tree (Gen. 2:17); but, walking in obedience, he was free to eat of the tree of life. He fell in partaking of the forbidden fruit; and God took care that he should not eat of the tree of life. But the two trees, representing the two principles, which man is ever confounding or obliterating one for the other, are in the scripture as in truth wholly distinct.

* * *

Observe another thing too. We have the description of the garden of Eden. I do not consider that its locality is so very difficult to ascertain in a general way as has been often imagined. Scripture describes it, and mentions two rivers which unquestionably exist at the present day. There can be no doubt that the Euphrates and the Tigris or Hiddekel, here named, are the same two rivers similarly called to this moment. It appears to me beyond reasonable doubt that the other two rivers are by no means impossible to trace; and it is remarkable, as showing that the Spirit of God takes an
interest, and furnishes a thread to help us in the fact, that the
two less notorious rivers are described more fully than the
rivers which are so commonly known. 19 We are therefore
warranted in supposing that they are described just because
they might have been less easily discerned. It is said that the
name of the first river is the Pison, and of the other the Gihon.
Now without wishing to press my individual judgment of such
a matter, I may state the conviction that the Pison and the
Gihon, here described, are two rivers on the north of the site
of Eden, one running into the Black Sea, the other into the
Caspian. I believe that they are what are called, or used to be
called in ancient times at any rate, the Phasis and the Aras or
Araxes.

However this is merely by the way, for it is evidently a
matter of no great importance in itself, save that we should
hold the entire account of Paradise to be historical in the
strictest and fullest sense. And, more than that, the position of
these rivers seems to me to explain -- what has often been a
difficulty to many -- the account that is given us here, that
a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from
thence it was parted and became into four heads
{Gen. 2:10};
because if the garden of Eden lay in that quarter (that is to say
in Armenia), in the part of it where are found the springs or
watershed of these rivers, they would be all within a certain
circumscribed quarter, as surrounding this garden. It is
however possible that God may have allowed a certain change
as to the distribution of these waters around the garden. I do
not venture on any opinion as to this. Scripture does not say
more, and we must hold to scripture. But these remarks are
merely thrown out to show that there seems to be no
insuperable difficulty in the way of arriving at a satisfactory
solution of this vexed question. As for the transfer of the site
of the garden lower down in the plain of Shinar, it appears to
me altogether untenable. It is impossible thus to connect Eden
with the fountainhead or sources of these rivers. It is not hard
to conceive both that they had a common source before they
parted, and that the garden of Eden may have been of
considerable extent. Let this suffice: I do not wish to speculate
about the matter.

The grand question to be tried we have afterwards.

Jehovah-Elohim took the man, and put him into the
garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it {Gen. 2:15}.
Not a word of this is in the first chapter.

And Jehovah-Elohim commanded the man, saying, Of
every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of
the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt
not eat of it; for in the day, &c. {Gen. 2:16, 17}.

Not a word of this again occurs in the previous chapter. Why?
Because moral responsibility in relationship to Jehovah-Elohim
comes in exactly where it should. Had it been spoken of in the
Gen. 1, there might have been grave exception taken whether
such an account could have been inspired; but, coming in as
it does, it is exactly as it ought to be.

Then the various species of land animals and birds are
brought forward to see what Adam would call them; not when
Eve was formed, but before. The beautiful type of creation
belonging to Christ is thus admirably preserved. 20 Creation
does not in the first instance belong to the church at all, whose
place is purely one of grace. The Heir of all things is the
Second man, and not the bride. If she possesses all along with
Him, it is because of her union with Him, not intrinsically.
This, it is observable, is kept up strikingly here, for Adam has
these creatures brought before him by Jehovah-Elohim, and
gives names to them all, showing clearly not alone his title as
lord, but the power of appropriate language imparted by God
from the first. The notion that intelligible speech is a mere
growth from the gradual putting together of elements is a
dream of ingenious speculation, which may exercise men’s
wits, but has no foundation whatever. Adam on the very first
day of his life, even before Eve was formed, gave the animals
their names, and God Himself sanctioned what their head
uttered. Such was his relation to the creature; he was put in
that place by God.

But this made the want so much the more evident, of
which Jehovah-Elohim takes notice, of a partner for Adam’s
affections and life, one that might be before him, as it is said:
And Jehovah-Elohim caused a deep sleep to fall upon
Adam {Gen. 2:21}.
The creation of the woman apart from the man (as no doubt
every other male and female were made separately) would
have been a sterile and unimpressive fact. As it is, God
reserves the striking detail for the scene of moral relationship.
And may I not put it to the conscience of every soul whether
such an event is not exactly where it should be, according to
the internal and distinctive features of Gen. 1 and 2? We all
know how apt man has been to forget the truth -- how often
might takes advantage of right! God at least was pleased to
form woman, as well as to reveal her formation in a way that
ought to make ashamed him who recognizes her as his own
flesh and bone, yet slights or misuses a relationship so intimate.

19. This, not to speak of other reasons, appears conclusive against the claim
of the Pison to be the Ganges! set up by Josephus and a crowd of Greek and
Latin fathers, the Nile according to Jarchi and other Rabbis, the Indus of late
reasserted by Ewald, more than one of the fathers considering it to be the
Danube! Caesarius and Epiphanius held it to be the Danube, the Ganges, and
the Indus, and that after an extraordinary course in the south it joined the
ocean near Cadiz! Those who made the Pison to be the Ganges regarded the
Gihon as the Nile. Those who embrace the theory that Eden lay on the Shat-
el-Arab consider the Pison and the Gihon as mere branches of the stream
formed by the blending of the Euphrates and the Tigris (or Hiddekel). But this
seems to me indefensible, though there may be difficulty in reconciling what
I regard as the truth with an unusual force of one or two words.

20. This moral and typical bearing is the true key to the record in Gen. 2:4-
25, and truly accounts for the differences from Gen. 1:1–2:3, which ignorance
and unbelief pervert into the discrepancies of two separate and inconsistent
writers. It is not the fact that Gen. 2:7, 19, represents man as created first of
all living creatures before the birds and beasts; any more than that man
created in God’s image (Gen. 1:27) contradicts the statement of Gen. 2:7, that
he was formed of the dust of the ground. It is not said in Gen. 1:27 that man
and woman were created together; or that the woman was created directly,
and not formed out of one of the man’s ribs.
And he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib which Jehovah-Elohim had taken from man made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh [Gen. 2:21-24].

The primitive condition is described too. They were both naked -- the man and his wife, and were not ashamed {Gen. 2:25}.

It was a state altogether different from that of man fallen; however suitable then, it was such as man as he is could never have conceived of with propriety. Yet we cannot but feel how suitable it was for innocence, in which condition God made man and woman. Could He have made them otherwise consistently with His own character? Could they so made have man and woman. Could He have made them otherwise suitable it was for innocence, in which condition God made have conceived of with propriety. Yet we cannot but feel how it was necessary. The fact declares itself. If in the first chapter introduction, and a full history of his origin and his designs man, (need one hesitate to say?) we should have had a long this but God? In any other book, in a book written by mere introduction, and a full history of his origin and his designs and his doings. God could introduce him, and could leave the heart to feel the rightness of saying no more about him than was necessary. The fact declares itself. If in the first chapter the true God shows Himself in creative power and glory, and in the perfect beneficence which marks too that which He had made; if in the second special relations display yet more His moral way and will, so the serpent does not fail to manifest his actual condition and aim -- not of course the condition in which he was made, but that to which sin had reduced him.

The serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which Jehovah-Elohim had made {Gen. 3:1}.

The third chapter is indeed a continuation of the second -- properly enough made into a separate chapter, but still its sequel simply. It is the issue of that probationary trial which was proposed there. And here the effort of the enemy was first to breathe suspicion on the goodness of God as well as on His truth, in short, on God Himself. Human lusts and passions were not yet in question, but they soon followed -- the desire of having what God had forbidden. First, however, it was an insinuation infused and allowed against the true God. All evil is due to this as its spring; it begins with God as the object attacked or undermined.

And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God 21 said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil {Gen. 3:1-5}.

So it was that the serpent envenomed morally the heart of the woman first, and then of the man. I need not dwell on the sad history which we all know more or less. She listened, she looked, she took of the fruit; she eat, and was fallen. And man eat too, not deceived, but with open eyes, and therefore so much the more guilty -- swayed, no doubt, by his affections; bold, however, in yielding to them, for he ought rather to have been her guard and guide, certainly not to have followed her, even if he had failed to keep her safely in the path of good. Alas! he followed her, as he has often since, into the broad way of evil. Adam did not preserve the place in which God had set him.

Both fallen, they were both ashamed.

They knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons {Gen. 3:7}.

And they heard the voice of Jehovah-Elohim walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves. The victims of sin knew shame, now fear. Departed from God, they hid themselves, and He had but to utter those solemn and searching words to Adam,

Where art thou? {Gen. 3:9}.

He was gone from God. Forced to discover himself, Adam tells the humiliating tale: --

I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself {Gen. 3:10}.

The evil is traced home at last to its source, and the serpent is brought fully out. Each severally -- the man, the woman, the serpent -- stand evidently convicted by the presence of Jehovah-Elohim. Yet, wonderful to say, in the very announcement of judgment on the serpent, God, who had by the light of His presence compelled the guilty pair to come forth out of the darkness in which they had hid, or rather sought to hide -- God held out the first bright light of mercy, but mercy in the judgment of him who was the root of the evil. May one not say again who beforehand would have

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21. Some have wondered why the serpent and Eve should be represented as saying Elohim ("God") in the temptation, seeing that everywhere else in the section the name employed is Jehovah-Elohim. Now, not only may it be the simple fact that Elohim alone was used, but, further, on account of it, the historian would not introduce here the name of special relationship which the enemy was above all anxious to have if possible forgotten, and which the woman in fact did soon forget when she allowed one to work on her mind whose first aim was to sow distrust of God. To me it appears that all is in perfect keeping; and that the omission of Jehovah here is equally natural on the part of the serpent and Eve, as it is appropriate to the inspired history of the transaction.
thought of ways so truly and self-evidently divine? But it is the word of God, and nothing can be more suitable to God, gracious to man, or just to the enemy.

Believers have constantly called it a “promise;” but it is not un instructive to see that scripture never does. There was a revelation of an infinite blessing for man unquestionably, but hardly what is called a promise. It was addressed to the serpent. If a promise to any, it was to the woman’s Seed, the last Adam, not to the first, who was just sentenced with Eve. Abraham, not Adam, is the depository of promise: so speaks scripture, as far as I know, invariably. We see why that ought to be. Was it a time for a promise? Was it a state for a promise? Was it a revelation of an infinite blessing for man unquestionably, but not uninstructive to see that scripture never does. There was a serpent’s-head the first sinner and too successful tempter to sin.

We have had their failure under law; we look for their stability under Messiah and the new covenant. But it is and will be of the deepest interest to trace these ways of God in earthly government from the first. How this agrees with the dispensational dealings of God with Israel needs no argument. They were chosen to be the public vessel of divine government, and had eaten of the tree of which he was made of dust, to the dust they must return. We thus learn the compatibility of these two things, which in fact were true of the insufficiency of their resources had been proved. Now comes in the shadow of what God would do fully another day.

Nevertheless present consequences take their course, and in a certain sense mercy too is mingled with them, as is the case habitually, I think, in the government of God; for man as he is, just so much the less happy as he knows not what it is to labor in such a world as this. It is not only what he is doomed to, but the wisely ordered place for fallen man here below. There is no one more miserable than the man who has no object before him. I grant that in an unfallen condition there was another state of things. Where all was bright and good around man in innocency the scope for labor would not have its place. I only speak of what is good for man out of Paradise, and how God meets with and ministers to his state in His infinite grace.

On this however we need not say more than that He drove out the man {Gen. 3:24}, lest he should perpetuate the condition of ruin into which he had passed. 22

Then (Gen. 4) we have a new scene, which opens with a change in the name of God. It is no longer the test of creation,
as God made it, and this accordingly is marked here. He is called

Jehovah {Gen. 4:1};

He is not designated by the former mingled or compound term
Jehovah-Elohim,

but by

Jehovah

simply; and this is found afterwards, either

Elohim

alone or

Jehovah

in the other names of special character, as we shall see, until
the call of Israel, when we have an appropriate modification in
the expression of His name. But Adam now becomes a father,
not innocent, but fallen before he became the head of the race.
Cain was born, and the fallen mother gave the name; but, oh,
what a mistake! I am sure, not that she was exactly entitled to
give the name, but that it can be proved that she gave a
singularly inappropriate one. She thought her first-born a great
gain, for such is the meaning of the name

Cain.

Alas! what disappointment and grief, both of the most poignant
kind, followed before long. For Abel too was born; and in
process of time it came to pass that they brought their offerings
unto

Jehovah

– a term, I may observe, that is here in admirable keeping. It
was not barely as He who had created all, but the God that was
in special relationship with man -- Jehovah. This is the force of
it. Cain looked at Him in the place merely of a Creator, and
there was his wrong. Sin needed more. Cain brought what
might have sufficed in an unfallen world -- what might have
suited an innocent worshiper of One who was simply known as
Elohim. It was impossible that such a ground could be rightly
taken longer; but so Cain did not feel. He makes a religion
from his own mind, and brings of the fruit of the ground now
under the curse; while Abel by faith offers {of} the firstlings of
the flock, and of the fat thereof. And Jehovah had respect unto
Abel, and to his offering. It is the great truth of sacrifice, of
which Abel’s faith laid hold, realizing and confessing in his
slain lamb that there was no other way in a ruined world for a
holy relationship, and for the confession of the truth too, as
between God and man. He offers of the firstlings of his flock --
that which passed under death -- to Jehovah.

And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell
{Gen. 4:5}.

And Jehovah speaks to him thus --

Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance
fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?
{Gen. 4:6, 7}.

The principles of God’s nature are immutable. Whether people
are believers or not, whether they receive the truth or not, God
holds to that which belongs to His own moral being. That any
one is capable of meeting the character of God in an unfallen
state is another matter. It is the same principle in Gen. 4, which
we find more explicitly stated in Rom. 2, where God shows His
sure judgment of evil on the one hand, and His approval of that
which is good, holy, and true on the other. So with Cain here --
and if thou doest not well;

and such was the fact. His condition was that of a sinner, and
he looked not out of himself to God. But what characterizes this
scene is not the state in which man as such was -- this we had
in Gen. 3 -- but what man did in that fallen state, and more
especially what he did in presence of God and faith. Certainly
he did not well.

And if thou doest not well,

it is said,

sin lieth at the door {Gen. 4:7}.

Evil conduct is that which makes manifest an evil state, and
flows from it.

I do not think that the expression means a sin-offering, as
is sometimes supposed; for it does not appear that there is
ground for inferring that the truth of a sin-offering was
understood in the slightest degree till long afterwards.

By the law is the knowledge of sin {Rom. 3:20};

and until the law was brought in there was, as far as scripture
tells us, no such discrimination, if any, between the offerings.
They were all merged in one; and hence it is that we find that
Job’s friends, though guilty in the Lord’s sight, yet alike with
him offer burnt-offerings. When Noah brings his sacrifice, it is
evidently of that nature also. Would there not have been a sin-
offering on these occasions had the law been then in force? Most
wisely all such details awaited the unfolding of another
day. I merely use these scriptural facts to show what seems to
me the truth that

sin {Gen. 4:7}

here does not refer to the specific offering for it, but rather to
that which was proved by evil conduct.

Notwithstanding God maintained the place that belonged to
the elder brother. But nothing softened the roused and irritated
spirit of Cain. There is nothing which more maddens man than
mortified religious pride; and so it is here proved, for he rose
up against his brother and slew him. And Jehovah speaks to
him once more. It was sin not as such against God in leaving
Him, like Adam’s, but against man, his brother accepted of
God.

Where is Abel thy brother? {Gen. 4:9}.

To God’s appeal he answers with no less hardness and
audacity than falsehood,

I know not {Gen. 4:9}.

There is no real courage with a bad conscience, and guile will
soon be apparent where God brings His own light and makes
guilt manifest. Let us not forget the deceitfulness of sin.

What hast thou done?

said Jehovah.

The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from
the ground {Gen. 4:10}.

Justly now we have him self-cursed from the face of the earth,
pronounced a fugitive and vagabond. But the will of man pits
man, for he is not like God. God made him in his likeness, but there was a likeness of God that was lost through sin. Seth therefore was begotten in Adam’s own likeness, not in the image of God; but the likeness of God was lost through sin. This, it is plain, was never lost; it abides, whatever more important because, when it is a question of the guilt of God’s. He was like Adam fallen, not his representative only.

But the chapter does not close until we find Seth, whom God substituted (for this is the meaning of the name), or appointed, as it is said,

instead of Abel, whom Cain slew {Gen. 4:25}. And so Seth, to him also there was born a son, and he called his name Enos. Then began men to call upon the name of Jehovah.

In Gen. 5 we have the generations of Adam. Upon this I would not now dwell farther than to draw attention to the commencing words,

In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made him; male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam in the day when they were created {Gen. 5:1, 2}.

But, Adam,
it is said,

begat a son in his own likeness, after his image {Gen. 5:3}.

It was no longer in the likeness of God, but in the image of God always. For man, now as ever, fallen or not, is in the image of God; but the likeness of God was lost through sin. Seth therefore was begotten in Adam’s own likeness, not in God’s. He was like Adam fallen, not his representative only. And this is what is referred to in James 3, where he speaks of our having been made in the likeness of God. But it is the more important because, when it is a question of the guilt of taking man’s life, the ground is that he was made in God’s image. This, it is plain, was never lost; it abides, whatever man’s state. Had the crime depended on man’s retaining the likeness of God, murder might have been denied or justified, because if a man were not like God the unlikeness might be urged in extenuation of killing him. But it is a crime against man made in the image of God, and as this abides, whether he be fallen or not, the guilt of murder is unimpeachable and evident. This accordingly is the ground taken, to which I refer as an instance of the perfectness of scripture, but at the same time of the profound and practical power of the truth of God.

In the remarkable list, which is pursued down to Noah, we have another great truth set forth in the most simple and beautiful way -- the power of life which exempts from the reign of death, and not only that, but the witness to heaven as a place for man. Enoch brings both these lessons before us. I have no doubt that, besides this, Enoch is the type of the portion of those who look to be with the Lord above, just as Noah shows us (as is too well known to call for a delay upon it) those who pass through the judicial dealings of God, and nevertheless are preserved. In short Enoch is the witness of the heavenly family, as Noah is of the earthly people of God.

But in Gen. 6 we have a very solemn statement -- the apostasy of the ancient world. The sons of God chose the daughters of men. The true key to this account is supplied in the Epistle of Jude. It is hardly so common-place and ordinary a matter as many suppose. When understood, it is really awful in itself and its results. But the Holy Spirit has veiled such a fact in the only manner that became God and was proper for man. Here indeed the principle of reserve does apply, not in withholding from man’s soul the deepest blessing of grace for his deepest wants, but in furnishing no more than that which was suitable for man to learn about the matter. He has said enough; but any one who will take the trouble to refer to Jude in connection with this chapter will gather more than appears on the surface. It is not needful to say more now. God Himself has touched it but curtly. This only may be remarked in addition, that

the sons of God {Gen. 6:2; Job 2:1},
in my judgment, mean the same beings in Genesis as they do in Job. This point will suffice to indicate their chief guilt in thus traversing the boundaries which God had appointed for His creatures. No wonder that total ruin speedily ensues. It is really the basis of fact for not a few tales of mythology which men have made up. Any one who is acquainted with the chief writings of the old idolatrous world, of the Greeks and Romans especially, will see that what God has veiled in this brief statement, which passes calmly over that of which more had better not be spoken, is what they have amplified into the Titans and the giants and their greater deities. I do not of course enter into details, but here is the inspired account, which shines in the midst of the horrors of that dark scene which fabulists portrayed. But there is enough in man’s amplification to point to what is stated here in a few simple words of truth.

The flood ensues. In the statement given by Moses every minute point beautifully exemplifies the propriety of the word of God. Men have fancied contradictions; they have fallen back on the old resource of opposed documents put together. There is not the slightest reason for suspicion. It is the same inspired historian who presents the subject in more than one point of view, but always consistently, and with a divine purpose which governs all. Every great writer, as far as he can go, illustrates this plan -- indeed everybody, we may say. If you are speaking in the intimacies of the family, you do not adopt the same language towards your parents, wife, child, or servant, still less towards a stranger outside. Is there then any contradiction to be

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24. As Eve at the birth of Cain seems to have been unduly excited, and expecting I think a deliverer in the child whom she named as gotten from Jehovah, so she seems to me to express a sobered if not desponding sentiment in saying at Seth’s birth,

Elohim hath appointed me another seed, &c. {Gen. 4:25}.

In the latter she only saw a child given of God naturally. Both appear to me natural and purposed.
surmounted? Both may be perfectly right, and both absolutely true; but there is a difference of manner and phraseology, because of a difference of object before you. It is no otherwise with God’s word, save that all illustrations fail to measure the depth of the differences in it.

Thus in Gen. 6 it is said that
the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence {Gen. 6:11}.

It is not
Jehovah
now but
God.

And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth {Gen. 6:12}.

What does He do then? He directs the ark to be made. For what end? The preservation of the creatures which required the ark. Hence He orders that two of every kind should be taken into the ark. We can easily see the propriety of this. It is very simply a measure for perpetuating the creature by God the Creator, in spite of imminent judgment. It has nothing to do with moral relationships. God the Creator would preserve such of the creatures as required the shelter of the ark. Here then we only hear of pairs which enter.

In Gen. 7 we have another order of facts. It opens thus:
And Jehovah said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark {Gen. 7:1}.

Is this merely the conserving of the creature? Not so. It is the language of One who has special relationships with Noah and with his family.

Come thou into the ark,
says He;
for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation {Gen. 7:1}.

Righteous
– is this a question of creation as such? It is not, but rather of moral relationship.

For thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation. Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female; and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth {Gen. 7:1-3}.

Certainly this is not mere creation in view, but special dealings of a moral sort. Almost every word gives evidence of it.

Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens . . . . and of beasts that are not clean by two.

It is God providing not for the perpetuation of the creature merely, but with marked completeness for sacrifice. Consequently we have this perfect care over the maintenance of His rights and place as One that governed morally.

And Noah did according unto all that Jehovah commanded {Gen. 7:5}.

Thus in relation to His place as creator God preserved two of every sort; in relation to His own moral government He would have seven taken into the ark -- seven animals of each clean sort; of the unclean just enough would be there to preserve what He had made. It is evident therefore that in the one case we have that which was generally necessary, in the other case that which was special and due to the relationship in which man was placed with Jehovah. Thus it is seen at once that, instead of these wonderful communications being merely earlier and later legends put together by a still more modern editor, who tried to make something complete by stringing together what did not aptly fit, on the contrary, it is the Spirit of God who gives us various sides of the truth, each falling under the title and style suitable to God, according to that which was in hand. Put them out of their order, and all becomes confused; receive them as God has written them, and there is perfection in the measure in which you understand them.

So we find what shows the folly of this yet more in what follows:

And they that went in went in male and female of all flesh, as God commanded him; and Jehovah shut him in {Gen. 7:16}.

The two terms occur in the very same verse; yet is there not an evident propriety in each case? Unquestionably. They went in male and female. What is the idea? Moral relationship? Not at all.

Male and female
has to do in itself with the constitution of the creature, nothing whatever necessarily with moral relationship. In male and female God acts according to His rights and wisdom in creation; and consequently there it is said,
as Elohim commanded him {Gen. 7:16}.

But when all this is done with, who was it that shut Noah in?
Jehovah.

There we have delight in the man who had found grace in His eyes. No doubt the mere act could have been effected in other ways. Noah might have been enabled to shut himself in; but how much more blessed that Jehovah should do it! There was no fear then. Had it been merely said that Elohim shut him in, it would have simply suggested the Creator’s care of every creature; but Jehovah’s shutting him in points to special relationship, and the interest taken in that righteous man. What can be more beautiful in its season?

Thus a peculiarity in scripture, when understood, is pregnant with truth, having its source in God’s wisdom, not in human infirmity. If we did not see it at once, this was merely because of our dulness. When we begin to enter into its real meaning, and hold fast that which is clearly the intended truth, the theory of Elohistic and Jehovist annalists, with their redaction, vanishes into its own nothingness. I confess human -- my own -- ignorance; but not that there is a single instance where God has not employed the terms in all respects the best. No language could express so well the truth as that which God has employed as a matter of fact.

The next chapter (Gen. 8) shows God’s remembrance of Noah and every living thing. Here it would not have served
His purpose to say, “Jehovah remembered every living thing,” because every living thing was not in moral relationship with God. Noah was undoubtedly; but it is not always, nor here, the aim to draw attention to what was special.

In due time the ark rests upon Ararat, and then follows the strikingly beautiful incident of the raven and the dove, which has been often before us, and from which therefore we may pass on. Afterwards God tells Noah to come forth -- he and all the other creatures.

And Noah, it is written

built an altar {Gen. 8:20}.

Unto whom? Unto God? Most appropriately it is to Jehovah now. Without loss, these two things could not be transposed. He took then, it is said,

of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl {Gen. 8:20}.

Yes, Jehovah is in question. It is the relationship of Noah which appears here. It is the special place in which he stood that was witnessed by the sacrifice thereon offered. And there Jehovah, accepting the sweet savor, declares that He will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake. For the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth {Gen. 8:21}.

Here again how observable is the transparent and self-consistent truth of scripture. The statement before us may look at first unaccountable; but when carefully weighed and reflected on, the propriety of it becomes manifest. That man’s being evil was a ground for sending the flood we can all see; but what depth of grace in the declaration that God knew perfectly the ruined condition of man at the very time when He pledges His word that there shall come no more flood on the earth! This is brought before us here.

Here then we enter on an entirely new state of things, and a truth of capital importance for everybody to consider who has not already made it his own. What was the ground of God’s delays in the previous time? Absence of evil in earth; innocence in man; it was a sinless, unfallen world. What is the ground of God’s dealings now? Man is fallen, and the creature made subject to vanity. All the delays of God now proceed on the fact that the first man is in sin. Leave out the fall; fail to keep it before you and test all with that in mind, and you will be wrong about every result. Next to Christ Himself, and what we have by and in Him, there is nothing of greater importance than the confession of the truth, both that God created, and that His purpose to say, “Jehovah remembered every living thing,” acts, a world ruined -- ruined by sinful man.

Thanks be to God, One has come who is before Him in unfailing sweet savor, so that if sin be in the background, there cannot but be also what He introduces of His own free grace. If His servant bids others behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, how much more does God Himself behold Christ and His sacrifice! Need it be said that as far as its efficacy is concerned, and God’s delight in it, He does not wait for the new heavens and the new earth, either to enjoy it Himself or make known its value to us? In short, Christ has intervened, and this most weighty consequence is connected with it -- that, although everything manifests evil and ruin increasingly, God has triumphed in grace and in faith after the fall and before

the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness {2 Pet. 3:13}.

God, having introduced His own Son, has won the victory, the fruits of which He gives to us by faith before our possession is displayed by-and-by.

Let it suffice to refer to the great principle, remembering that the theater of the ages or dispensations of God is the world since the flood. It is a mistake to include the world before that event in the time of dispensations. There was no dispensation, properly so called, before it. What dispensation could there be? What does it mean? When man in Paradise was forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he broke the command immediately -- as far as appears, the first day. Not that one could say positively that so it was; but certainly it is to be supposed that little time could have passed after receiving the woman, his wife. And the patent fact lies before us, that to join his wife in the sad sin is his first recorded act. What dispensation or age was there here? And what followed after it? There was no longer trial in Paradise, because man was turned out. By what formal test was he proved outside? By none whatever. Man, the race, became simply outcasts morally -- nothing else -- from that day till after the flood. Not but that God wrought in His grace with individuals. Abel, Enoch, Noah, we have already seen. There was also a wonderful type of deliverance through Christ in the ark -- happily so familiar to most. But it is evident that dispensation, in the true sense of the word, there was none. There was a trial of man in Eden, and he fell immediately: after that there was none whatever in the antediluvian world. The history supposes man thenceforward allowed to act without external law or government to control, though God did not fail to work in His merciful goodness -- in His own sovereignty.

But after the flood we find a covenant is made with the earth (Gen. 9): the principle of government is set up. Then we enter on the theater and times of dispensations. One sees the reason why man before this had not been punished by the judge; whereas after the flood there was government and judicial proceeding. In the post-diluvian earth God establishes principles which hold their course throughout the whole scene till Jesus came, or rather till He not only come and affirm by His own power and personal reign all the ways in which God has been testing and trying man, but deliver up the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all, when He shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power.
This then may suffice. As a notice of God’s covenant with the earth, I may just refer, in passing, to the establishment of the bow in the cloud as the sign of the mercy of Elohim (Gen. 9:12–17).

The end of this chapter shows that the man in whose person the principle of human government was set up could not govern himself. It is the old familiar story, -- man tried and found wanting as always. This gives occasion to the manifestation of a great difference among Noah’s sons, and to the solemn words which the father uttered in the spirit of prophecy.

Cursed be Canaan {Gen. 9:25}

was of deep interest, especially to an Israelite, but in truth to anyone who values the revelation of God. We can see afterwards how verified the curse was, as it will be yet more. The sin began with utter disrespect to a father. Not to speak of the destroyed cities of the plain, they had in Joshua’s day sunk into the most shameless of sinners that ever disgraced God and defiled the earth. The believer can readily understand how Noah was divinely led to pronounce a just malediction on Canaan. 25

Cursed [be] Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be {Gen. 9:25}.

So always it is. A man who despises him whom he is bound to honor, not to speak of the special distinction which God had shown him, must come to shame and degradation, must be not merely a servant but

a servant of servants.

The most vaulting pride always has the deepest fall. On the other hand,

Blessed be Jehovah the God

– for God does not dwell upon the curse, but soon turns to the blessing --

Blessed be Jehovah the God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant {Gen. 9:26}.

And Elohim, it is said,

shall enlarge Japhet, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem {Gen. 9:27}.

How remarkably this has been made good in the providential history of the world I need not stay to prove, -- how Jehovah God connected His name with Shem, to the humiliation of Canaan, and how Elohim enlarged Japhet, who would spread himself not merely in his own destined lot, but even dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan humbled there too. How true of the energetic Japhetic race that pushed westward, and not content with the east, pushes round again to the west -- anywhere and everywhere. Thus God declares Himself in every word He utters. A little key to the world’s history is contained in those few words of Noah.

Then we find the generations of the sons of Shem. Without pretending to enter into particulars, this I may remark -- that in the Bible there is not a more important chapter than Gen. 10 as regards the providential arrangement of tongues, families, and nations. Here alone is given the rise of different races, with their sources. Who else could have told us how and when the earth was thus divided? For this was a new state of things, not only not at all in the world before the flood, but not for some considerable time after it, and their distribution in their lands. This is the divine ethnology. Here man is at sea; but where he does arrive at conclusions, this at least is the common consent, as far as I know, of all who have given their minds to the study, that there are three, and only three, divisions into which nations properly diverge. So it is here. The word of God is before them. More than that: it is the conviction of all men, and men worthy to be listened to, that not more surely are they divided into three grand lines than that these three lines had a common origin. That there was only one such root is the statement of the scriptures. The word of God is always right. The details are of the highest interest, more especially when compared with the predicted results in the latter day, where we see the same countries and nations re-appear for judgment in the day of Jehovah. But into the proof of this we cannot now pause to enter.

Gen. 11 opens with the sin of man, which led to the division described in the preceding chapter, the moral reason of that fact, new then, but still in its substance going on, whatever the superficial changes among men in their lands, and tongues, and political distribution. Hitherto they had been of one lip; but combining to make a name to themselves, lest they should be scattered, not to exalt God nor confide in Him, they had their language confounded, and themselves dispersed.

So Jehovah scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because Jehovah did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth (Gen. 11:8, 9).

The genealogy of Shem, with gradually decreasing age among his seed, follows down to Abram, the remainder of the chapter being thus the link of transition from the history of the world as it then was, and in its principle still is. We come at length to him in whom God brings in wholly new principles in His own grace to meet a new and monstrous evil -- idolatry. This daring evil against God, we know from Josh. 24, was then spread far and wide, even among the Semitic race, although never heard of in scripture, whatever man’s lawlessness in other ways, before the deluge. But here I stop for the present.

May we confide not only in scripture, but in Him who gave it! May we seek to be taught more and more His truth, leaning on His grace! He will withhold no good from those who walk uprightly; and there is no other way than Jesus Christ our Lord.

25. If Canaan drew his father into the shameful exposure of Noah, all can see how just the sentence was. In any case it was mercy to confine the curse certainly earned by Ham within the narrowest limits, instead of extending it to all his posterity. In judgment as in grace God is always wise.
Lectures on the Pentateuch
Lecture 2

Genesis 12–25

We have had hitherto God’s account of that which He had
made; then the trial and utter ruin of the creature, with the
revelation of divine mercy in Christ the Lord. We have had in
fine the judgment of the world before the flood, and the
universal history, we may say, of the sources of nations,
compared with which there is nothing safe or sure, even to
this day, spite of all pretensions of men. Their true history,
and, scanty though it seems, the fullest and most
comprehensive, is in that one short chapter -- Gen. 10 -which was before us last night; the following chapter
(Gen. 11) disclosing the moral ground of that dispersion which
was merely given as a fact before. Then the Spirit of God
takes up not merely the source of that nation that He was
about to form for His own praise and glory in the earth, but a
regular line successionally given of the chosen family from
Shem till we come to Abram.
This introduces Gen. 12 on wholly new ground. It is
evident that here we are entering a sensibly different
atmosphere. It is no longer man as such, but a man separated
of God to Himself, and this by a promise given to one chosen
and called -- a new root and stock. These are principles which
God never has abandoned since, and never will. Let me repeat
that it is no longer mankind as hitherto, nor nations only, but
we have the call of God to Himself -- the only saving means
where ruin has entered before judgment vindicates God’s
nature and will by His power. For we know from elsewhere
that idolatry was now prevalent among men even among the
descendants of Shem, when a man was called out by and to the
true God on a principle which did not change nor judge (save
morally) the newly-formed associations of the world, but
separated him who obeyed to divine promises with better
hopes. Abram, it need hardly be said, was the object of His
choice. I am not denying that God had chosen before; but now
it became a publicly affirmed principle. It was not only a call
known secretly to him who was its object, but there was one
separated to God by His calling him out as the depositary of
His promise, the witness of it being before the eyes of all, and
in consequence blessed, and a channel of blessing. For what
might seem to man’s narrow mind an austere severing from
his fellows was in point of fact for the express purpose of
securing divine and eternal blessing, and not to himself and his
seed alone, but an ever-flowing stream of blessing which
would not fail to all the families of the earth. God will yet
show this. For the present it has come to nought, as
everything else does in the hands of man; but God will yet
prove in the face of this world how truly and divinely, and in

the interests of man himself, as well as of His own glory, He
wrought in His call of Abram.
Abram comes forth therefore at God’s bidding; he departs
from his country; but first of all we find a measure of
infirmity which hindered. There was one who hung upon the
called out man, whose presence was ever a clog: the company
of one not in the calling always must be so. Terah was not the
object of the call; and yet it was difficult to refuse his
company; but the effect was grave, for as long as Terah was
there, Abram, in point of fact, did not reach Canaan. Terah
dies (for the Lord graciously controls things in favor of those
whose hearts are simple, even in the midst of weakness); and
now
Abram set forth to go into the land of Canaan, and
into the land of Canaan he came {Gen. 12:5}.

The Canaanite, it is added, was then in the land.

26

And Jehovah appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto
thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an
altar unto Jehovah, who appeared unto him
{Gen. 12:7}.

Here we find for the first time the principle so dear to our
hearts -- the worship of God founded on a distinct appearing
of Himself (it always must be so). Man cannot reason out that
which is a ground of worship. It flows from, and is presented
to us as flowing from, the appearing of Jehovah. It is not
merely the call now, but Jehovah
appeared

unto him. True worship must spring from the Lord, known in
that which at any rate is a figure of personal knowledge of
Himself. It is not only thus a blessing conferred, but in
Himself known. Of course no one means to deny the fact that
until He was known in the revelation of His own Son by the

26. It is wholly unfounded to infer that these words, or Gen. 13:7, imply that,

when the writer lived, the Canaanites and Perizzites had been expelled from
the land. They show that the first if not the second were in the land when
Abram entered it; and that both were settled there when he returned from
Egypt. That this was a trial to the patriarch we can readily understand; but he
had not to wait till Moses’ time, still less Joshua’s, to know that they and all
the other intruders were doomed. See Gen. 15:16, 18-21. No doubt their
expulsion was yet future; but the writer like Abram believed in Jehovah, who
knows and reveals the end from the beginning. I am aware of Aben Ezra’s
insinuation that the clause was interpolated, and of Dean Prideaux yielding to
it, though the latter saves the credit of scripture by attributing it to Ezra, an
inspired editor. But there is no need of such a supposition here, however true
elsewhere and in itself legitimate.

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power of the Holy Ghost, there could not be that which we understand now as

worship in spirit and in truth {John 4:23};

but at least this sets forth the principle.

There is another thing also to be observed here: it was only in Canaan that this was or could be. There was no worship in Mesopotamia; no altar, which was the symbol of it, was seen there. Neither was there an altar in Haran. It is in Canaan we see one first. Canaan is the clear type of that heavenly ground where we know Christ now is. Thus we see first Jehovah personally revealing Himself; and this next in connection with the type of the heavenly places. These are clearly the two roots of worship, as brought before us in this instructive passage.

Further, Abram moves about in the land; he pitches his tent elsewhere. This was of great importance. He was a pilgrim, not a settler in the land. He was as much a pilgrim in the land as before he came there. It was evident that he was a pilgrim when he left all dear to him, whether country, or kindred, or father’s house; but when in the land he did not settle down. He still pitches his tent, but he also builds his altar. Who could hesitate to say that in the land Abram acquired a more truly heavenly intelligence? The promise of the land from God brought him out of his own land -- out of that which is the figure of the earth; but when in Canaan God raised his eyes to heaven, instead of permitting them to rest on the world. And this is precisely what the epistle to the Hebrews shows us, -- not alone the faith which brought him into the land, but the faith which kept him a stranger when there. This is precious indeed, and exactly the faith of Abram.

His worship then we have in connection with his sustained pilgrim character in the land of promise.

Then we have another thing, -- not mere infirmity but alas! failure -- open and serious failure. He who had come out to God’s call, the stranger in the land that was given him of God, fearing the pressure of circumstances, goes down into the granary of the earth, the land which boasts of exhaustless resources. Abram went there of his own motion, without God or His word. Not only is no altar there, but he is without the guidance and guard of divine power morally. Abram fails miserably. Say not that this is to disparage the blessed man of God; it is rather to feel and to confess what we are, which is as much a part (however low) of our Christian duty as to adore what God is in His own excellency to our own souls. Flesh is no better in an Abram than in any other. It is the same ruinous quagmire wherever trusted, in every person and in any circumstances. And there it is that Abram (who had already failed in the unbelief which induced him to seek Egypt, away from the land into which God had called him) denies his wife, exposing her to the most imminent danger of defilement, and bringing not a blessing on the families of the earth, but a plague from Jehovah on Pharaoh and his house. Thus Abram proves the utter hopelessness either of blessing to others or preservation even for ourselves when straying from the place into which God calls us.

But God was faithful, and in Gen. 13 Abram is seen returning to the place where his tent was at the beginning. He is restored, and so resumes his place of pilgrim, and along with it of a worshiper. Such is the restoring goodness of God. But here we find another encumbrance in Lot, if we may so say, although personally a man of God. The Spirit bears witness that he was righteous, but he had no such faith as Abram, nor was he included in that character of call which we must carefully discriminate from the inward working of divine grace. Let us bear in mind that Abram had the public line of testimony for God, and the place of special promise. It is mere ignorance to suppose that there were not saints of God outside that call, which has nothing to do with the question of being saints, for Lot clearly was one; and we shall find from the very next chapter that he is not the only one. But Lot’s hanging upon Abram, though it had not the same neutralizing effect as his father Terah, nevertheless did bring in difficulties. And here again Abram, restored in his soul, shines according to the simplicity of faith. It was not for him to contend. Alas! Lot was not ashamed to choose. He used his eyes for himself. Fully owning him to be a believer, it is plain that he lacked faith for his present walk. He preferred to choose for himself rather than ask God to give. Abram left all calmly with God. It was well.

After Lot had thus taken the best for himself, disgraceful as it was that the nephew should have ventured so to act in a land which God had promised to Abram only, another thereon decides the matter.

Jehovah said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him.

So the Spirit notes now that all was according to the simple will of God, who was no heedless spectator, and does not fail to clear off the elements that hinder. Now that it was so, Jehovah said,

Lift up thine eyes and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward,

He had never said so before --

for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth, &c., then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land,

Abram was to take possession by faith --

in the length of it and in the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee. Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto Jehovah {Gen. 13:14-18}.

Well he might! Thus we learn that there is a fresh manifestation of worship, and under the happiest possible circumstances to the close of the chapter.

This part is concluded by Gen. 14. For all these chapters may be viewed as forming one main section of the life of Abram. It is more particularly what pertains to him publicly; consequently we have as the public character of Abram the separating call, the promise secured, himself constituted manifestly a pilgrim as well as a worshiper in the land. It is all
vain to talk about being a pilgrim in heart. God looks for it thoroughly; but He does not constitute us necessarily the judges, though no doubt those who are most simple will not mind the judgment of their fellows. At the same time it is well to judge in grace where we have to do with others. If there is reality, it will commend itself to the conscience of others; but I do say that to be manifestly, indisputably a pilgrim is the only right thing for one who is thus called out of God, as well as a worshipping, no less truly separate from the world than knowing and enjoying the God who called him out. Then we have seen the fatal absence of truth when the faithful are in the type of this world, Egypt; and the sustaining grace which restores and gives back the place of one who was manifestly a worshipping to the last. These were the great points of his public separated career.

The work is closed, as remarked, by Gen. 14 where we see a raid made by certain more distant kings of the earth against those who ruled in the valley of the Jordan or the neighborhood, four against five. In the affray between them, he who had chosen the world suffers from the world. Lot with all that he had was swept away by the conquering kings who came from the north-east, and thereon Abram (guided of God I cannot doubt) with his armed servants, goes forth in the manifest power of God; for the conquerors as thoroughly fall before Abram as the others had been conquered by them. Thereon the priest of the Most High God comes forth (mysteriously, no doubt) king of Salem as well as in his own name, king of righteousness. On this the apostle Paul enlarges in the epistle to the Hebrews, where he shows us the close of the public career of pilgrimage and worship for the man of faith. For the Lord Jesus Himself is the anti-typical Melchisedec who will bring forth refreshment when the last victory has been won at the end of this age. Then the public separated career.

It is a new beginning. And that this is the case may be marking a break, but also anew phrase occurs.

The word of Jehovah came unto Abram in a vision {Gen. 15:1}. We had nothing at all like this before. Jehovah called, Jehovah appeared, Jehovah said, but not as here the word of Jehovah.

It is a new beginning. And that this is the case may be made still more manifest when we bear in mind what the character of this re-commencement is.

Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Adonai-Jehovah, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Jehovah said, Behold to me thou hast given no seed, and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And behold the word of Jehovah 27 {Gen. 15:1, 2}.

27. Dr. Davidson (Introd. O.T. i. pp. 21, 22) construes this into an inconsistency with Ex. 6:3. "In Gen. 15 it is recorded that God was manifested to Abraham, who believed in Jehovah, and therefore his "faith was counted for righteousness." There the Lord promises him a heir; declares to him that his seed shall be numberless as the stars of heaven, shall be afflicted in a strange land 400 years, but come forth from it with great substance. Jehovah too made a covenant with Abraham, and assured him that he had given the land of Canaan from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates to his posterity. Here is Jehovah the Covenant-God revealing himself to Abraham in a peculiar manner, encouraging him by a fulness of promise, and confirming his word by a sign, entering into covenant with his servant, and condescending to inform him of the future of his race. That Abraham (continued...
Observe it here again. Clearly therefore it is a characteristic that cannot be neglected without loss.

The word of Jehovah came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in Jehovah [Gen. 15:4-6].

Is not this a fresh commencement? Is it not the evident and known scripture which the New Testament uses to great effect, and refers to repeatedly as the great note and standing witness of the justification of Abram? If we do not go back again with the type, but take it as following the scene of his worship and pilgrimage, and indeed the immemorial shadow, it has no force, or would mislead. What! man justified after being not called out only, but a worshipper entering into such wonders as Abram had done! Take it as a recommencement, and all is plain. Justification is certainly not after the Lord had been leading on the soul in the profound way in which Abram had been taught. I grant you the order of facts is as we read; but what we are concerned with now is not the bare history, but the form in which God has presented His mind to us in His word. He has so ordered the circumstances of Abram’s history, and presented them with the stamp of eternal truth on them, not only as an account of Abram, but looking on to the times of redemption, in order to form our souls according to His own mind.

I consider therefore that, as the former series gave us the public life of Abram, so this is rather that which belongs to him individually considered, and the dealings of God with him in what may be called a private rather than a public way. Hence therefore we shall find that there is this further series, which going on from Gen. 15 closes with Gen. 21, where again it is observable that there follows a similar introduction to a new series after that. For the beginning of Gen. 22 runs thus:

And after these things {Gen. 22:1};
Is it not plain then that the clause,
After these things,
introduces us to a new place? I am not aware that the same phrase occurs anywhere between. Consequently there is an evident design of God regarding it. We shall now look at the current of this new section, and see what is brought before us in these chapters.

First of all there is founded on the wants which Abram expresses to God the desire that it should not be merely an adopted child, but one really of his own blood. It was a desire to which God hearkened, but as it was a feeling which emanated from no higher source than Abram, it had a contracted character stamped on it. It is always better to be dependent on the Lord for everything. It is not a question of merely avoiding the painful way in which Lot exercised his choice, but Abram himself is not at the height of communion in this chapter whatever God’s mercy to him. It is better to wait on the Lord than run before Him; and we are never the worse that He should take the first step. Our happy place is always confidence in His love. Had the Lord pressed it upon His servant to speak to Him with open heart, it would have been another matter. Abram however presented his desire, and the Lord meets it graciously. It is very evident that He binds Himself also remarkably. There was given to Abram a kind of seal and formal deed that He would secure the hoped-for heir to him. Who could gather from this that Abram is here found in the brightest mood in which the Spirit of God ever presents him? He is asking, and Jehovah answers, no doubt; he wants a sign whereby he may know that he shall inherit thus:

Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?
{Gen. 15:8}.

This does not seem to rise to that admirable trust in Jehovah which characterized him at other times. This is not presuming to find fault with one where one would gladly learn much; it is ours to search, as far as grace enables us, into that which God has written for our instruction.

Jehovah accordingly directs him to take a heifer and a she-goat and a ram of three years old, and a turtle dove, and a young pigeon; and then when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon him, and lo an horror of great darkness fell upon him
{Gen. 15:12}.

It appears to me most evident that the circumstances here detailed were suitable to the condition of Abram; that there were questions, and it may be doubts, connected with that prospect which Jehovah had put before his soul; and that consequently we may safely discover, if it were only by the manner in which the communication was made to him, his state of experience then. Hence too the nature of the communication:

Be sure,
said he,

that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred years. And also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge, and afterwards shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace: thou shalt be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full {Gen. 15:13-16}.

This is not all.

And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace and a burning lamp {Gen. 15:17}.

The mingled character of all is plain. There is a smoking furnace, the emblem of the trial on the one hand, not without darkness; there is the burning lamp, the sure promise and pledge on God’s part, the prophetic and sure intimation therefore of God’s deliverance. Nevertheless it is not a bright vision, it is a horror of darkness which is seen in the sleep which had fallen upon him. Sifting and tribulation must come, but salvation in due time. But there is more than this. The very limits of the land are given and the races with which Abram’s seed should have to do.

In short we see that the whole scene, clothed in a measure with a Jewish character, has naturally the elements of sacrifice which in various forms were put forward afterwards in the Levitical economy, and that it is also stamped with prophecy which never brings one into the depths of God’s nature, but displays fully His judgment of man. Prophecy, admirable as it is, is always short of the fulness of grace and truth which is in Christ. Prophecy has to do with the earth, with the Jew and the nations, with the times and the seasons. So it is here: we have dates and generations; we have the land and its limits; we have Egypt and the Canaanitish races. It is not heaven, nor the God and Father of our Lord known where He is -- very far from it. It is God knowing what He means to do on earth and giving a doubting friend the certainty of it, securing and binding Himself to comfort the faith that wanted extraordinary support, -- nevertheless not without affliction for his seed, not without their serving a strange nation, but Jehovah bringing them out triumphantly in the end. Admirable as the vision is, it neither looks up at the heights of God’s glory; nor again does it in any way go down into the depths of His grace.

It is no small confirmation of the condition of Abram at this time, if we read aright what follows in the very next chapter (Gen. 16). Undoubtedly Sarah was more to blame than Abram: there was haste through manifest want of faith in short; and consequently Hagar was given to her husband, and the fruits of the connection soon appeared. As always, she who was most to blame suffered the most. It was not so much Abram as Sarah who smarted through her folly about her maid. But we have again in this chapter the faithfulness of God even in the case of Hagar, who is told to return to her mistress and humble herself before her. Jehovah here still carries on the prophetic testimony through His angel, and draws out the remarkable prefiguration of the Bedouins, who remain to this day a minor witness, but none the less a true one, of the truth of God’s word.

In the next chapter (Gen. 17) we have another and higher scene.

When Abram was ninety years old and nine, Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God: walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly {Gen. 17:1, 2}.

Now here it is no longer Hagar, the type, as we know, of the Sinai covenant; it is not a prediction that man’s way only brings the child of flesh into the house, a trouble to all concerned. But here Jehovah, unasked and of His own grace, appears once more to His beloved servant.

I am, says he,

El-Shaddai: walk before me, and be thou perfect: and I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly {Gen. 17:1, 2}.

God, not man, takes the foremost place now. It is not Abram who asks, but God who speaks. Abram accordingly, instead of bringing forward his desires and difficulties, fell on his face -- the right place --

and God talked with him {Gen. 17:3}.

There was greater freedom than he had ever enjoyed before; but it in no way diminished the reverence of his spirit. Never was he more prostrate before God than when He thus opened His heart to him about the seed of promise, and was about to make further communications even as to the world.

Elohim then talked with him, saying, As for me, behold my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations,

It is not now about his seed a stranger in a land not theirs. Now we have the wide extent of the earthly purposes of God beginning to unfold before us, even as far as the whole earth, and Abram was concerned in all.

Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee {Gen. 17:4-6}.

Not a word of this had been breathed before. That he should have a line to succeed him, one that should inherit the land and have it for ever: such was the utmost already vouchsafed. And when the doubting mind sought and would have security from God Himself, God deigned to enter as it were into a bond with him, but along with it gave him to know that many a sorrow and affliction must precede the hour of His judgment in favor of the chosen seed. But here all is of another order and measure -- beneficence according to the grace and purposes of God.

I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and
thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee and to thy seed after thee the land wherein thou art a stranger -- all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every man-child among you shall be circumcised {Gen. 17:6-10}.

Let none suppose that circumcision is necessarily a legal thing. In the connection in which it is put here it is the concomitant of grace -- the sign of flesh's mortification. Undoubtedly it was incorporated into the law when that system was afterwards imposed; but in itself, as our Lord Himself shows, it was not of Moses, but of the fathers; and as being of the fathers -- of Abraham -- it was, as we see here, an emblem significant of the putting flesh to death. God would have it dealt with as an unclean thing; and certainly this is not law. It may be turned to legalism as anything else; but in this case it is rather in contrast with law. It means flesh judged, which is the true spiritual meaning of that which God then instituted.

The chapter then exhibits grace that gives according to God's own bountifulness: at the same time flesh is judged before him. Such is the meaning of this remarkable seal. Accordingly we have the promise brought out when Sarah's name was changed from being "my princess" (Sarai) to be "princess" (Sarah) absolutely. So she was to be called thenceforth.

As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai; but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her; yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations: kings of people shall be of her {Gen. 17:15, 16}.

Then goes out the heart of Abraham even for Ishmael, with the historical notice that circumcision was instituted from that day.

The next chapter (Gen. 18) shows us that grace gives not only communion with Jehovah in what concerns ourselves, but that to His servant is granted to enjoy the communications of His mind even as to what is wholly outside. God had begun to speak with an intimacy such as Abraham had never before known: He would certainly not repent of His love. It is not God who recedes from us -- we from Him rather, never He from us.

And Jehovah appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre, and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. And he lift up his eyes and looked, and lo! three men stood by him. And when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground {Gen. 18:1, 2}.

See the character of Abraham: it is very lovely -- genuine lowliness, but remarkable dignity. He said, My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant. Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts. After that, ye shall pass on; for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do as thou last said {Gen. 18:3-5}.

At this time there seems no reason to suppose that Abraham had any knowledge or suspicion even who it was. We shall find how soon he does infer it, and has the consciousness of it. But he behaves with perfect propriety. He would not speak out openly; he does not break what we may call the incognito that Jehovah was pleased to assume. He understood it: his eye was single, his body full of light.

Outwardly it was simple patriarchal preparation for passing strangers. Some, you know, not forgetful to entertain strangers, have unawares entertained angels. It was Abraham's honor to entertain Jehovah. In due time he hears the question put to him, which I think is the point where he enters into the spirit of the divine action.

Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son {Gen. 18:9, 10}.

Could Abraham be ignorant any longer whose voice this was? Nevertheless there is no speaking before the due time. If Jehovah was pleased to appear with two of His servants there, if He put them in the common guise of mankind, certainly it was not for the faithful to break the silence which Jehovah preserved. And this was just a part of the admirable manner in which his heart answered to Jehovah's confidence in him. But Sarah shows her unbelief once more, while Jehovah reproving it, spite of Sarah's denial, remains with Abraham. When the men rose up to go towards Sodom, Abraham instinctively accompanies, but Jehovah remains with him, and says,

Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? {Gen. 18:17}

As Gen. 17 had furnished Jehovah's communication of what so intimately concerned Abraham and Abraham's line for ever, this chapter reveals to him what concerns the world. Thus we see, although it be not the intimate relationship of the children of God, it is exactly the way in which the understanding of the future is not only profitable but becomes a means of sustaining and even of deepening communion. Let me call your attention to this. Be not deceived, beloved brethren. Entering upon the future in the first instance, and making it pre-eminently our study, never does really deepen our souls in the ways of God, but rather leads them on in lower lines and earthly principles from which it is difficult to escape at another day. Nevertheless it is very evident that God has given it all, and that God means that what He has given should be used and enjoyed by our souls.

What then is the preserving power? Grace; when it is not a question about what is coming when, it is not above all questions arising from ourselves. Such it was in Gen. 15; but now Abraham has been set perfectly free by Jehovah. He is at large as to what pertained to himself and to his seed after him. His heart is clear. Jehovah has abounded beyond his largest thought. There are infinitely greater prospects before Abraham than he had ever dared to ask of God; for He speaks out of
His own thoughts, His own counsels, which must necessarily always be above the largest expectations of man; and then it is that the unveiling of the future, instead of dragging us down to the earth, on the contrary becomes a means only of drawing us into the presence of the Lord with longing after His own grace. Such was the case with Abraham. All depends on this, that we should not first yield to the bias of our minds before we enter into the perfect liberty and the enjoyment of our own proper place with Jesus Christ in the presence of our God. After that we can listen, and then all becomes profitable and blessed to us.

Such is the case with Abraham now. It is Jehovah again who takes the first step. It is Jehovah who says,

\[\text{Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?} \]  
\{Gen. 18:17\}.

What a difference for the man who wanted to know whether he should for certain have the line that God said he should have! Here Jehovah meets him and predicts to him the imminent ruin of the cities of the plain. Jehovah gives light to him here, and everything is made plain. But it is not a doubting heart or an inquisitive mind; it is one who bows down in heartfelt homage, withal confiding in God, who was pleased to confide in him. In truth God was going to act upon the world; He was going to judge this guilty scene; He was going to blot out that sink of iniquity -- Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain that was as the garden of Jehovah, but alas! now rose up with pestilential breath against God Himself, so that He must as it were mow down this iniquity, or else the whole world would be polluted by it.

So it is then that God speaks to His servant. He loved to make known His ways. Abraham was now in a condition to enjoy without in any way sinking into earthly-mindedness. Abraham could hear anything that Jehovah would tell him. Then, instead of in any way dragging him down, Jehovah was rather lifting him up into an enjoyment of the secrets of Himself, into confidential intercourse with Him, for indeed he was the friend of God. Abraham profits by all here; and we shall see the moral effect on his spirit soon.

Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I know him

-- Oh, what a word is this! --

I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him \{Gen. 18:18, 19\}.

-- what confidence in him the Lord expresses!

I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Jehovah to do justice and judgment; that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. And Jehovah said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham stood yet before Jehovah. And Abraham drew near \{Gen. 18:19-23\}.

-- such was the effect --

Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city \{Gen. 18:23, 24\}.

It may not be now the fitting time to say much upon such a scene, but I will make at least this observation, that there is no anxiety about himself, and for that very reason his whole heart can go out, not only towards the God who loved him, and whom he loved, but also for his nephew, righteous Lot, who had played so poor a part, suffered for his folly, and once more had profited little by the discipline, and was about to be humbled yet more, as Abraham could not have anticipated. Not merely did the man of faith go forth to pursue the victorious kings of the earth for the rescue of Lot, but he now dares in the confidence of Jehovah’s goodness to draw near and plead for him whose righteous soul was vexed in Sodom, and loved the Lord spite of his earthly-mindedness and his evil position. And was it not of Jehovah that Abraham interceded? Did He not strengthen His servant’s heart to go on, until he was ashamed? As everywhere, so here, it was man who left off pleading with Jehovah, not Jehovah who refused to encourage and hear the voice of further intercession.

Here was the effect of prophecy taken into the heart after it was freed by the grace of God, and rendered practically heavenly. Instead of exercising a damaging character by indulging idle curiosity about others, or causing mere occupation with self -- the wanting to know what the Lord will give me -- we see the believer’s heart going out after another. This is as God would have it. It is the spirit of intercession for others which we find to be the result of listening to the Lord, and delighting in the communications of what was still unfulfilled, not because they were about himself, but because they were the Lord’s secrets about others (even the world itself) entrusted to him, and drawing out his affections after a divine sort. Is it so with us in our use of the prophetic word? Ought it to be otherwise? May we gather such fruit of our Old Testament study!

In the next chapter (Gen. 19) the blow of judgment is seen to fall. The angels arrive at Sodom, and Lot shows himself a scholar in the same school of courteous grace as Abraham; but the men of the guilty city justify Jehovah in that unexampled dealing when the sun next went forth on the earth. Lot meanwhile was brought out, and his daughters without their unbelieving husbands; but his wife!

-- Remember Lot’s wife \{Luke 17:32\}.

-- his wife remains for ever the most solemn instance on record of one who was personally outside, but in heart attached to the scene of evil.

Yet Lot delivered is nevertheless but half delivered; and here again we learn how the blessed written word sets forth in great facts the moral judgment of God before the time came to speak with unmistakable plainness. We had seen sorrowful enough results in the case of Noah, who, drinking of the fruit of the vine to the dishonor of himself, pronounced a curse on a branch of his posterity, though not without a blessing on the
rest. It was a curse not causeless but just: nevertheless what a sorrowful thing for a parent’s heart to utter! So here with Lot, delivered of angels from the worst of associations, even after his deliverance by Abraham, brought out again, but as it were maimed and wounded, to be yet more dishonored. It would be painful if it were needful to say a word of that which follows. Yet was it not without moral profit for Israel to remember the source of a perpetual thorn in their side -- the shameful origin of the Moabite and the Ammonite, two nations, neighbors and akin, notorious for continual envy and enmity against the people of God. The only God marks all in His wisdom. Sin then as now produced a harvest, large and long-continued, if sovereign grace in some cases forbids that it should be a perpetual harvest of misery to those who indulged in it.

He that soweth to the flash,
no matter who or where or when,
shall of the flesh reap corruption {Gal. 6:8}.

Then follows a new scene, where Abraham alas! fails once more (Gen. 20). There is no power in forms to sustain the rich triumphs of faith. As on the one hand after failure God can bring into depths of grace which never were proved before, so on the other from the most real blessing there is no means of strength or continuance, but only in God Himself. No matter what the joy for one’s own soul, or the blessing to others, power in every sense belongs to God, and is only ours in dependence upon Him. And now it was even more painful than before, because Sarah was the known appointed mother of the heir that was coming. There was no question as to her relationship with us that deserved nothing less, and who will never deny it. May He have our unswerving confidence!

But Abimelech was evidently conscientious, and God took care of him, although the seriousness of the case was not weakened to his mind. God made known in a dream how matters really stood, that he must not touch the man’s wife. He is a prophet and he shall pray for thee {Gen. 20:7}.

a most instructive instance of the way in which God holds to His principles. He will even honor Abraham before Abimelech, however he may act in discipline with Abraham. Perhaps Abimelech would be ready to say, “How can Abraham be a prophet, -- a man that tells lies in denying his own wife?” Nevertheless, said God,

he is a prophet;
but we may be assured of this, that the Lord in no way restrained the mouth of Abimelech from a severe reproof, when he said to Sarah,

Behold I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reproved {Gen. 20:16}.

What a veil Abraham had been to his poor wife! He had better buy a veil for her with the thousand pieces of silver. It was a keenly cutting condemnation -- a rebuke no doubt addressed to Sarah, but how it must have touched Abraham to the quick! The Bible has recorded the sin of the father of the faithful for the good of all the children. Where was the faithfulness of Abraham now? God first took care that his faith should not fail. May the sin be a warning to us, and the grace strengthen our faith too!

The next chapter presents the closing scene in this series. The child and heir of promise is given; the child of flesh is dismissed. All now is settled according to God. Whatever inconsistent with His grace had been allowed before must disappear. Hagar the slave must depart, and the child that was not of promise must be gone. Jehovah can no longer tolerate that the child of flesh shall be with Isaac and Sarah in the house of Abraham.

Remarkable to say, while the goodness of God fails not to care for Hagar, Ishmael too in His providence is seen winding up the whole scene. Abimelech comes in, seeking a covenant with the very man whose failure must have surprised and stumbled him not so long before. Abimelech, with Phichol the chief captain of his host, owns God to be with Abraham in all that he did, adjures him to show favor to his race, and stands now reproved for the wrong of his servants. The Gentile king in short craves the countenance and protection of Abraham,

who planted a grove,
as we are told here,
in Beersheba, and called there on the name of Jehovah the everlasting God {Gen. 21:33}.

It is clear therefore that here we behold the heir of the world in figure brought in. It is not a question yet of introducing deeper relations; nevertheless it is the heir not merely of the land of Palestine but of the world that comes before us here. Consequently Jehovah is presented to us in the character not before named of the everlasting God (El-olam). This fitly terminates the series, and brings us down to another type of the millennial day. It is then that the Gentiles seek the protection of the faithful; it is then that Jehovah will show Himself the God of ages, the guardian and blesser of the true Heir; it is then that pretensions of flesh and law will be for ever put aside, and the promises will have their full course to His glory who gave them. This again concludes, as it would appear, in a way similar to the former section. We are carried forward to the millennial day.

After this a still deeper order of things begins, where the distinct light of God is seen shining, one might almost say, on

28. There is some difficulty here as evinced by the differences of translators. Thus Benisch translates the last clause, “and thou mayest face every one,” i.e. she was made right by the fine as an eye-covering. De Sola, Lindenthal and Raphall, in their version, go even further, “and unto all others as a vindication.”
every step. Here we survey a type before which almost every other even in this precious book may be considered comparatively a little thing. It shadows such love as God Himself can find nothing to surpass, if even to compare with it. It is the chosen figure of His own love, and this not only in the gift but in the death of His Son, who deigned to be for us also the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. A scene at once so simple yet so deep demands few and will not indeed bear many words of ours on what is happily the most familiar of all types to all Christians, as, morally viewed, it is an unequaled call to our hearts. For we must not overlook it as a most real trial of Abraham’s faith, besides being such a precious manifestation of God’s own love. For if Isaac was spared the blow to which Abraham fully devoted him in the confidence of God’s raising him again to make good the line of promise, the type of death as a sacrifice was fully carried out by the substitution of the ram caught in the thicket and slain by the father. Then follows the oath of Jehovah founded on it, of which the apostle Paul makes so striking a use in the Epistle to the Galatians, where he draws the remarkable contrast between the one seed and the many. With the seed being Christ, where number is not expressed, we have the blessing of the Gentiles; whereas, when we hear of the seed numerous as the stars and the sand, the connection beyond all controversy is with the supremacy of the Jews over their enemies. If we closely examine the passage, it may be readily seen in all its force.

By myself have I sworn, saith Jehovah, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore {Gen. 22:16, 17}.

Here it is expressly the numerous seed; and what follows? Is there any promise of blessing to the Gentiles here? On the contrary it is a properly Jewish hope --

Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies {Gen. 22:17}.

Is this the special place of Christ? Is it His relation to us now from among the Gentiles? The very reverse. It remains to be verified when He reigns as the Head of Israel, and He will give them power and rule over their enemies. In its day this will be all right.

But what is it that the apostle quotes, and for what purpose? Not this but the next verse, which is of a wholly different nature: --

And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed {Gen. 22:18}.

The force of the apostle’s argument is that, where the scripture referred to says nothing of number, only naming thy seed {Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16} as such, there the blessing of the Gentiles is assured. On the other hand, where He speaks of the seed multiplied according to the most striking images of countless number, Jehovah pledges here the earthly exaltation and the power of the Jew over their enemies -- a blessing in contrast with that of the gospel and the argument in Galatians. It is this distinction which the apostle applies to the subject with such depth of insight. The inference is obvious. The Galatians had no need to become Jews to get blessing. Why then should they be circumcised? What God gives them in the gospel and what they have received by faith is Christ, dead and risen, as was Isaac in the figure. (Compare Heb. 11:17-19.) Of this seed He speaks not as of many but as of one: this seed secures the blessing of the Gentiles as Gentiles. Hence, where God speaks of Abraham’s seed apart from numbers (Gen. 22:18), there is the blessing of the Gentiles. This is what we really need; but it is what we have in Christ. By and by there will be the numerous seed spoken of in Gen. 22:17. This will be the Jew; and then the chosen nation will possess the gate of their enemies. I can conceive nothing more admirable in itself, or more complete as a refutation of the Judaizers who would fain have compromised the gospel, and sunk the Galatians into mere Gentiles looking up to their Jewish superiors by seeking circumcision after they had a risen Christ. But the truth is that both are divine, the Old Testament fact, and the New Testament comment. And as the fact itself was most striking, so the application by the apostle is no less profound.

In Gen. 23 another instructive event opens on us. It is not the death of Hagar, who sets forth the Sinaitic or legal covenant: we might have expected some such typical matter, and could all understand that. But the marvel is that, after the figure of the son led as a sacrifice to Mount Moriah but raised from it (the death and resurrection of Christ, as the Apostle Paul himself explains it in the Epistle to the Hebrews), we have the death of Sarah, of her who represents the new covenant, not of the law but of grace. And what is the meaning of that type, and where does it find its answer in the dealings of God when we think of the antitype? It is certain and also plain. In the Acts of the Apostles, not to speak of any other scripture, the true key is placed in our hands. When the Apostle Peter stood before the men of Israel, and bore witness of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the true Isaac, what did he tell them? This -- that if they were willing by grace to repent and be converted, God would assuredly bring in those times of refreshing of which He had spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. He added that they were the children not only of the prophets but of the covenant which God made with the fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

There we have the required solution. For Peter presented after this the readiness of God to bring in the blessedness of the new covenant, if they by grace bowed their stiff neck to the Lord Jesus. But they would not hearken: they rejected the testimony, and finally put to death one of the brightest witnesses. In point of fact, the unbelief was complete to the testimony of the Holy Ghost founded on the death and resurrection of Christ; and, in consequence, that presentation of the covenant to Israel completely disappears. It was the antitype of Sarah’s death -- the passing away for the time of all such overtures of the covenant to Israel. Nowhere do we hear of it renewed after that. No doubt Sarah will rise again, and so
the new covenant will appear when God works in the latter day in the Jewish people. But meanwhile the presentation of the covenant to Israel, as that which God was willing there and then to bring in, which was the offer then made by grace, completely passes from view, and a new thing takes its place.

So it is here. Immediately after the death and burial of Sarah a new person comes before us -- another object distinct from what we have seen; and what is it? The introduction of a wholly unheard of personage, called to be the bride of Isaac, the figuratively dead and risen son of promise. It is no more a question of covenant dealings. The call of Rebecca was not thought of before -- altogether a fresh element in the history. Then again we have the type, so familiar to us, of Eliezer, the trusty servant of all that the father had, now the executor of the new purposes of his heart, who goes to fetch the bride home from Mesopotamia. For as no maid of Canaan could be wedded to Abraham's son; so he, Isaac, was not to quit Canaan for Mesopotamia: Eliezer was to bring the bride, if willing, but Isaac must not go there. Nothing is more strongly insisted on than this, and to its typical meaning I must call your attention. The servant proposes a difficulty: Suppose she is not willing to come: Is Isaac to go for her?

And Abraham said unto him, Beware that thou bring not my son thither again [Gen. 24:6].

When the church is being called as a bride for Christ, He remains exclusively in heavenly places. He has nothing to do with the world while the church is in process of being gathered from among Jews and Gentiles. He leaves not heaven, nor comes to the world to have associations with the earth, while it is a question of forming the bride, the Lamb's wife. In relation to the call of the church, Christ is exclusively heavenly. It is the very same Isaac who had been under the sentence of death sacrificially. As Isaac is raised again in figure and must on no account go from Canaan to Mesopotamia for Rebecca, so Christ is to have only heavenly associations, and none with the world, while the church-calling is in progress. Ignorance of this, and, yet more, indifference to it where it seems to be known, must make the Christian worldly, as communion with Christ where He is makes one heavenly-minded. It shows how irretrievably false any position is which necessarily connects us with the world. The only sure way for the Christian to decide any question aright is to ascertain from God's word how it bears upon Christ and His glory. When Christ has His associations with the world, we may have our place there too; if Christ is entirely outside it, as He is manifestly apart from it now in heaven, we should be. To judge and walk according to Him is what we do well to cultivate.

Never call it worldliness to discharge aright your duty here below. It is worldly-mindedness wherever the world or its things may occupy us as an object, instead of pleasing and doing the will of the Lord here below. It is not what you are doing which is so important as fellowship with His mind; it may be in appearance the most holy work, but if it links Christ and His name with the world, it is only deceiving ourselves and playing so much the more into the hands of the enemy. But, on the other hand, supposing it is connected with the world, there may be the most ordinary act, yet as far as possible from worldliness, even though it were only blacking a shoe. It is hardly needful to say that the power of Christianity may be enjoyed in the heart and ways of a shoe-black just as truly as anywhere else. Anything that is outside Christ will not preserve, and must have the stamp of the world on it; whereas, on the other hand, so great is the efficacy of Christ that if my heart is set upon Him, and seeking after what is suitable to Him at the right hand of God, we become truly witnesses of Him; and, supposing there is real occupation with Him there, this will assuredly give to what we do a heavenly stamp, and impart the truest and highest dignity, no matter what we may be about.

The details of this chapter of course it is not for me to enter into now. I have said enough to show the general principle -- first, the novelty and unprecedentedness of what concerns Isaac and Rebecca. It was not mere continuance of what had been known already, but a new thing following up not only the typical sacrifice on Moriah, but the death of Sarah. It is happy when the truth of Christ illumines consecutive chapters of the Old Testament. We know alas! what it is to be uncertain and dissatisfied in presence of the written word, which is really simple to the simple. Again, there is the passing away of all covenant dealings. How long we have known confusion ourselves in all this! Sarah is dead and gone for the time. Then the bride is sought and called, and comes; for it is a question of a bride, not a mother. Again, we have Eliezer, the type of the Spirit of God, marked by this -- the heart going out towards the Lord both in entire dependence and in simple-hearted praise as he receives the speedy and unequivocal answer of His grace. Eliezer had his mission from Abraham: so is the Spirit sent from the Father on an errand of love in the church. Prayer and worship accordingly become the members of Christ's body, and should go forth intelligently with the purpose of God, just as Eliezer's prayer was entirely founded on the object that he who sent him had in view. He asked much and boldly about the bride, and nothing else swerved him from this as nearest to his heart.

It is all well for men in an evil world to be filled with enterprises for doing good; but here was one who with the utmost simplicity knew he was doing the best, and this we too ought to be doing. The best of all service, serving the Father's glory in the Son who is to have the church as His bride -- this is worth living for and dying too -- if it be the will of God that we should meanwhile fall asleep, instead of waiting for the coming of the Lord. It is not merely seeking the salvation of sinners, but doing His will with a direct view to Christ and His love, and accordingly not with prayer only, but the character of it naturally marking this. There is more about prayer in this chapter than in any other in Genesis; but besides there is more distinctly than elsewhere the heart turning to Jehovah in worship of Him. These two things ought to characterize the Christian and the church, now that Christ the Son of God is dead and risen, and we enjoy the immense results by faith -- prayer and worship, but prayer and worship in union with the purpose of God in the calling of the bride, the church; not mere isolated action, although that may have
its place and be most true for special need. Still the great characteristic trait should be this -- that God has let our hearts into His own secret in what He is doing for Christ. He has given us to know where Christ is and what He, who deigns to be the executive here below (the Spirit), is doing for His name in this world. Consequently our hearts may well go forth in prayer and praise in connection with it, turning to our God and Father with the sense of His goodness and faithfulness now as evermore. The New Testament shows us what the church was and should be; and there is not a chapter in Genesis which sets them forth as a type in anything like so prominent a form as this. Is it casual, or the distinct design of God that here only in these incidents should be the picture of bridal expectancy and confidence in the love of one not yet seen, and of going forth to meet the bridegroom?

Finally we have Gen. 25 closing Abraham’s history, with his relation as father to certain tribes of Arabs, who as being of his stock, mingled with the Ishmaelites. These sons, unlike Isaac, received presents, and were sent away. Isaac must be left the undisputed heir of all, and abides ever as son in the father’s house. The purposes of love center in him; as the inheritance was his in its widest extent.

But no more to-night. Though perfectly persuaded that a cursory sketch has its disadvantages, I am equally assured that it is not without advantages of its own; for it is well for us to have a broad and comprehensive view, as it is well also, when we possess this, to fill up the details. But we shall never approach to a clear or a full intelligence of Scripture if we neglect the one or do not seek the other. Grace only by the written word used in faith can give and keep both for our hearts to the praise of the Lord’s name.
Lectures on the Pentateuch
Lecture 3
Genesis 25:19 to End

Having already shown the position of Isaac, I resume briefly with the remark that he stands before us clearly as the representative of the Son, and this too as dead, risen, and in heaven. All will understand it who remember that we have had His death and resurrection parabolically in Gen. 22; and then, after the passing away of her who was the figure of the new covenant, come the entirely novel dealings of God in the call of the bride for the Son here carefully and exclusively connected with the type of heaven. The bearing of this on the great mystery of the heavenly Christ and the church, His body and bride, does not need to be further insisted on now.

We have here, before pursuing the history of Isaac to the end, an episode which brings before us the birth of the two sons of Isaac and Rebecca. God had already affirmed the principle of His choice in the son of the free woman Sarah, sons of Isaac and Rebecca. God had already affirmed the end, an episode which brings before us the birth of the two sons. It was therefore impossible to find a closer parity between any than in these two sons of Isaac and Rebecca. Nevertheless, from the first, entirely apart from any grounds of choice. Why even a man does so; and God would be sovereign. He can show mercy to the uttermost, and He does; such as to determine a preference, God shows that He will be sovereign. There was a need, in the wisdom of God, that the sovereignty should be affirmed still more expressly. And so it was now; for Esau was the son of the same father and of the same mother as Jacob, and in fact they were twins. It was therefore impossible to find a closer parity between any than in these two sons of Isaac and Rebecca. Nevertheless, from the first, entirely apart from any grounds such as to determine a preference, God shows that He will be sovereign. He can show mercy to the uttermost, and He does; but He is God, and as such He reserves to Himself His right of choice. Why even a man does so; and God would be inferior to man if He did not. But He claims His choice and makes it, setting it forth in the most distinct manner, which is reasoned on, as we know, in the power of the Spirit of God, in the Epistle to the Romans, and alluded to elsewhere in the Bible. I only refer to it passingly to show how clearly it is brought out in the circumstances.

At the same time there is another thing to be weighed. The after history illustrates the two men and their posterity; for whatever may be said of the failure of Jacob, it is perfectly clear that not Jacob but Esau was profane, despising God and consequently his birthright. This is brought out in the same chapter. But the choice of God was before anything of the sort, and God made it unambiguous. I would only add one other word, that although scripture is abundantly plain that He chose him apart from anything to fix that choice, it is never said nor insinuated in any part of the word of God, that the prophet’s solemn expression

Esau have I hated {Rom. 9:13; see Mal. 1:3} was applicable from the first. The choice was true, but not the hatred. In fact, so far is it from the truth that we see the plainest facts in opposition to such a thought. In the first book of the Bible the choice of Jacob, and not Esau, is made plain; in the last book of the Bible, the prophecy of Malachi, the hatred of Esau is for the first time clearly affirmed. How admirable the word of God is in this! Let us delight first that God should have His choice; secondly, that God, far from pronouncing His hatred then, waited till there was that which manifestly deserved it -- waited, as we see, to the very last. To confound two things so distinguished, to mix up the choice at the beginning with the hatred at the end, seems nothing but the narrow folly of man’s mind. The truth is that all the good is on God’s part, all the evil on man’s. He is sovereign; but every condemned soul will himself own the absolute justice of it.

In Gen. 26, which follows, Isaac’s history is resumed. Let us bear in mind that it is the account of the risen Son. Hence mark the difference when Jehovah appears to Isaac. I call your attention to it as an interesting fact, as well as an instance of the profoundly typical character of the Scriptures. He appears as Almighty God (El-Shaddai) to Abraham: so He is also revealed as the Almighty to Jacob; but I am not aware that He is ever represented as formally proclaiming Himself in this way to Isaac. The reason is manifest. While surely included in fact like his father and son in such a revelation of El-Shaddai, Isaac has an altogether peculiar place in the record, not connected in the same way with the dispensations of God as either Abraham on the one hand, or Jacob on the other. Here we have God either in His own abstract majesty as Elohim, or in special relationship as Jehovah -- the two forms in which God is spoken of. These are used, but not the Almighty.

Isaac indeed speaks of Him as the Almighty when he blesses Jacob; but when God appears, Scripture describes Him simply as Elohim or as Jehovah. The reason is clear: we are upon the ground where God meant us to appreciate the very peculiar dealings with him who sets forth the Bridegroom of the church. Consequently what was merely of an earthly, passing, or dispensational nature is not brought forward.

Again, when God does appear to Isaac, He says,

Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of {Gen. 26:2}.

Isaac is always a dweller in the heavenly land. How admirably
this suits the position of Christ as the risen Bridegroom will be
too plain to call for further proof.

Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee and will
bless thee; for unto thee and unto thy seed I will give
all these countries, and I will perform the, oath which
I sware unto Abraham thy father. And I will make thy
seed to multiply as the stars of heaven [Gen. 26:3, 4].

Not a word about the sand of the sea. He is as ever exclusively
connected with what is heavenly as far as the figure goes. In
the case of Abraham appears the double figure: the children
were to be as the stars of the sky, but also as the sands of the
sea. Isaac has the peculiar place. Abraham takes in both; as
we know, he is connected with that which is heavenly, but
also with what is earthly. For Isaac we find the heavenly
places, a relationship past resurrection as far as this could be
also set forth in type. But it was only the shadow, not the very
image; and so alas! we find that he who was but the type
denies his relationship, which Christ never does. Isaac failed
like Abraham before. Unswerving fidelity is true of One only.

At the same time we have the never-failing faithfulness of
God. Immediately afterwards he is blessed and blessed a
hundred-fold. What is not the goodness of God? And Abimelech seeks his favor too; but Isaac remains always in the
emblematic heavenly land, the type of Christ’s present
position.

The next chapter (Gen. 27) lets us into the sight of
circumstances which searched the heart of all concerned. We
see the nature which left room for the mingled character which
so evidently belonged to Jacob. He was a believer; but a
believer in whom flesh was little judged, and not in him only,
but in Rebecca also. Between them there is much to pain; and
although Isaac might not be without feebleness and fault, there
was deceit in both the mother and the son. As to Esau, there
was nothing of God, and consequently no ground of complaint
on that score. At the same time there was positive
unrighteousness, of which God never makes light in any soul.
Hence we find that though the blessing was wrested fraudulently from Isaac, he is astonished to find where he had
been drifting through yielding to nature; for indeed flesh
wrought in Isaac, but for the time it ruled, I may say, in
Rebecca also and in Jacob. Shocked at himself, but restored
in soul, he finds himself through his affections in danger of
fighting against the purpose of God. Spite of all the faults
of Rebecca and of Jacob, they at least did hold fast the word of
God. On the whole it is a humiliating spectacle: God alone
shines throughout it all as ever. Isaac therefore, awakened to
feel whence he was fallen, affirms the certainty of the purpose
of God, and pronounces in the most emphatic terms that, spite
of the manner in which Jacob had possessed himself of his
blessing, he shall be blessed of God.

In Gen. 28 we have Jacob called by Isaac, and sent to
Padan-Aram for a wife, with El-Shaddai’s blessing on him.
Now the governmental dealings of God begin to appear, and
Jacob is the standing type of the people of God not walking in
communion with God like Abraham, and consequently the
first type of a pilgrim and of a worshiper too; not as the son,
risen from the dead and in the heavenly land, but an outcast;
forced to be, if a pilgrim, a pilgrim against his will in the
government of God, and consequently the most apt possible
type of Israel, for unfaithfulness expelled from their own land,
passing under corrective discipline, but blessed at last with
rest and joy here below. This is what Jacob represents -- none
more suitable to be such a type, as we shall find by the very
name which God gives him. So

Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him,
and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the
dughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the
house of Bethuel thy mother’s father; and take thee a
wife from thence of the daughters of Laban, thy
mother’s brother. And God Almighty bless thee, and
make thee fruitful, and multiply thee [Gen. 28:1-3].

Jacob accordingly goes out on his lonely way, and went
to Padan-aram, and there it is that he dreams; and he beheld
standing above the ladder Jehovah, who proclaims Himself to
Jacob as the God of his fathers.

I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham thy father, and the
God of Isaac. The land whereon thou liest, to thee will
I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the
dust of the earth [Gen. 28:13, 14].

Mark again the consistency of the word of God. Not a word
here about the stars of the sky. Abraham had both; Isaac had
the heavenly part alone, and Jacob the earthly alone. And He
says,

Behold I am with thee, I will keep thee in all places
whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this
land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that
which I have spoken to thee of {Gen. 28:15}.

Jacob awakes; but, as is always the case when a person is
simply under the government of God without being founded
in His grace, there is alarm. The presence of God is more or
less an object of dread to the soul, as indeed he expressed it.

He was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place!
This is none other but the house of God, and this is the
gate of heaven [Gen. 28:17].

Many of us may be astonished to think of such a conjunction,
that the house of God should be associated with terror. But so
it must always be where the heart is not established in grace;
and Jacob’s heart was far from it. He was the object of grace,
but in no way established in grace. Nevertheless there is no
doctrine of God’s grace towards him, little as he might as yet
appreciate its fulness. Jacob then rises up early, and takes the
stone that he had put for his pillow, and sets it up, calling the
name of the place Bethel, and vowing a vow; for all here is of
a Jewish savor: --

If God 29 will be with me, and will keep me in the

29. There is no real difficulty in understanding the propriety of the various
divine names in these chapters according to the motive which governs. Thus
El-Shaddai is the peculiar patriarchal name of guaranteed protector; Jehovah
of special relationship for covenant blessings of Israel according to promise;
but then Jehovah is Elohim in His own majesty, or He would be a merely
national deity. Compare Gen. 17, where it is expressly Jehovah that appears
and calls Himself El-Shaddai, yet immediately after talks as Elohim with
Abram. See also Gen. 22:1, 8, 9, 12, and 11, 14, 15, 16, where the various
(continued…)}
way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and
raiment to put on

— his demands were by no means large, legalism is of
necessity contracted --

so that I come again to my father’s house in peace,
then shall Jehovah be my God; and this stone, which
I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house; and of all
that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto
thee {Gen. 28:20-22}.

He was in no way a man delivered from self or from the earth.
It is as nearly as possible the picture of a man under law. How
appropriate, therefore, for the type of the Jew, driven out
through his own fault, but under the mighty hand of God for
government, but for good in His mercy at the end! This is
precisely what Jacob himself has to prove, as we may see.

Thus he goes on his journey; and among the children of
the east ensues a characteristic scene, which need not be
entered into in a detailed manner -- the providential
introduction to his experiences with Laban and his family
(Gen. 29).

Now experiences are admirable in their own way as a
school for the heart in the soul’s finding its way to God; but
experiences completely melt away in the presence of God.
This and the grace known there in Him who died and rose
again alone can give fully either the end of self or communion
with God. Experiences may be needed and wholesome; but
they are chiefly wholesome as a part of the road while on our
way to Him. Before what God is to us in Christ they disappear
— I do not mean the results, but the processes. So we shall
find it was with Jacob. He is a man evidently cared for by
God. He shows us much that was exceeding sweet and lovely.
No doubt he had often to suffer from Laban’s deceit; but was
there not a memorial here of the deceit in which he had acted
himself? He is deceived about his wife, deceived about his
wages, deceived about everything; but how had he dealt with
his father, not to speak of his brother? Deceit must meet with
deceit under the retributive hands of God. Wonder not
overmuch at the tale of Jacob; but bless with all your heart the
deceit under the retributive hands of God. Wonder not
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30. (. . .continued)
delivering His Jewish brethren after suffering among both Jews and
Gentiles. So her history closes in the death of her Bononi and Jacob’s
Benjamin, son of the mother’s sorrow and of the father’s right hand, as the
people of God will prove in the end. I take this opportunity of noticing the
beauty of Scripture in the use of the divine names in these chapters, the best
answer to the superficial folly which attributes them to different writers and
documents. In the case of Leah (Gen. 29), who was hated compared with
Rachel, Jehovah as such interposed with His special regard to her sorrow, and
this was expressed in the name of her first-born son, Reuben; and His hearing
in her second, Simeon. At Levi’s birth she does not go farther than the hope
of her husband’s being joined to her; but Jehovah has praise when she bore
Judah. In Rachael’s case (Gen. 30) there is no such expression at first of
confidence in Jehovah’s compassionate interest; but in disappointment of heart
she gives Jacob her maid; and, when Dan was born, she accepts it as the
judgment of Elohim, and at Naphatli’s birth speaks of His wrestlings. Leah,
following her example, gains through Zilpah Gad and Asher, but makes no
acknowledgment of the divine name in either form. After this comes the
incident of using mandrakes for hire, when Elohim acts for Leah in sovereign
power, and she owns Him as such because Issachar was born, and in Zebulun
on the pledge of her husband’s dwelling with her. In the same power did
Elohim remember Rachel, who not only confesses that the God of creation
had taken away her reproach, but calls her son Joseph, saying, Jehovah shall
add to me another son. This is the more striking because it is an instance of
the combined use of these names, admirably illustrating both sides of the
truth, and irreconcilable with the double-document hypothesis. Rachel rose
from the thought of His power to the recognition of His ways with His own.
And even Laban [cp. Gen. 30:27] is obliged to confess that Jacob enjoyed the
blessing of One who was in special relationship with him -- of Jehovah.

30. (. . .continued)
with considerable skill; feeble was his faith, and where even generous self-sacrificing love for the family? All bears the stamp of anxiety as well as address, if not craft. This was his natural character; for though eminently a man of God, still it is not God who is prominent to his eyes, and leant on, but his own human resources. Ill at ease, he sends over -- I am sorry to say -- himself last of all! That which he valued most came latest: Jacob was not among the first! His flocks, herds and camels set first, wives and children next, Jacob last. The various bands in order were meant to serve as a breakwater between the offended brother Esau and trembling Jacob. But at length, when all were taken or sent over the ford Jabbok, comes another whom Jacob did not expect when left alone. A man struggled with him that night till break of day.

But it is well to remark, though it has been often noticed, that it is not set forth to the honor of Jacob that he wrestled with the man, for it was rather the man, or God Himself, who wrestled with him. There was still not a little in him with which God had a controversy for Jacob’s good, not without his humiliation. In short God was dealing with and putting down His servant’s dependence on his own strength, devices, and resources in any and every way. Hence, as the symbol of this, what was touched and shrank was the known sign of man’s strength. The sinew of the thigh was caused to wither away. But the very hand which touched the seat of natural man’s strength. The sinew of the thigh was caused to wither away. But the very hand which touched the seat of natural strength imparted a strength from above; and Jacob on this occasion has a new name given to him.

Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed {Gen. 32:28}.

He asked the name of God, but this could not, consistently with His character, be revealed yet. God keeps His name in secret now. Jacob struggles all night that he might be blessed. It was no question of peaceful fellowship, still less of earnest intercession for others. It was indeed most significant of divine mercy; but of God’s mercy in the dark, where there could not yet be communion. Thus nothing could more truly answer to the state of Jacob. He was no doubt strengthened of God, but it was compassionate mercy strengthening him to profit by a needful and permanent putting down of all his own strength -- love that must wither it up, but would nevertheless sustain himself.

In the next chapter (Gen. 33) the meeting takes place. Esau receives him with every appearance of generous affection, refusing but at length receiving his gifts. At the same time Jacob proves that his confidence was far from being restored. He is uneasy at the presence of Esau: his conscience was not good. Esau provokes his protection. There was nothing farther from the desire of Jacob. Is it too much to say that the excuse was not thoroughly truthful? Can one believe that Jacob meant to visit him at mount Seir? Certain it is that, directly Esau’s back is turned, he goes another way.

He journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth. And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-aram; and pitched his tent before the city. And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent . . . And he erected there an altar, and called it El-e-loh-e-Israel {Gen. 33:17, 20}.

Thus, it seems to me evident, that although there was unquestionably progress in Jacob’s soul, he was far from being brought to that which we find in Abraham from the very beginning. He is still wandering -- still under corrective government. All that which hindered the enjoyment of grace was not yet removed. There was earthliness of mind enough to quit the pilgrim’s tent and build a house, as well as to buy a piece of ground. What did he want it for? He erected no doubt an altar. There is progress unquestionably; but he does not in this go beyond the thought of God as connected with himself. It was in no way the homage of one who regarded God according to His own being and majesty. Now there never can be the spirit of worship till we delight in God for what He is Himself, not merely for what He has been to you or me. I grant you that it is all right to feel what He has done for us; but it is rather the preparation for worship, or at most worship in its most elementary form. It is more thanksgiving than the proper adoration of God, and in fact a circumscribing of God to our own circumstances. I admit fully that the grace of God does minister to our wants; but then it is to raise us above them and the sense of them, in order that we may freely and fully enjoy what God is, and not merely feel what He has done for us. Jacob had not reached that yet; for him God the God of Israel is all he can say. Shechem is not Bethel.

This conclusion, as to the then state of Jacob, seems to be confirmed by the chapter which follows. The settling down in the city before long became a sorrowful story for Jacob, who proved it in one that was near and dear to him. It was the occasion of his daughter Dinah’s shame, as well as of her brother’s cruel and deceitful vengeance, that brought trouble on Jacob, and caused him to stink among the inhabitants of the land, as Jacob so sorely confessed (Gen. 34).

Once more God said to Jacob, Arise; but now it is to go to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother {Gen. 35:1}.

Here he is not met by a host of angels, nor does the mysterious stranger wrestle in the darkness of the night, crippling him in the might of nature, and making the weak to be strong. It is a more open call in Gen. 35.

Now it is singular to hear, that Jacob says to his household and all that are with him,

Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments {Gen. 35:2}.

Strange gods?

Yes, there they were, and he knew it all along, but he never before felt the seriousness of it till summoned to go to Bethel. His conscience is now awake to what previously made no impression on his mind. We easily forget what our heart does not judge as it is before God; but as He knows how to rouse the conscience adequately, so it is a sorrowful thing on the other hand when a saint forgets what ought to be the permanent object of his soul, still more solemn when his conscience is not sensitive to that which utterly sullies the glory of God. Manifestly it was the case with Jacob; but now the presence of God, not providential power, not disciplinary dealings with him, but the call to Bethel, brings light into his soul, and the false gods must be put away. Jacob will have the household in unison with an altar at Bethel.

Be clean, and change your garments, and go to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went {Gen. 35:2, 3}.

What in his ways can be conceived more blessed than the patient faithfulness of God? Now at length Jacob is alive to his responsibility toward God.

And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem. And they journeyed {Gen. 35:4, 5}.

But was it a flight now?

And the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob {Gen. 35:5}.

All was changed from this point.

So Jacob came to Luz which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el (the God of Bethel) {Gen. 35:6, 7}.

There Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died and was buried. There God appeared again; and while He repeats the name of Israel instead of Jacob, He reveals Himself as God Almighty, El-Shaddai.

And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and He called his name Israel 32

{Gen. 35:10}, -- blotting out in one sense all the history from the day when that name was first conferred on him. It is a sorrowful reflection for the heart when time past is, so to speak, time lost. It is not that God cannot turn it to purpose when grace is at work, but there must be merited self-reproach as we may too well know.

Not only then does Jacob receive afresh his new name, but God shrouds His name no longer in secrecy. Now he has not to ask,

What is thy name?

any more than He who wrestled once had to ask him wherefore he asked it. He was not then in the condition to profit by that name; nor was it consistent with God’s own honor that He should make it known. Now God can reveal Himself to His servant, saying,

I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins. And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land {Gen. 35:11, 12}.

And not unlike what was said of Abraham, so on an occasion of singular nearness it is said of Jacob, -- great honor for one after such an experience, -- that

God went up from him in the place where he talked with him {Gen. 35:13}.

If it was a glorious moment in Abraham’s history, it was especially gracious in God’s ways with Jacob.

And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he, talked with him, even a pillar of stone, and he poured a drink-offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon, and called the name of the place where God spake with him Beth-el {Gen. 35:14, 15}.

Afterwards comes the passing away of Rachel at a moment of deep interest already noticed, -- the birth of her second son, and her burial near Bethlehem. And on the journey there the aged father has a fresh sorrow and shame in the foul sin of his first-born.

Then follows the genealogy of Jacob’s sons; and the long-delayed last sight of Isaac at Hebron, where he dies at the age of 180 years, and was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob.

32. Dr. Davidson (Introd. O.T. pp. 65, 66), in his arguments against unity of authorship on the score of diversities, confusedness, and contradictions, alleges this: “In like manner Jacob’s name was changed to Israel, when he wrestled with a supernatural being in human form all night before he met his brother Esau, on his return from Mesopotamia (Gen. 32:28); whereas according to Gen. 35:10 he received the name on another occasion at Bethel, not Penuel, as the first passage states. It is a mere subterfuge to assert that, because no reason is assigned for the change of name in Gen. 35:10, it relates no more than a solemn confirmation of what had been done already. A reason for the change does not necessarily accompany its record. The words are explicit: ‘And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob; thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name.’ If his name were Israel before, the words plainly assert the contrary. The passages are junior Elohist, and Elohistic respectively. An analogous example is Bethel, formerly Luz, which was so named by Jacob on his journey to Mesopotamia (Gen. 28:19, 30:13), but according to Gen. 35:15, on his return. Identical (continued...)
But there is another genealogy (Gen. 36), and strikingly introduced in this place. The Edomite interrupts the course of the line of God’s dealings. We discern at once what remarkable maturity there was here. It is always so -- first that which is natural, afterwards that which is spiritual. Even then we find a rapid development of power in the family of Esau. They were all great people, to be sure -- duke this and duke that, to the end of the chapter -- even kings, as we are told, reigned before there were any such in Israel. I have no doubt that this is given us as an important element to mark how rapidly what is not of God shoots up. Growth according to God is slower, but then it is more permanent.

Gen. 37 introduces to us a new and altogether different range of events -- the very attractive account of Joseph. It is not now a fugitive from the land under the righteous hand of God, but a sufferer who is going to be exalted in due time. These are the two main outlines of Joseph’s history -- a more than usually meet type of Christ, in that he shone above all his fellows for unsullied integrity of heart under the several trials. There is no patriarch on whom the Spirit of God dwells with greater delight; and among those who preceded Christ our Lord it may be questioned where one can find such a sufferer. And his suffering too was not merely outside: he suffered quite as keenly from his brethren. Wherever he lived, in Palestine or in Egypt, he was a sufferer, and this in astonishing grace, never higher morally than when lying under the basest reproach. He was one who had true understanding; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. Such was Joseph’s great distinctive trait. Thus we find it brings him, first of all, into collision with his father’s house. Jacob indeed felt very differently. It was impossible for one that valued holiness to bring a good report of his brethren. But his father loved him, and when his brethren saw their father’s estimate of him, they could so much the less endure Joseph.

They hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him [Gen. 37:4].

The wisdom that follows fidelity -- and I believe it is always so as a rule -- is furnished and exercised in the communications of God; for if He forms a heart for what is of Himself, He gives the supply of what it craves. He ministers to Joseph dreams that show the gracious purposes that were before Himself. For first the sheaves pay obeisance, and he with the utmost simplicity of heart tells all to his brethren; for he never thought of himself, and therefore could speak with candor. But they with instinctive dislike and jealousy of what gave glory to their brother did not fail to make the detested application of his dreams. Even the father finds it trying, much as he loved him; for Joseph has another dream, in which the sun and moon, as well as eleven stars, made obeisance to him; and Jacob felt but observed the saying.

The story proceeds: Joseph is sent to see the peace of his brethren, follows them to Dothan, and there the last errand of love brings out their deepest hatred. They determine to get rid of him. They will have this dreamer no more. Reuben sets himself against their murderous intention; but the result is that at Judah’s proposal he is cast into the pit, given up for death, yet taken out of it and sold to the Midianites -- a wonderful type of a greater than Joseph. It was bad to sell him for twenty pieces of silver, but this was not the full extent of the wrong; for the same cruel hearts which thus disposed of a holy and loving brother did not scruple to inflict the deadliest wound on their aged father. Sin against the brother, and sin against the father -- such is the sorrowful conclusion of this chapter of Joseph’s story.

Here again, we have another interruption; but never allow for a moment that anything is not perfect in the word of God. It is right that we should see what the leader in this wickedness was; it is well that we should know what the character and conduct of Judah was, whom we afterwards see the object of wondrous counsels on God’s part. The answer lies in the shameful account of Judah, his sons, and his daughter-in-law, and himself (Gen. 38). Yet of that very line was He born, with her name specified too, which points to the most painfully humiliating tale that we find perhaps anywhere in the book of Genesis. But what humiliation was He not willing to undergo who had love as well as glory incomparably greater than Joseph’s!

* * *

In Gen. 39 Joseph is seen in the land of Egypt, for there the Midianites sold him. He is in slavery, first of all in the house of Potiphar, captain of the guard; but Jehovah was with Joseph; and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian [Gen. 39:2].

Here again he comes into suffering; here again most unworthily is he misrepresented and maligncd, and hastily cast into the dungeon. But Jehovah was with Joseph in the prison, just as much as in Potiphar’s house. In Gen. 39:2, it is written, He was with Joseph; in Gen. 39:21, He was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand {Gen. 39:21, 23}.

It mattered little where he was, since Jehovah was with him. What a difference it makes when God is with us -- God too in His special known relationship, which is implied in the use of Jehovah here as everywhere.

He looked not to anything that was under his hand, because Jehovah was with him; and that which he did Jehovah made it to prosper {Gen. 39:23}.

But God works for Joseph, and in the prison puts him in contact with the chief butler and the chief baker of the king of Egypt (Gen. 40). They too have their dreams to tell. Joseph willingly listens, and interprets according to the wisdom of God that was given him. His interpretation was soon verified. With the remarkable prudence which marks his character, he had begged not to be forgotten. But “his soul came into iron” a little longer. The word of Jehovah tried him. God would work in His own way. If the chief butler forgot Joseph in his prosperity, God did not.

Pharaoh now had a dream; but there was none to interpret
(Gen. 41). It was two years after -- a long while to wait, especially in a dungeon; but the chief butler, remembering his faults, and confessing them, tells his master of the young Hebrew in the prison, servant to the captain of the guard, who had interpreted so truly.

Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon [Gen. 41:14], and presented him duly before the king. His interpretation carried its own light and evidence along with it; and Pharaoh recognized the wisdom of God not only in this but also in the counsel that Joseph gave. And what wiser man than Joseph could take in hand the critical case of Egypt, to husband its resources during the seven years of plenty, and to administer the stores during the seven years of famine that would surely follow? So the king felt at once, and his servants too in spite of the usual jealousy of a court. Joseph was the man to carry out what he had seen beforehand from God; and Joseph accordingly becomes ruler next to Pharaoh over all the land of Egypt.

And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph’s hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; and he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh went out over all the land of Egypt. And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. And in the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth handfuls. And he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt, brought forth the hands of the earth; and Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering; for it was without number. And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt. And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. And in the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth handfuls. And he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was round about every city, laid he up in the same. And Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering; for it was without number. And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah priest of On bare unto him. And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction. And the seven years of plenteousness, that was in the land of Egypt, were ended. And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do. And the famine was over all the face of the earth: And Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt. And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands [Gen. 41:41-57].

Then comes another wonderful working of God. The sheaves had not yet stood and bowed; the sun, moon, and stars had not paid obeisance yet; but all was to follow not long after. The famine pressed upon the land where Jacob sojourned, while Joseph was in Egypt with a new family, children of the bride that was given him by the king, evidently corresponding with the place of Christ cast out by Israel, sold by the Gentiles, but exalted in a new place and glory altogether, where He too can say during His rejection and separation from Israel,

Behold I and the children whom Jehovah hath given me {Isa. 8:18}.

Nothing can be more transparent than the application of the type.

But there is more in the type than that we have just seen. The brethren that remained with Israel have yet to be accounted for; and the pressure of the famine is upon them. It is so with Israel now, -- a famine indeed, and in the deepest sense. But ten of the brethren come down to buy corn in Egypt; and there it is that God works marvelously by Joseph. He recognizes his brethren. His heart is towards them when they are altogether ignorant who he was that enjoyed the glory of Egypt. The result is that Joseph puts in execution a most solemn searching of the heart and conscience of his brethren. It is exactly what the Lord from a better glory will do before long with His Jewish brethren. He is now outside in a new position quite unlooked for by them: they know Him not. But He too will cause the pinch of famine to press upon them. He too will work in their hearts in consequence, that He may be made righteous known to them in due time (Gen. 42).

We find, accordingly, that first of all one of the brethren is taken, Simeon; and the charge is given that, above all, Benjamin should be brought down. There can be no restoration, no reconciliation; relief it is true, but no deliverance for Israel till Joseph and Benjamin are united. He that was separated from his brethren, but now in glory, must have the son of his father’s right hand. It is Christ rejected but exalted on high, and taking the character also of the man of power for dealing with the earth. Such is the meaning of the combined types of Jacob’s sons, Joseph and Benjamin. Christ has nothing to do with the latter yet; He admirably answers to the type of Joseph, but not yet of Benjamin. As long as He is simply filling up the type of Joseph, there is no knowledge of Himself on the part of his brethren. Hence, therefore, this became the great question how to bring down Benjamin -- how to put him into connection with Joseph. But the truth is, there was another moral necessity which must be met -- how to get their hearts and their consciences set right all round. This part of the beautiful tale is typical of the dealings of the Lord Jesus, long severed and exalted in another sphere, -- first with the remnant, and then with the whole house of Israel. There are various portions. We have Reuben and Simeon; and then others come forward, -- Judah more particularly at the close, and Benjamin.
The famine still pressing (Gen. 43), Jacob sorely against his will is obliged to part with Benjamin; and here it is that we find affections altogether unheard of before in the brethren of Joseph. We might have thought them incapable of anything that was good; and it is very evident that their hearts were now shown to be under a most mighty power which forced them anew, as far as, of course, the type was concerned. More particularly we see how the very ones who had so shamefully failed are now distinctly brought into communion with God's mind about their ways. Reuben is quick to feel, recalls the truth as far as he knew it about Joseph, and shows right feelings towards his father. Yet we know what he had been. Judah is even more prominent, and clearly knew yet deeper searchings of the heart, and particularly too in the way of right affections about both their father and their brother. These, as is plain, were just the points in which they had broken down before. On these they must be divinely corrected now; and so they were.

The issue of all is this, -- that at last Judah and his brethren return to Joseph’s house (Gen. 44). Judah speaks. Here indeed we have a most earnest pleading, and full of touching affection.

O my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord’s ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh. My lord, I beseech thee, let not thine anger burn against thy servant. Have ye a father, or a brother? {Gen. 44:18, 19}.

There we have evidently a heart that has been brought right, exactly where the sin lay.

We said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man.

Ah, there was no lacerating of his heart now!

And a child of his old age, a little one.

How little they thought of that once!

And his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him.

Do we not feel how far the hearts of all his brethren were from hating Joseph now because of Jacob’s love to him!

And thou saidst unto thy servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may see mine eyes upon him. And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father: for if he should leave his father, his father would die. And thou saidst unto thy servants, Except your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more. And it came to pass, when we came up unto thy servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. And our father said, Go again and buy us a little food. And we said, We cannot go down. If our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down: for we may not see the man’s face, except our youngest brother be with us. And thy servant my father said unto us, Ye know that my wife bare me two sons, and the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces, and I saw him not since; and if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Now therefore when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us, seeing that his life is bound up in the lad’s life, it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die; and thy servants shall bring down the grey hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave; for thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever. Now, therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren. For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father {Gen. 44:20-34}.

The moral restoration was complete.

In the following chapter follows the unveiling of the typical stranger, the glorified man, to his brethren, who up to this were wholly ignorant of him.

Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me; and there stood no man with him while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud; and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard; and Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph. Doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him, for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you; and they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years in the which there shall be neither earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste ye, and go up to my father (Gen. 45:1-9).

And so they do. Benjamin then is embraced by Joseph; and now there is no let to the accomplishment of the purpose of God for the restoration of Israel -- for this complete blessing where the reality comes under Christ and the new covenant.

Jacob comes down at length, and on his way God speaks to Israel

in the visions of the night; and said, Jacob, Jacob; and he said, Here am I. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes (Gen. 46:2-4).

Then after the genealogies of the chapter, 33 we have the

33. It may be worth while to observe in this and other genealogies not often the object of infidel attack, that the differences between Genesis, Numbers, and Chronicles in their form are due to the motive for their introduction in each particular connection; that the difficulties clearly spring from the design, in no way from error in the writer, but in fact because of ignorance in such readers as misapprehend them; and that both the differences and the
meeting between Jacob and Joseph. Not this only; for some of Joseph’s brethren are presented to Pharaoh; and Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh; and Joseph’s brethren are presented to Pharaoh; and Joseph meeting between Jacob and Joseph. Not this only; for some of

the less is blessed of the greater [see Heb. 7:7].

But so it is. A poor pilgrim blesses the monarch of the mightiest realm of that day; but the greatest of earth is little in comparison with the blessed of God. Jacob now is not merely blessed, but a blesser. He knows God well enough to be assured that nothing Pharaoh has could really enrich him, and that there is very much which God could give, on which Jacob could count from God even for Pharaoh.

In Gen. 48 tidings of Jacob’s sickness brings Joseph and his two sons to the bed of the patriarch. The closing scene of Jacob approaches, and I scarcely know a more affecting thing in the Bible. It is a thorough moral restoration. Not merely is there that which typifies it for Israel by and by, but Jacob’s own soul is as it never was before. There is no such bright moment in his past life as in the circumstances of his deathbed. I grant that so it ought to be in a believer; and that it is really so in fact where the soul rests simply on the Lord. But whatever we may see in some instances and fear in others, in Jacob’s case the light of God’s presence was evident. It is striking that here was the only occasion on which the brightness of Joseph’s vision was not so apparent. All flesh is grass. The believer is exposed to any evil when he ceases to be dependent, or yields to his own thoughts which are not of faith. Jesus is the only

Faithful Witness [Rev. 1:5].

Failure is found in the most blessed servant of God. So fact, so scripture teaches. Joseph, ignorant of the purpose of God about his sons, allows his natural desires to govern him, and arranges the elder before the right hand of his dying father, the younger before his left. So Joseph would have had it; but not so Jacob. His eyes were dim with age, but he was in this clearer-sighted than Joseph after all. There never was a man who saw more brightly than Joseph; but Jacob, dying, sees the future with steadier and fuller gaze than the most famous interpreter of dreams and visions since the world began.

And what thoughts and feelings must have rushed through the old man’s heart as he looked back on his own early days! Did he fail to discern then how easily God could have crossed the hands of his father Isaac against his own will? Certainly God would have infallibly maintained His own truth; and as He had promised the better blessing to Jacob, not to Esau, so, spite of Esau and the fruits of his success in hunting, he would have proved that it was not to him that willed like Isaac, nor to him that ran like Esau. All turns on God, who shows mercy and keeps His word.

On this occasion, then, Jacob pronounces the blessing -- the superior blessing -- on the younger of the two boys; and this too in terms which one may safely say, were equal to so extraordinary a conjuncture, -- in terms which none but the Spirit of God could have enabled any mouth to utter.

In Gen. 49 we find the general prophetical blessing of Jacob’s sons. Here one may convey the scope without ceasing to be brief. As the blessings allude to the history of the twelve heads of the nation, so naturally we have the future that awaits the tribes of Israel. But as this is a matter of tolerably widespread knowledge amongst Christians, there is no need for much to be said about it.

Reuben is the starting-point, and alas! it is, like man always, corruption. It was the first mark of evil in the creature. The second is no better, -- rather worse it may be in some respects, -- violence. Simeon and Levi were as remarkable for the former, as Reuben for the former -- a sorrowful vision for Jacob’s heart -- to feel that this not only had been but was going to be; for undoubtedly he knew, as he says, that what he then uttered would sweep onward and befall the people

in the last days [Gen. 49:1].

This did not hinder his beginning with the history of Israel from his own days. Corruption and violence, as they had been the two fatal characteristics of his three eldest sons, so would stamp the people in their early history. Israel under law broke the law, and was ever leaving Jehovah for Baalim; yet the sons would be no better; rather worse, than the father; but the
grace of God would interfere for the generations to come as it had for their father Jacob, and the last day would be bright for them as in truth for him.

Then Judah comes before us. It might be thought, that surely there will be full blessing now.

Judah is a lion’s whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. 34 Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk. Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon {Gen. 49:9-13}.

Yes, Jacob speaks of Shiloh. But Shiloh was presented to the responsibility of the Jew first; and consequently all seemed to break down, and in one sense all really did.

To him shall the gathering of the peoples be; and so certainly it will be, but not yet. Shiloh came; but Israel were not ready, and refused Him. Consequently the gathering (or the obedience) of the peoples, however sure, is yet in the future. The counsel of God seemed to be abortive, but was really established in the blood of the cross, which unbelief deems its ruin. It is postponed, not lost.

Zebulun gives us the next picture of the history of Israel. Now that they have had Shiloh presented but have refused Him, the Jews find their comforts in intercourse with the Gentiles. This is what they do now -- seeking to make themselves happy, when, if they weigh their own prophets, they must suspect fatal error somewhere in their history. They have lost their Messiah, and they court the world.

Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for a haven of ships, and his border shall be unto Zidon {Gen. 49:13}.

The consequence is that the Jews sink under the burden, falling completely under the influence of the nations. This is shown by Issachar -- a strong ass crouching down between two burdens {Gen. 49:14}.

Then we come to the crisis of sorrow for the Jew. In Dan we hear of that which is far more dreadful than burdens inflicted by the Gentiles, and their own subjection, instead of cleaving to their proper and distinctive hopes. In the case of Dan there is set forth the power of Satan.

Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward (Gen. 49:17).

We see here the enemy in the serpent that bites, and the consequent disaster to the horseman. It is the moment of total ruin among the Jews, but exactly the point of change for blessing. It is then accordingly we hear the cry coming forth, --

I have waited for thy salvation, O Jehovah {Gen. 49:18}.

It is the sudden change from the energy of Satan to the heart looking up and out to Jehovah Himself.

From that point all is changed.

Gad, a troop shall overcome him; but he shall overcome at the last {Gen. 49:19}.

Now we have victory on the side of Israel.

This is not all. There is abundance too.

Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties {Gen. 49:20}.

Again, there will be liberty unknown under law, -- impossible when merely dealt with under the governing hand of God because of their faults.

Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words {Gen. 49:21}.

What a difference from him who was bearing like an ass two burdens!

But, more than that, we have Joseph. Now we have the glory in connection with Israel; and finally power in the earth: Joseph and Benjamin are now as it were found together. What
was realized in the facts of the history at last terminates in the blessedness -- the predicted blessedness -- of Israel.

The last chapter gives us the conclusion of the book, the burial of Jacob, the reappearance of his sons left with Joseph, and at last Joseph’s own death, as lovely as had been his life. He who stood on the highest pinnacle in the land next to the throne, type of Him who will hold the kingdom unto the glory of God the Father, -- that single-eyed saint now breathes forth his soul to God.

By faith Joseph when he died made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones {Heb. 11:22}. His heart is out of the scene where it enjoyed but a transient and at best typical glory. In hope he goes onward to that which would be lasting and true unto God’s glory, when Israel should be in Emmanuel’s land, and he himself be in a yet better condition -- even resurrection. He had been exalted in Egypt, but he solemnly took an oath of the sons of Israel, that when God visits them, as He surely will, they will carry up his bones hence. He had served God in Egypt, but to him it was ever the strange land. Though he dwelt there, ruled there, there had a family, and there died fuller of honors than of years, an hundred and ten years old, he feels that Egypt is not the land of God, and knows that He will redeem His people from it, and bring them into Canaan. It was beautiful fruit in its season: no change of circumstances interfered with the promises of God to the fathers. Joseph waited as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Earthly honors did not settle him down in Egypt.

On another day we may see how this oath was kept when God brought about the accomplishment of Israel’s deliverance, the type of its ultimate fulfilment.
There is hardly a book of the Old Testament that stands out in more decided contrast with the book of Genesis than the one which follows it most closely. And this is the more striking, because God employed the same inspired writer to give us both, as well as others. One of the most salient features of the book of Genesis is the variety in which the Holy Spirit has set forth the various principles on which God deals, the ways in which He manifests Himself, the special fore-shadowings of the Lord Jesus, and this not only in respect to man but Israel and even the church in type. Consequently for this various development of the truth there is no book in scripture so remarkable as the very first of the Pentateuch. In fact, in a general way we may say that all the other books take up special truths, which are at any rate in the germ presented there. As for the second book, Exodus, there is one grand idea which pervades it -- redemption. The consequences of redemption, as well as in the circumstances in which it was accomplished, are brought before us in a very full and complete manner, as we shall see. Further, not only the consequences of redemption, but that which may be the result when man, insensitive to the grace which has wrought redemption, turns back on himself, and attempts to gain a footing by his own resources and faithfulness before God. How God deals with him thereon we shall also see before we have done with the book of Exodus. In making these few remarks, I believe we have touched on the principal topics which will come before us, and nearly in the order in which God has presented them.

First of all then we have a sketch of the chosen people in the land of Egypt. But a king is seen who knew not Joseph, and the afflictions which the Spirit of God had predicted long before to Abraham begin to thicken on his seed there. Nevertheless God is faithful, and the very efforts to destroy are met by His good hand, who produces faithfulness even in those that might have been supposed most of all subservient to the cruel designs of the king. This occupies the first chapter.

In Ex. 2, growing out of these circumstances and of the edict which doomed to death every man-child of Israel, appears the deliverer, -- the type of an infinitely greater one. It is Moses, a man of whom the Spirit of God has made the largest use not only in the Old Testament but in the New, as in so many forms shadowing forth the Lord Jesus. His parents’ faith is not spoken of here, it is true, but, as we know, in the New Testament. The fact is here named that they hid him; and when they could no longer do so, or it may be, when they had no longer faith to proceed as before, they committed him to an ark of bulrushes in the river, when the daughter of Pharaoh takes up the child and adopts him as her own. Thus Moses was learned, as we are told, in all the

35. buff known, they were supposed to double their number in fifteen years. Along the sea coast, which would naturally be first inhabited, the period of doubling was about thirty-five years, and in some of the maritime towns the population was absolutely at a stand. From the late census made in America, it appears that taking all the states together, they have still continued to double their numbers every twenty-five years; and as the whole population is now so great as not to be materially affected by the emigrations from Europe, and as it is known that, in some of the towns and districts near the sea coast, the progress of population has been comparatively slow, it is evident that in the interior of the country in general the period of doubling from procreation only must have been considerably less than twenty-five years.” In a note he adds, “From a return to Congress in 1782, the population appeared to be 2,389,300, and in the census of 1790, 4,000,000; increase in nine years, 1,610,700; from which deduct ten thousand per annum for European settlers, 5 per cent. for 4½ years, which will be 20,250; the remaining increase during the nine years, from procreation only, will be 1,500,450, which is nearly 7 per cent.; and consequently the period of doubling at this rate would be less than sixteen years. If this calculation for the whole population of the States be in any degree near the truth, it cannot be doubted that in particular districts the period of doubling from procreation only has often been less than fifteen years. The period immediately succeeding war was likely to be a period of very rapid increase.” Thus, even supposing with Ussher, Clinton, and others that the 430 years date from the call of Abram, and that just half this period, or 215 years, can strictly apply to the stay in Egypt, the objection is utterly irrational.

Nothing can be conceived more captious than to take Gen. 15:16 as limiting the Israelites who sojourned in Egypt to just the fourth succession in family birth, or to assume that they had no children beyond those named for special reasons.
learning of the Egyptians. In such a position he had the finest opportunities for assuaging the hard lot of the Israelites, and it might be for accomplishing that which was so dear to his heart, their deliverance from thraldom. This he entirely declines. Undoubtedly it must have been a far greater trial to his spirit than the relinquishment of any personal advantages. It exposed him necessarily to the reproach of folly from his brethren. For no race ever was more apt to find matter for blame than they, none quicker to see their own advantages or to speak out whatever they did see. But God was working not only for a design according to His own heart, but so that the manner in which that design was to be accomplished should bring Him glory. This Moses in measure understood; for faith always sees it, and holds to it just so far as it is faith. There may be, I grant you, the mingling of that which is of nature along with faith; and from this it appears to me that Moses was far from being exempt, either in his first appearance as one engaged for God with His people here below, or afterwards when God summoned him to accomplish the great work of which he had a certain anticipation, no doubt vague and dark, in his soul.

On this enterprise then we behold him going forth, when he was come to years of discretion. He sees an Egyptian maltreating an Israelite. This kindles all his affections on behalf of his brethren. Undoubtedly the affections were there; but this calls them out, and he acts accordingly, looking, it is said, this way and that way -- by no means an evidence of singleness of eye. Yet here was just the situation. It was impossible for the Spirit, on the one hand, to blame the love that prompted the hand of Moses; it was impossible, on the other, to vindicate the act. God has just left it, as He always knows how to do -- left what was of Himself to tell its own tale, while that which was not of Himself is before the spiritual judgment of those who have confidence in Him. And is there anything that more beautifully shows the character of scripture than this? In any other book there would be a kind of apology, if not an elaborate argument, a discourse on the matter, to vindicate God from all participation in what was far from being according to His own holiness.

Nothing shows the difference between God’s word and the way in which even men of God may handle, or feel it necessary to handle it, more strikingly than this. God is content to speak of things as they are without a word on His side to explain or account for it, or in anywise to soften matters for man.

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all {1 John 1:5}.

Accordingly the tale is told with all simplicity. The self-same principle applies to hundreds of passages in the Scriptures; and therefore it seemed well to make a few remarks in a more general shape. We must distinguish between the statement of a fact in the Bible and any sanction given to it. This may help our appreciation of the word of God in all such cases. We are bound ever to refuse the thought that the record of facts in scripture implies that they are according to the full mind of God. The truth is that He speaks of good men and bad men; that He mentions not only what was excellent in the good, but such distressing and shameful things as draw out His own chastening it may be for a long while to come. God, in short, states things exactly as they are. He counts on faith in His own people; but they will always reckon that whatever there may be of good is from Him -- whatever may be wrong is surely not so. It is an easily settled principle after all, and it accounts for much on which men’s minds otherwise are apt to stumble.

Moses then flees from Egypt, but not so much in fear of Egyptian enmity; against this he might have looked to God to sustain him, no matter what might be the pressure on his spirit. It was the unworthy dealing of his brethren which broke up all hope for the present. The man who was in the wrong too, as is always the case, had the bitter feeling against him who loved both, and would willingly have set them at one with each other; it was he who taunted Moses with the words,

Who made thee a ruler and a judge? {Ex. 2:14}.

The Israelite’s own proud spirit was ready to insinuate pride in others. Moses then bends to the blast. The time was not yet come evidently for the deliverance of such a people. He retires from the scene to the land of Midian, and there is put through the necessary discipline for the mighty work he was yet to accomplish. Moses had certainly been hasty; and the Lord judged it. But he was right in the main; and the Lord accordingly left not to another but to him the due accomplishment of Israel’s deliverance when the fulness of time was come.

There, in his retirement, he receives from Jethro his daughter a stranger given him to wife, who bears him a son, the name of whom tells whither his heart turns.

I have been a stranger in a strange land {Ex. 2:22}, is the word of comment that is made upon him. He was called Gershom, which means this -- “a stranger here.”

In due time the unforgetting heart of God shows His remembrance of Israel (Ex. 3). Abroad Moses was discharging his duty long enough for such thoughts to have passed away from him, as we might have supposed. But not so. At the back side of the desert in Horeb, the angel of Jehovah appears to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.

And he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed {Ex. 3:2}.

We are never to suppose that the manner of the revelation of God is an unimportant consideration. No doubt He is sovereign; but for that very reason He is sovereignly wise, and displays Himself invariably in such a sort as is most appropriate to the object in hand. Hence it was in no casual sort or merely arresting attention by its wonders that Jehovah here appears in the burning bush. It was meant to be an image of that which was then presented to the spirit of Moses -- a bush in a desert burning but unconsumed. It was no doubt thus that God was about to work in the midst of Israel. Moses and they must know it. They too would be the chosen vessel of His power in their weakness, and this for ever in His mercy. Their God, as ours, would prove Himself a consuming fire. Solemn but infinite favor! For, on one hand, as surely as He is a consuming fire, so on the other the bush, weak as it is, and
ready to vanish away, nevertheless remains to prove that whatever may be the siftings and judicial dealing of God, whatever the trials and searchings of man, yet where He reveals Himself in pitifulness as well as in power (and such it certainly was here), He sustains the object and uses the trial for nothing but good -- no doubt for His own glory, but consequently for the very best interests of those that are His.

Hence, when He calls Moses to draw near, He first of all proclaims Himself the God of his fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. This was the first announcement that was meant to act on the soul of Moses, and of course in due time on Israel. The time was coming when they should no longer be a family but a nation; and if God was about to reveal Himself after a special sort, He at the same time particularly brings before them His association with their fathers. We must never forget the ways in which God has acted before if we are to appreciate what He is doing now: and, in point of fact, our value for and intelligence of these things will be found to go together. It is by confounding the scriptures that men misunderstand them: if we would indeed enter into the real force of God’s word, it must always be by distinguishing the things that differ. Hence it is to be observed that first God draws particular attention to His being the God of the fathers. This of necessity would recall to Moses the special manner in which He made Himself known to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob as the Almighty God {El-Shaddai}. We shall find this set out in express terms in a later chapter; but the substance of it seems conveyed on this first occasion when He directs attention to His being the God of promise, coupling consequently the names of the fathers with Himself.

God was now about to present Himself as the unchanging One that could and would accomplish His word according to the relation in which He and His people stood. Was it to be in view of His grace or their desert? Whether all were to be fully made good now, or whether only to a partial extent -- whether even the partial accomplishment was to be opposed and weakened, and useless as far as this could do it by Israel’s own folly and sin, all this would afterwards appear. In point of fact, as we know, there could be no such thing as a complete fulfilment apart from Christ. The Son of God, the Lord Jesus, the promised Seed, must come, if there was to be the making all the promises of God yea and amen in Him. If this furnish the direct reason why there could be no such fulfilment, the moral hindrances from the state of Israel -- from man fallen -- were quite as real, though necessarily indirect. Nevertheless God would give at least a partial accomplishment in him that was the type of Christ. How this was arrested is a most instructive lesson, but it will be found later on in this book.

However Jehovah does declare in full His deep interest in the people. And what a proof is this of never-failing goodness in God! For there was not one quality in the people which could in anywise move the heart towards them except their misery -- not one worthy moral feeling, not one generous emotion, not the smallest care for the glory of God. Nay, they were ever ready to turn aside to reproach Himself, to slander His servants, and to abandon His will. All these things we learn in due time as they were known to Him before He began. Nevertheless God expresses in the most affecting manner His tender interest in them even as they were. There is nothing therefore that can hinder a soul from being the object of the most real love to God except the persistent rejection of Himself. There is nothing too low or too hard in man to hinder the power of God’s grace except the wilfulness that will not have Him at all.

The Lord then brings before Moses His care, saying,

I have surely seen the afflictions of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of the taskmasters, for I know their sorrow {Ex. 3:7};

but He does not add, their cry to Him. We may say then, as a prophet did later, that they groaned; but they did not groan to God. It was but selfish sense of suffering. They groaned only because of their wretchedness; but there was no looking out to God -- no counting on His mercy. Nevertheless, says He,

I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me; and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt {Ex. 3:8-11}.

Moses soon brings forward his difficulties and objections. Jehovah however meets all at first with quietness, and at the same time breathes comfort into the ear of His anxious and hesitating servant.

But what a lesson it is! Is this the man once so ready to smite Rahab and deliver Israel? The very same. Full of courage when God’s time was not come, he feels the obstacles when it is. It is often so! Moses thus replies,

Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name?

Is it not humbling? What a state! God’s people do not even know His name!

What shall I say unto them? {Ex. 3:13}

says Moses.

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM. And he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you {Ex. 3:14}.

There is great force in these words. It was not merely what God was going to perform. Man probably would have preferred “I shall do;” but God takes His stand upon these weighty words,

I AM THAT I AM,

the self-subsisting, ever-being One. In truth, on Him hangs everything. All others are merely beings that exist; God is the
only one who can say

I AM.

What exists was called into being, and may pass out of it, if God so please. I say not that they do, but that they may. Surely God is evermore and evermore God. This is what describes Him in His being at least. I am not now speaking of His grace, but of His own essential being --

I AM.

Accordingly, as a message to Israel, surrounded by the vanities of the heathen -- those imaginary objects of adoration whose rôle really was that of demons taking advantage of man's superstition and folly, it was a fine and an admirable name for those who might ask it:

I AM hath sent me.

But there is more than this; for God takes care to utter another word:

Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, Jehovah the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you.

He is still more explicit.

Jehovah the God of your fathers hath sent me unto you. This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations {Ex. 3:15}.

How infinitely gracious of God, that the name taken for ever in connection with Israel is not that which relegates every other creature into its own nothingness, which makes all to be merely the consequence of His word and of His will! He loves and cherishes the name in which He has bound up the objects of His choice with Himself.

It reminds one of that which the Gospels tell us. When here below Jesus never proclaimed Himself as the Christ on the one hand, or as the Son of God on the other, though truly both, and always accepting and vindicating either when He was thus confessed by others. For we know that Jesus was the Head of the kingdom, and that Christ is the title in which He takes His rights over Israel and their land, which will be in force in the day that is coming. And, what is more striking still, He does not even take His stand upon His being the Son of God, though this was His eternal name. It may be said that it belongs to Him more strictly and personally in the highest sense than any other; for He became the Christ, but He is and will be (as He always was) the Word, the Son, the only begotten Son of the Father. There was no becoming here. This is what He is from everlasting to everlasting. But for all that He does not assert it. What name does He take then? What does He Himself delight in? The chosen name that Jesus habitually puts forward is Son of man.

Whom do ye think that I, the Son of man, am? {see Matt. 16:13}.

Where all was morally glorious, there is nothing finer than this. For, as we know, the Son of man is not merely the title in which He linked Himself with man here below, but the name of sorrow and suffering, of shame and rejection -- it is the name undoubtedly of glory, and this of a richer and fuller sort, according to the counsels of God, than anything connected with His place as the Christ, the object of Jewish hope and promise; for it opens the door into His reign for ever and ever over all peoples, tribes and tongues under the whole heaven, nay, as is known, over all the universe of God the Creator. Nevertheless it was the name of suffering first, if of such high and widespread glory afterwards.

So with Moses, Jehovah seems to be speaking according to the grace, as far as this could be unfolded then, which afterwards shone in the blessed Lord here below. In the latter case, naturally, it was more connected with His own person as known in the Godhead. For we must ever remember that He who showed Himself then as Jehovah was, no doubt, the One whom we know as the Son of God. When revealing Himself as Jehovah their God then, He delighted to take a name which in some way linked Himself with His people. This was the more touching, because He knew right well how these very men were about to disgrace Him. He knew how they would depart from all that was before His own mind, seeking in self-confidence that which would give an apparent momentary importance, but be sure to bring a blot for ages on His character as well as ruin to themselves, -- for so lies the Jew now. The actual wreck of Israelitish hopes is the result both of their assuming legal condition in the first place, and next of their rejection of the grace of God that came in by Jesus Christ our Lord, and was proclaimed by the Spirit sent down from heaven.

There is another important point to note in the chapter. Jehovah shows from the very first how all the consequences of His raising and sending Moses to Pharaoh were before His own mind. He was surprised by nothing. It is of course as simple as necessary for those who know God, but none the less delightful to find it stated clearly. The same thing pervades the New Testament. It is sweet to see these analogies; because in one respect there can scarcely be two volumes more different than the Old Testament and the New Testament; but just as clearly there is everywhere the same mind, and the same source -- God Himself dealing with a different subject, but the same God no matter what He deals with. Just so is it in the New Testament. The gospel of John, for instance, discloses the end from the beginning; but that is because here we have Jesus known as the One who is before the beginning. He is the sent One, but a consciously divine person. Consequently in perfect harmony with this all things are known (and no testimony needed by Him), what God is no less than man, with as absolute a comprehension of the future as of the past or present.

Here then Jehovah says,

I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out my
hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty [Ex. 3:19-21].

In truth their wages were of long date, never having been paid. It is mere folly to suppose there was any, the smallest, infringement of what was right and becoming. 36 It is a matter, perhaps, too well known to need many words, that every woman was simply to ask of her neighbor, &c., vessels of silver and of gold, with raiment, which were to be put on Israel’s sons and daughters. It was to spoil their oppressors by divine authority, and no question whatever of deceit or dishonesty. The impression of “borrowing” given in the Authorized Version is by no means necessary, nor does the connection justify it. There is no such thought as that they had no right involved in the matter. There was nothing the people and even at last the king of Egypt were not disposed to concede: later on in spite of all their own interests in the retention of the children of Israel, they were willing and desirous that they should go, and that they should not go away empty. Their proud will was broken, although their hearts were by no means with God. There was no kind of communion, I need hardly say: nevertheless they bowed to that which they had so stubbornly opposed before. And then Moses speaks, and says,

But, behold; they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, Jehovah hath not appeared unto thee [Ex. 4:1].

Then follow signs of a miraculous kind in proof of Jehovah’s mission of His servant (Ex. 4). The attention of Moses is drawn to what was in his hand — a rod which, when cast on the ground, became a serpent. The word is somewhat vague, and probably has a wider meaning and not so definite as serpent. It is the same word that is used for sea monsters generally. It is commonly known that what is translated “whales” in Gen. 1:21 means the huge creatures of the deep; so that it is not quite correct to restrain it to a “serpent” here, as it is certainly erroneous to call it “whales” there. It properly expresses a monster which might be, I presume, amphibious, not certainly confined like a fish, still less like a whale, to the waters, nor confined to the land like a serpent. But, however this may be judged by others, it would appear that, although not specifically a serpent, it was meant here to embrace a creature with such qualities. The point of this wonder was the change of power (which a “rod” means in scripture) into something Satanic. The rod is the symbol of authority; it may also represent chastening. But then no chastening is right unless it flow from just authority; and hence the connection between the two ideas in this emblem.

The rod of power then taking Satanic form seems to be meant by the sign first committed to Moses. Such was exactly the state of things in the land of Egypt.

But there was more; and hence a far more personal test. Moses was told by Jehovah to put his hand in his bosom. Undoubtedly the place was significant, as well as the effect; for when he took it out again, his hand was leprous as snow -- the well-known type of sin, at least in its defiling character if not in the powerlessness to which it reduces man. Throughout the word of God there are two standing types of sin. Both appear to be used in the New Testament, as is familiar to us, if one of them is more prominent in the Old. Paralysis, or palsy as it is called in our version, is the type of the effects of sin as thoroughly destructive of human strength -- of sin in its plunging the guilty into a state of weakness --

without strength {Rom. 5:6},

as it is said in the Epistle to the Romans. Leprosy is the type of it in its defilement. These are the two forms more particularly in which it is presented.

But, on the other hand, when Moses put his hand into his bosom again at the word of God, it became as his other flesh.

If they would not hearken to these two signs, there was a third which would affect the river. We all know what the Egyptians thought of the Nile. That which ought to have been for refreshment as well as for purifying becomes the sign of death -- life no longer in the body. Such is the known significance of blood symbolically in scripture.

All this evinces the absolute command of all circumstances by God, but in His servant’s hands, and in favor of His people. Let them know that God would work according to what belongs exclusively to Him. There could be nothing more thorough. Look at authority in the world, or at that which pertains to man, or at the resources of nature: a man brings the vouchers of One who was sovereign over every domain. This seems to be conveyed in these three signs. At the same time remember this caution here, my brethren; and it seems to be a wholesome thought ever to bear in mind.

We must not assume in such points that we have ascertained the whole of the truth, even though we may have got some true elements. Confident as we may be that we are taught of God, it does not necessarily follow that there may not be another side of truth which we have yet to learn more fully. In fact it is one of the blessed features of the word of God that we can never assume to possess an exhaustive view of scripture. For scripture savors of God’s own infinity, however He may come down to us, and adopt the language of men, as we know He has done. It is owned that of course human language is the finite; but then He who comes down into the finite is Himself infinite, and we must never lose sight of this, although put now in its most general shape. It is indeed a most important truth to hold fast, and no less full of consolation and blessing for our souls.

Let us be thankful then for all that which commends itself to us as true and of God, but never assume that we have

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36 The remarks of Dr. D. (Introd. O.T. i. pp. 236, 237) seem to me the wantonness of incredulity, which, irritated by the divine authority of Scripture, yields to the merest calumny. “If the words in Ex. 3:20-22 be taken literally or historically, they represent Jehovah as commanding an immoral thing. Hence this method of interpretation must be abandoned. The writer, giving expression to his own moral consciousness, represents the Deity as directly enjoining the people to do a thing dishonest in itself. This shews the imperfect development of the divine to which the author’s age had attained,” &c. The rationalist never suspects himself.
apprehended the whole truth.

Now we know in part {1 Cor. 13:12}.

Let us depend on God to bring out the truth for our intelligence in the measure which fits His glory, and as He pleases to accomplish more fully the purpose for which He has revealed it.

Then Moses finds another difficulty. He says,

I am not eloquent

– one wonders that he took so long to find it out.

I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue {Ex. 4:10}.

If God sent him, what had that to do with the matter? The real difficulty is always this, -- one thinks about oneself, instead of the Lord. It is astonishing what a difference it makes when one can afford and has made up one’s mind to drop self. It is clear that God must be the best judge. If He chooses a man that is slow of speech, who can say Nay? Nevertheless let none suppose that this is said in the smallest disrespect of Moses -- not so, but for our own profit and instruction, and to guard us lest we should enact the same part with even less excuse; for God has set before us the wavering of a servant so faithful for the express purpose of guarding ourselves from the like or other failures.

The upshot is that at last the Lord is really displeased with His servant's facility in objecting.

The anger of Jehovah was kindled against Moses, and he said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother?

Great humiliation! He might have been the simple and happy instrument of God in the mighty work; but Aaron is brought forward to share it.

I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart {Ex. 4:14}.

Thus we find the junction of Aaron with Moses, which has many important consequences, and some of them of a serious character, as this book records.

Another fact is mentioned before we close the chapter, and one of deep and grave practical instruction. God was going to put honor on Moses, but there was a dishonor to Him in the house of Moses already. God could not pass over that. How came it that Moses’ sons were not circumcised? How came it that there lacked that which typifies the mortifying the flesh in those who were nearest to Moses? How came it that God’s glory was forgotten in that which ought to have been ever prominent to a father’s heart? It appears that the wife had something to do with the matter. Accordingly mark how Jehovah deals in His own wisdom. There never is a hindrance but through flesh; there is no difficulty brought in to distract a faithful man of God from obedience, but God accomplishes the end, only in a far more painful way, and often by the very one who obstructed. What a safeguard then to be childlike and subject to the Lord! How many sorrows are thus escaped! But no escape would God allow from that which was so repugnant to the feelings of Zipporah. In fact she at last was obliged to do what she most hated, as she said herself in her son’s case. But more than that, it endangered Moses; for God had the controversy with him -- not with his wife. Moses was the responsible person; and God held to His order. It is said that Jehovah met and sought to kill him. The consequence was that his wife had to take a sharp stone and execute the work herself. It must be done, and with incomparably greater pain and shame to herself than if done in God’s time and way. Let us remember this.

Now that God was vindicated in the household of Moses, his mission could begin (Ex. 5). Public work can only rightly follow when all is well at home. So Moses and Aaron go in and tell Pharaoh the message of Jehovah; and Pharaoh, with the insolence natural to him, replies,

Who is Jehovah, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, neither will I let Israel go.

And they said, The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto Jehovah our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword {Ex. 5:2, 3}.

But the result of their interference is that the tasks are increased, and that the children of Israel groan yet more, quick enough to resent it too, as if, instead of being deliverers, Moses and Aaron were themselves the more immediate causes of the troubles which thickened on the people. This is described in the rest of the chapter.

But Jehovah, in the beginning of Ex. 6, speaks to Moses once more when he returns, 37 and says,

37. The attempt to eke out proofs of diversity of authorship from alleged contradictions and confusion is not only futile, but evidence of incapacity to discern what is excellent and full of instruction. Dr. D. says (Intro. O.T. i. 65) that “the Israelites did not listen to Moses at first for anguish of spirit and cruel bondage (Ex. 6:9, 12). But in 4:31 they believed and rejoiced when he announced deliverance to them. It may be said that the elders were the persons spoken to in the latter case, not the people; and that they were induced to believe in him by the signs he wrought. But if the heads of the people were convinced of his divine mission, the people groaning under their burdens would be ready to follow them.”

According to Ex. 6:2, &c., Moses received his divine commission to deliver the people out of bondage in Egypt. But in Ex. 3:1, &c., he received it in Midian and afterwards repeated in Egypt, because the former call is followed by Moses and Aaron going in to Pharaoh and asking him to let the Israelites go for the purpose of holding a feast in the wilderness. Had Moses not visited the king to ask for the thing he was called by God to effect, we might suppose that the call was repeated; but since he did so a second call was unnecessary! The two calls are in reality the narrations of different writers, giving a somewhat different version of the same thing. The one represents Moses as asking for a temporary release of the people (Ex. 5:3, &c.); the other for their entire deliverance (6:11; 7:2; 9:35; 11:10)."
Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land. And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am Jehovah: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them [Ex. 6:1-3].

We come to greater precision here. Carefully remember that this does not imply that the word Jehovah was not known. We have no real reason to doubt that men heard it from the beginning. As a word Jehovah occurs frequently in the book of Genesis, in a way which shows not only that the writer knew the term, but that it was in use from the beginning. What then is the true meaning? That God now takes this name as the revealed character according to which He was going publicly to act on behalf of the children of Israel. Observe, as illustrating what is here meant, that when our Lord came, as scripture says, He declared the Father. What an absurd inference it would be that the term “Father” had never been known before! This clearly is not conveyed anywhere, but that God had not before revealed Himself in that relationship as He did then. It is so precisely with the term “Jehovah.” Thus, in Gen. 22, when Isaac was taken from under the sentence of death, Abraham calls the place Jehovah-Jireh [Gen. 22:14].

The word therefore must have been well enough known: only God did not yet take it as the form and ground of His dealings with any people on the earth; now He does with Israel. It was not enough to be the almighty shield of the children as of the fathers: no matter what their weakness and exposure in the midst of jealous and hostile and wicked Canaanites, He had been the protector of the wandering patriarchs. It was what was involved in the formula of His revelation to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But now He goes farther, showing Himself the unchangeable and eternal God, the God who was indeed as a governor true to the promise He had made of old. Accordingly this is precisely what is involved in the name of Jehovah. Here He was ready for His part to accomplish. There might be unreadiness on their part, but He at any rate was able to make good all He had promised. And thus fittingly He, as Jehovah their God, pledges before them His own unchangeable character to accomplish His promises. Whether it would come to a result or not depended on altogether different circumstances -- not on any failure in Him.

This then is brought before Moses and Aaron, and soon after we find the message given,

Go in, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land [Ex. 6:11].

They were not to be in anywise cast down by the first replies. They must not be disheartened even by the growing troubles of the children of Israel. They had this warrant to go on in the name of Jehovah.

Then (Ex. 6:14-27) the genealogy is given, which calls for no remark, save only to notice how grace cannot but assert itself. For Moses was not the elder brother but Aaron, and in the genealogy the order of nature is maintained, as, for instance, in Ex. 6:20, 26,

These are that Aaron and Moses, to whom Jehovah said, Bring out the children of Israel [Ex. 6:26].

But the moment we come to spiritual action, it is always Moses and Aaron never “Aaron and Moses.” How slow we are to learn the perfectness of the word of God! Yet nothing is like it for simplicity and accessibility. Our difficulty is that the very familiarity of men with it hinders their taking notice of what is under their eyes. There it is: when our eyes are opened, we see how unique its character is. And this has an amazing effect upon the spiritual man, who nourishes himself on the sound words of God, because we are all apt otherwise to be careless and to use words lightly. If it is a great thing to enjoy the profit of good company, there is no company or converse like that of God. This is the way in which the Lord gives us simplicity, and at the same time a depth entirely beyond ourselves. How good the Lord that speaks to us about the things not of grace only but of nature! Do we as Christians quarrel with such matters? We acknowledge them, owning nature in its place; and quite right. It is all a vain thing to deny that which is right according to the order of nature. Always avoid one-sidedness. There is nothing more dangerous in the things of God. Give nature its place, and what belongs to it; but always maintain the superiority of grace in order to do so. And take care that, not only knowing and enjoying it, we walk suitably to grace: else it loses its character. Grace is then no more grace, but only a vain pretension -- the flippant use of words without power.

In Ex. 7 begins the great struggle, and wonders upon wonders awfully fall on the devoted land of Egypt. Observe, as to the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, that this was in no-wise the case before the pronounced infidelity of Pharaoh. God never compelled a man to be an unbeliever. In short, unbelief in the first instance is never the consequence of judicial hardness on God’s part. Is there no such thing then as hardening? Does not scripture mean that there is? Undoubtedly hardening there is. It is an equal error to suppose that God hardens a person when He first sends a testimony as to deny that He does harden after His testimony has been refused. The fact is, both are true, and this is just another instance of the importance of not taking up particular views of scripture, but of being guided and formed in our thoughts by all scripture.

God then sent a testimony to Pharaoh, as He does to everyone in some form or another. But man left to himself
invariably refuses the testimony of God. He knows it is God; he has the consciousness that he is doing wrong in refusing it; yet he does refuse because he does not like and dare not trust God, whose word interferes with everything that he likes. Hence man gives himself up to unbelief, and then God may either at that or a later time, according to His own wisdom, seal up a person in a judicial hardness which is a distinct positive act on God’s part. I hold therefore most strongly that hardening is not merely on man’s side, and in the judicial sense not on man’s at all, though no doubt the result of man’s sin. God hardens because man refuses His word. Thus the hardening is a judicial act on God’s part, which comes in after man has proved himself an unbeliever, and has persisted in it. It was so with Pharaoh, and his is a typical case, the permanent warning in the New Testament, as it is the first specified instance in the Old. It is the one which the apostle Paul quotes for this purpose. Consequently it is the standing witness of this solemn truth. And remember that this is not a mere exceptional fact. It is commoner than people imagine. It will be on a great scale in Christendom shortly (2 Thess. 2), as I have little doubt that it may be in many individual cases now, and has always been so. Thus it was when our Lord Jesus was here, and the presence of the Spirit, instead of preventing, confirmed it. Hence, whether on a great scale or in individual dealings of God, nothing can be more certain than that there is such an action on His part. At the same time it is never God Who makes man an unbeliever. Hardening is a judgment which comes when man persists in unbelief in the face of distinct and repeated testimony from God.

The ten plagues follow (Ex. 7–11), on which one or two general remarks may be made. They were particularly suited in the wisdom of God to humble Egypt. It was not only an infliction on the land; it was not only a deep pain and anguish to the natives, and this with increasing intensity; but it was a solemn contest between Jehovah and the gods of Egypt. The plagues were calculated to smite them most acutely in what constituted their religion. For instance, take the Nile: we know the boastfulness of Egypt in that river which they supposed to be the great earthly emblem of God. On the other hand it is well known what all these ancient nations thought of the light of the sun, and how preternatural darkness (with light for Israel in Goshen) must have struck them. Again, bodily cleanliness was no small part of heathenism which could do nothing for the soul: more particularly was it so with Egyptian heathenism. It is plain that the infliction of lice or gnats, if either be the meaning of the term — at any rate a loathsome insect which made life almost intolerable to man and beast -- was particularly humiliating to Egypt. Thus a few of those points are merely touched without entering into details; for it is evident that this would keep us longer than is suitable in what I propose for the present. In these repeated strokes we find then God dealing with the gods as well as with the men and habits of Egypt. The controversy was with their opposition to the true God, as well as with their oppression of His people.

Even rationalism does not in every case venture to deny the supernatural character of the phenomena related in Ex. 7–12. Some of the most sceptical are compelled to admit that the ten plagues were all actual and historical events. Their effort is to strip and reduce them to the uttermost by exalting circumstances, which bear a somewhat similar appearance either ordinarily or occasionally, to a measure of correspondence. Thus, alongside the first plague (Ex. 7:15-25), they put the fact that Ehrenberg in 1823 saw the inlet of the Red Sea, near Sinai, stained a blood-red color by cryptogamic plants. Did this kill the fish in the sea or make the waters to stink? Did it affect every pond and stream, nay every vessel of wood and stone? They cannot deny that there is all possible difference between the reddish tint of the Nile for some weeks in June, without one of these consequences as compared with so severe a blow in or about January on the river of their pride and idolatry, which had seen the cruel death of Israel’s male children.

Again, after that plague of blood had run its course in vain for seven days, that of frogs rose up from the streams, rivers, and ponds, and the land was covered with these actively disgusting objects, as the waters had shocked and sickened them before (Ex. 8:1-15). How humbling this second judgment must have been to a people who included frogs among their sacred animals -- to see them, an object of detestation, crowd their houses, and beds, and ovens, and kneading troughs! Never do these animals annoy the Egyptians at the beginning of the year; still less do they come and go at the command of a man like Moses.

The third and fourth plagues (in our version, lice and swarms of flies (Ex. 8:16-32), may be open to discussion as to their specific character; but there can be no doubt that they dealt with man and beast with increasing intensity and the more distressingly if they interfered with personal cleanliness, and made the killing of what they venerated needful in self-defense. The rationalist counts at least the first of these “a natural phenomenon of the country,” the wonder being its origination by Aaron and the exemption of the Israelites. He is thus more incredulous than the magicians who said to Pharaoh,

This is the finger of God {Ex. 8:19}. – not a mere combination of unusual circumstances with a natural phenomenon.

The fifth plague (Ex. 9:1-7), was a very heavy pestilence which at Moses’ word fell the next day on the cattle of Egypt, not on those of Israel. This was the sharper a blow as immediately before Pharaoh went back even from his promise of three days’ absence, Moses had pleaded the inexpediency of their sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes. How many victims fell now! It is well known what the ox and the sheep were in their eyes.

Then came the sixth judgment (Ex. 9:8-12), a boil breaking forth with blains on man and beast in all Egypt, and notably on the magicians who could not stand before Moses. Such a purulent eruption baffled their scrupulous avoidance of impurity. The vanity of their divinities was as manifest as of their own arts of healing.

Next, the seventh plague (Ex. 9:13-35), hail with thunder
and consuming fire, drew from Pharaoh the confession of his
and a promise to let the people go, broken by him as soon
as Jehovah heard the intercession of Moses. Perversity alone
could in this see phenomena ordinary in Egypt, let the time or
other circumstances be what they might.

The threat of the locusts to eat what remained from the
hail brought Pharaoh’s servants to their senses; but on the
demand of Moses that all should go, old and young, children
and cattle, to keep their feast to Jehovah (not a word of three
days now), they are driven out from before the king, and the
eighth blow falls all over the land. The powers of the air were
at the command of Jehovah and against Egypt (Ex. 10:1-20).

So still more solemnly in the preternatural darkness of the
ninth plague (Ex. 10:21-29). The sovereign who derived his
name from the sun availed nothing for all the land of Egypt,
while the darkness which might be felt was made visible in its
source by the light which all the children of Israel had in their
habitations.

It is sad to hear a so-called orthodox antagonist of
rationalism weaken the tenth infliction (Ex. 11) by the remark
that “it must not be inferred that none of the first-born
remained alive in the land, or that none besides the first-born
died.” And it is rank infidelity to say that “the eternal (?) laws
of nature are sufficient to effect whatever he intended to bring
about in the history of redemption.” It is to deny God’s word,
if not God Himself.

At last in Ex. 12 comes the grand decisive stroke, where
there was no appearance of second causes, and the hand of
God made itself felt in an unprecedented way. Murrain and
even hail were not such uncommon visitors in Egypt, still less
so were other plagues. It was impossible to deny the peculiarity of some of the plagues. At the same time all were
so distinctly according to His word, and fell one after another
with such alarming frequency and tremendous force on them,
that they confessed the hand of God. The very magicians
themselves owned themselves defeated; for whatever they
might do with their enchantments at first, they were soon
silenced. But at length comes the last plague inflicted, the
slaying of the first-born in the land, and with it the line of
demarcation still more evident between the friends and foes of
Jehovah. Even in the third and fourth plagues we find God
marking off His people. At first they may have been involved
in a general way, but gradually a separation is made more and
more plain. Now it was undeniable. Another plague might, if
not must, be the destruction of the nation. Israel must leave
now. Pharaoh had scorned Jehovah’s call for the homage of
His first-born Israel; and from the beginning had been warned
that if he refused to let him go,

behold, I will slay thy son, thy first-born (Ex. 4:22).

Heads of houses did fall afterwards at the Red Sea with
Pharaoh’s host; but the ten plagues were in the way of
preparatory chastenings, not the figure of so wide and
indiscriminate a judgment.

But the question which was decided that paschal night
affected the Jew not less than the Egyptian. God was there as
a Judge, dealing with man’s sin. How then could Israel
escape? This was what had to be set forth: a slain lamb
becomes the sole means of security — the sprinkled blood of
the lamb. There were other requisitions on God’s part which
showed that this had another and an infinitely more solemn
character than the preceding plagues. Not a fact only but a
type, still it was a type not of an earthly woe but of a
judgment before the eyes of God — judgment of sin. Hence
there were not merely insects, or the elements brought in, but
God employing a destroyer for the first-born of man and
beast. Here man had to face death, and that in what was
dearest to him — his first-born.

Hence the Passover is brought before us of which the
New Testament makes great account — the type of Christ the
Lamb of God sacrificed for us, with the striking
accompaniment of leaven absolutely excluded. Leaven
represents iniquity in its tendency to extend itself by
assimilating what was exposed to its action. This ordinance
then means the disallowance and putting away of all evil that
belongs to man in his fallen state. The flesh of the lamb was
to be eaten not raw or sodden, but roast with fire, the strong
and evident sign of fierce unsparing divine judgment. It must
and ought to be so; for herein Christ’s death met our sins and
God’s judgment. Thus and thus only was the Israelite to eat of
the lamb, sanctified by and to this holy feast, eating of its
roast flesh that night and leaving none till the morning, or, if,
aught remained, burning it with fire. It was a matter between
God and the soul, outside the domain of sense and nature. It
was apart from all common food. All the congregation of
Israel might and must eat it, but no stranger — unless
circumcised, no foreigner, no hired servant, but only he who
was bought and circumcised; and when eaten, bitter herbs
must accompany it — repentance on our part, the fruit of the
truth applied to us by grace.

38. Bishop Colenso (part i. ch. xi.) has heaped together objections to the
account of the Passover as weak as they are malicious. His main point seems
be that “in one single day, the whole immense population of Israel, as large
as that of London, was instructed to keep the Passover, and actually did keep
it.” For this the text not only gives no ground but furnishes its unequivocal
disproof. On the face of it the prescribed mode required the lamb to be taken
on the tenth day of the month of Abib and kept till the fourteenth, in the
evening of which it was killed. “This night” and “that night” can in no way
invalidate these directions, nor is their own meaning doubtful. Besides there
may have been notice given long before the tenth of Abib. Every one knows
the habit in Hebrew, and indeed other languages, for the speaker to throw
himself forward into the chief event in question, even if there had been no
express preliminaries which evince the futility of the statement. All the other
elements are exaggerated by the objector, the number of the lambs requisite,
as well as the degree of haste, which affected scarce anything but their bread,
as otherwise they stood ready for their move, which they were fully
expecting.

As to the difficulties raised in Bishop Colenso’s chaps. xx. xxi., the small
number of priests for their work, they are imaginary and prove great
attention to the facts in Scripture. Thus Aaron and his sons had no such duty
in the Passover, as we find in the extraordinary temple celebration recorded
in 2 Chron. 30:5. In Egypt it was essentially a family feast, and so probably
in the wilderness: certainly not one word then ties it to the presence or action
of the priests. Its family character appears in the New Testament also. The
Israelites who were not circumcised in the wilderness could not have found
work for Aaron and his sons; for that rite was the basis for all the rest, and
yet it was certainly neglected there and then.

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And thus then shall ye eat; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is Jehovah’s passover {Ex. 12:11}.

On the other hand the feast of the Passover did not comprehend in its type the full result of Christ’s work in comfort and blessing. There was no communion. As it is said of this feast elsewhere, “Every one went to his own tent;” so although it was here the house of the Israelite in the land of Egypt, still communion is not seen. In a certain sense what was set forth is yet more important, as it lies at the bottom of communion, without which there could be none according to God’s holy nature.

In short, the Passover was the judgment of sin before God. As He never loses sight of its need, so we never can make light of it without loss to our souls. Much as one rejoices through the mercy of God in that which is built upon it and is its complement, sweet and precious as it is to follow by the way of resurrection into heavenly glory itself, never forget for a moment that what stands alone in depth of suffering and in efficacious value before God is the death of Christ. This then is brought before us here with the utmost possible care; as the Spirit of God gives immense scope to the allusions elsewhere. Indeed, it is one of those feasts that are never to cease while souls are to be saved. Peculiar to the land of Egypt as the only feast that could be celebrated there, it was laid down specifically for the wilderness (Num. 9); and when Israel shall enter the land again, even when the time of glory arrives for the world, still there will be the feast of the Passover. So will it be for earthly people, when gathered back to God’s land here below. Thus the Passover has, above all, a fundamental and a permanent character beyond all other feasts. Hence therefore the children of God may surely gather what its antitype must be to God Himself.

But the subject is so familiar to us that we need not enlarge upon the minutiae of this feast. I will only add, that in Ex. 13 we find another thing -- a character stamped on the Passover, that the ordinance of the Passover. It is alleged by Dr. D. (Introd. O.T. i. 65,) that “according to Ex. 12:15, &c., the feast of unleavened bread was introduced before the exodus; but from 13:3, &c., we learn that it was instituted after that event at Succoth.” This latter statement is perfectly fictitious. Not a word implies that the feast (continued...)

The two things are here put together as flowing from the sense of a divinely wrought deliverance. This is remarkably evinced in the character now given them, as well as their preciousness with God. He who delivered them claimed them as His own. If the firstborn of an animal could not be sacrificed, it must like man’s firstborn be redeemed.

Sanctify unto me all the firstborn {Ex. 13:2}. This, as well as the connected eating of unleavened bread, is founded on the Passover.

But Ex. 14 brings before us another order of ideas. Though there can be no stable foundation without the sacrifice of Christ, in itself it does not give, but only lays the basis for, the full blessing of grace in redemption. Without it there is nothing good, righteous, or holy, as far as we are concerned; without it there is no adequate dealing with sin; without it there is no vindication of the majesty of God. Nevertheless peace is impossible if we have only that which answers to the Passover. The soul must enter into what is beyond, if we are to have real rest and enjoyment and communion. Hence we find here that God permits the full power of the enemy to be arrayed against Israel. They never were in greater alarm than after they had partaken of the paschal feast; but that alarm was used of God to show the total inability of Israel to cope with the difficulty. It was for the purpose of having the full power of Satan brought out against His people that He might demolish it for ever. And so He does. Pharaoh, his host and his chariots, -- all the flower of Egypt -- were there drawn up and ready to devour the poor children of Israel. Destruction in one way or another seemed to be inevitable. The sea was before them; they were hemmed in on every side, with Pharaoh and his host behind them: how was it possible to conceive a door of deliverance there? God there and then was about to accomplish a deliverance without precedent, which remains the bright and strong ground for counting on such a God. Thus, whatever difficulties might rise before Israel, no matter what their source or character, the day of the Red Sea is always, whether in the Psalms or the prophets, the point to which the heart of an instructed Israelite turned. It was there that God showed, not merely what must be in order that He should be able righteously to abstain from judging (and hence destroying) a sinful people, but what He is in defense of His people against all their foes, were they the mightiest.

Accordingly then this is the great truth taught in Ex. 14; 39. It is a fair question, which has perplexed translators and commentators in ancient as well as modern times, what is meant by the Hebrew word translated “harnessed” (with the marginal alternative “five in a rank”) in Ex. 13:18. Bishop Colenso (part 1, chap. ix.) will have it to mean “armed,” in flagrant inconsistency with the context, because it is so taken elsewhere; and this in order to urge the impossibility of 600,000 “warriors.” But even Gesenius and Knobel take the word otherwise, and so do Onkelos and Aben Ezra, as Dr. Mc Cau has shown. It is unwarrantable, therefore, to reason on what is so precarious. The men might be “girt” or “in regular order” without all being armed, and very far indeed from being all “warriors.”

40. It is alleged by Dr. D. (Intro. O.T. i. 65,) that “according to Ex. 12:15, &c., the feast of unleavened bread was introduced before the exodus; but from 13:3, &c., we learn that it was instituted after that event at Succoth.” The latter statement is perfectly fictitious. Not a word implies that the feast (continued...) was instituted in Succoth, the mention of which is severed by three important verses (17-19) from the close of all that refers to the feast. It is evident that there is an addition of consequence in chapter 13 to what Jehovah had prescribed in chapter 12. No date or place is named. It may have been, and probably was, after the sons of Israel left Egypt, as it throughout supposes the feast already instituted. Here too there is no excuse for a different author or document, as the codicil of chapter 13 is Jehovahistic equally with chapter 12, and adds the fresh thought of the sanctification to Jehovah of all the first-born in Israel, whether of man or of beast. The males were to be His, and must be either sacrificed or redeemed. The tenor of Dr. D’s statement is the more remarkable, because the reference to Succoth occurs in a distinct clause that follows where is only Elohim, after which we have Jehovah once more as before.
and it is here that God takes the place properly of Savior-God. Salvation always means a great deal more than that my sins are judged in the death of Christ. Salvation means that I am brought consciously to know God in the triumph of redemption by Christ for me. Hence it will be found that in the doctrine of the New Testament there is never the allowance of such a thought as that salvation is only the beginning of the blessing. People not imbued with scriptural truth are often apt to talk of salvation in a slighting or at least superficial way. They speak of a person perhaps as “not happy; but at any rate he is saved.” Never do we meet with language like this in the New Testament. Salvation means known conscious deliverance. It is not merely a good hope of being delivered, but that the person himself by grace has no doubt about it. Of this people often lose the true force by an unscriptural phraseology. Indeed the denial of salvation as a present status is part of the current coin of Christendom, and the truth is opposed in one way or another by the parties who otherwise oppose each other. Arminianism naturally resists it, as its doctrine causes salvation to turn largely on man’s deserts; while Calvinism would consent to salvation in “the purpose of God” or some jargon of the kind, while meanwhile the object of it may have no comfort, nor solid footing whatever for his soul. Far removed from both is the truth and the language of scripture; and to scripture we must hold.

Thus in Rom. 5 salvation is very clearly referred to, and put in full contradistinction to what God has wrought for us by the blood of Christ. The apostle says,

God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us: much more then, being now justified by his blood {Rom. 5:8, 9}.

It is clear that salvation here is not simply that a person is purged from guilt, but the real application of Christ’s work in all its fulness; only that we have it not yet for our bodies.

We shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son (this was the beginning), much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life {Rom. 5:9, 10}.

It is plain therefore, that salvation requires and involves not only the death but the life of Christ; that salvation supposes not merely guilt removed through His blood, but ourselves maintained, and to be brought through all difficulties, past, present, and future. Thus it is a complete deliverance from all that can be brought against us; not a going through the world with hope of protective mercy, which is the notion of man, but a complete victory over the foe present and future.

The type or principle of this we have here for the first time when Moses says this day

and speaks about the salvation of Jehovah; and again, later on in the chapter,

Jehovah saved Israel {Ex. 14:30}.

How beautiful the accuracy of scripture! We might have put in that Jehovah saved Israel on the night of the paschal lamb; but nowhere then is such an expression heard. No; they were sheltered, but in the true sense not yet “saved.” Salvation means the known destruction of their foes, God having risen up in the majesty of His power, and manifested it completely in their favor. Here they were clearly on the simple ground of grace; and immediately afterwards we have the triumphant song of Moses and the children of Israel: --

I will sing unto Jehovah, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. Jah is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation (Ex. 15:1-2).

This last phrase then is not merely a casual expression; it is the purposed and suited language of the Holy Ghost. We are meant to take notice that now we can speak of salvation, not before.

But there is more than this. There are some weighty consequences of this wonderful work of God, and one of them is this:

He is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation {Ex. 15:2}.

It has been often remarked, and very justly, that although Genesis is so prolific of the various counsels and ways of God, there is the more marked an absence of the special truth of Exodus in it. Thus, although we have sacrifice as such, covenant and other kindred dealings of God, redemption in its full import at least is never brought before us in that book. I am not aware of anything of the sort. By redemption I mean not merely a price paid to purchase us that we may belong to God (this indeed is not the proper import of the word), but rather in its precise meaning this too that God has broken the power of the adversary, ransoming and freeing us for Himself. Such is redemption. I grant you that to the Christian both these truths are made good. He is bought with a price, as we are often told in scripture, and we know it. But the effect of the purchase is that we become the bondmen of the Lord; the effect of redemption is that we become the freemen of the Lord. As ever, man is quick to put the two things in opposition. He cannot understand how a person can be both a freeman and a bondman. But the truth is certain, and both clearly revealed. The reason why a man finds it hard to put the two truths together is that he trusts himself and not God, and this because he wants to be free from the restraints of His will and word. It wants but little thought and reflection for a person to understand that each of them is not only quite just, but that they are both thoroughly compatible and harmonious. Can we not comprehend, brethren, that we were under the power of an enemy of God? In the face of this, when enslaved to him, redemption was the putting forth of God’s own power in Christ in a way suitable to His majesty and holiness, in which not a single claim was left unsettled, not a single requisite was not answered, not a single sin of man but was
judged, yet all and every quality in God was honored, and we are brought out triumphant and free. Thus we are made to be the Lord’s freemen; and what should we do if Christ’s redemption could not? He did indeed accomplish it, but at all cost to Himself.

But there is more than this in the work of Christ which broke the power of Satan, that by death he might destroy him that had the power of death \{Heb. 2:14\}.

He has perfectly annulled his power, and met all on God’s part needful for us; but there is another thought. It is of all consequence that we should feel that we are immediately responsible to God according to the new, intimate, and holy relationship which is ours in virtue of redemption. We are bought with a price. (And what a price!) Thus we belong to Him -- we are not our own, but His. These two truths combine in the Christian; but there is this difference between them -- that the world also is

bought,

and every man in it; whereas it would be false to say that every man in the world is

redeemed.

If we are subject to scripture, we must say that there is no such thing as universal redemption; but we must confess the truth of universal purchase. 41 Christ’s blood has purchased the whole world with every soul and every other creature in it. Therefore in 2 Pet. 2, for instance, we hear wicked heretics spoken of as denying the Lord \(\delta επστη\), not that redeemed, but “that bought them.” The Sovereign Master made them His property: they are a part of that which He purchased to Himself by blood. They do not own it themselves; they treat the Master’s claims and rights with indifference and contempt, as every unbeliever does. The believer is not only bought by the precious blood of Christ, but delivered from the power of the enemy, just as Israel was in type here. The two things are therefore as clear as they are also harmonious. The effect of the one is that the enemy has no longer the slightest claim to us, or power over us; the effect of the other is that the Lord has a perfect right to us in every particular. Let us own the grace and wisdom of our God in both.

What Christ has done is the right thing as well for us as for the glory of God; but then there is another result which should be noticed as the consequence of redemption, and so, beginning to appear in this chapter, it is brought out more fully elsewhere. It is now, after redemption, that God reveals Himself as “glorious in holiness.” He never did before. No one could be expected to believe this (if he did not look into the Bible and bow to the truth), that God could have written a whole book and never once have spoken of holiness before this. That God should not have touched on the matter in a book so fertile of truths as Genesis would hardly be credible to a mere theologian. But when we begin to be subject to the truth, instead of getting up technical theology, when we look into that which is divine, not the mere science that man has made of it to the utter havoc of its bloom and beauty, -- when we search into the word of God, we then see and enjoy its perfection. Holiness in Scripture is as much made to depend on redemption as God’s being able righteously to come and dwell in our midst. How could He do this till sin was gone? And how till redemption could sin be gone for God to have a holy resting-place in the midst of men?

Here then having the typical redemption of Israel from Egypt -- the greatest and fullest type of it in the Old Testament, immediately after (without even allowing a single chapter to intervene) we hear of God glorious in holiness, as well as of a habitation prepared for Him. This again is not an immaterial expression by the way, but bound up with the truth now first brought before us:

Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Jehovah, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the sanctuary, O Jehovah, which thy hands have established. Jehovah shall reign for ever and ever \{Ex. 15:17, 18\}. 42

Thus the dwelling of God amongst His people is revealed immediately after we have the express type of redemption. Now in Christianity this has a most blessed antitype. Not that there will not be the dwelling of God in the midst of His people by-and-by; but the peculiarity of our calling is, that we wait for none of our characteristic joys: we have all in Christ now by the power of the Spirit before we go to heaven. We have in principle everything while we are on the earth. We have what belongs to heaven while we are here. We wait for nothing except Christ Himself in actual person to take us above. Of course by many this will scarce be understood. Hope undoubtedly has its full place; for we suffer still, and Christ Himself is gone to prepare a place for us, and is coming again to receive us to Himself, and that we may be glorified together. But what else is there that we have not? All the promises in Him are Yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. I grant you that my body is not yet

41. The Authorised Version does not distinguish as it evidently ought between ἄγιορὲξω or ἐξαγιορέξω on the one hand, and λυτρώω on the other, meaning “I buy,” and “I redeem.” God makes both true in Christ of the believer; but purchase is unlimited, as an examination of the Greek Testament will convince any soul who reads the word of God with a subject spirit; while redemption has its defined objects.

42. The unbelief expressed in Dr. D.’s Introd. to the Old Testament here for instance is astounding. The author boldly says, “The Song of Moses in the fifteenth chapter was not written by Moses himself. It is a Palestinian production. If any part of it was sung at the time the Hebrews passed over, it was probably the words of the first verse . . . Allusions are made in it to a time considerably after the song is said to have been first sung; for example in the seventeenth verse . . . Here the temple on mount Zion seems to be meant. If so, the poem was not prior to Solomon’s time” (i. p. 226)! Thus, as it is an axiom with these men, that there can be no prediction of events which God alone could foresee, and as this song clearly anticipates what was not realized till the reign of David’s son, it must be as late as his days at least; and Ex. 14 is pronounced to be later still, because the hand of the Jehovist appears in it, not in the fifteenth! Can there be more absurd trifling than the sentence that Ex. 15 (“the poem as we now have it”) is Elohistic as contrasted with Ex. 14?
changed, nor yours; but then we have got infinitely better than even the body changed for us if alone; we have Christ Himself, and this risen and in God’s presence on high. Therefore the change in the body is the mere consequence of what we have already; whereas Christ in heavenly glory as the fruit of redemption and of God’s righteousness is the hinge of all that will glorify God and secure the blessing, not of the Old Testament saints and the church only, but of Israel, the nations, man, the earth, heaven, and all things for ever, around the mighty center of all. In Him is concentrated the full power of the change that will follow in due time, as He is the firstfruits of that glorious harvest.

So it is with all other truths; and amongst the rest with this, that God, instead of waiting to have us in heaven, and taking up His abode in our midst there, makes us to be His habitation while we are here -- a proof of His love and of the perfectness of Christ’s redemption incomparably greater than waiting till we are actually changed and taken to heaven, because here He deigns to dwell with us spite of all we are. We are here in the place where we may, alas! think, feel, speak, and act unworthily of such a habitation; and yet in the face of all He here deigns to dwell in us. If He thus dwells in us, is not this one of the capital truths which we are called to make good in our faith and practice day by day? When we come together as His assembly, should we not remind ourselves that we are not only members of the body of Christ, but God’s habitation through the Spirit? When held thus in faith it becomes a most practical test for souls; for nothing should be said or done in that assembly but what is suitable to God’s dwelling-place.

In the latter part of the chapter there is another topic. After the triumph the children of Israel are led by Moses into the wilderness where there was no water. A most astonishing thing it might seem at first sight, that after having been thus blessed, the first thing the people find is a wilderness where there is no water; and that, when they do come to water, it is so bitter that they cannot drink it.

Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? {Ex. 15:23, 24}.

But the resource was at hand. He cried unto Jehovah; and Jehovah showed him a tree which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them {Ex. 15:25}.

God was showing that the privileges and power of redemption in Christ are one thing, and the necessary practise that follows from redemption another. But we are now in the place where all this is put in fact to the test; and the only power to sweeten what is bitter is by bringing in Christ. Else we find either no water whatever, or the water brackish and undrinkable. Thus we have to make death and resurrection good in our practise, learning the reality of the wilderness and the utter want of all power of refreshment in the place and circumstances through which we are passing. We owe everything to Christ.

After this is proved, abundant refreshment is given. How truly of the Lord!

They came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters {Ex. 15:27}.

But there is another lesson also. Whatever may be the refreshment by the way, the Lord sets forth in a full and distinct manner the need of absolute dependance on Christ in another form for support all the wilderness through. Here comes in that most remarkable type of Christ personally given as the bread of life for the people of God to feed on. This is in Ex. 16. 42 It has been well remarked that it is as connected

43. It is alleged that there is “a double description of the manna in Ex. 16:11, &c., and Num. 11:7-9. In the former it is said that it fell from the air, was white like coriander seed, and melted if the sun shone upon it; in the latter, that it could be pound (sic) in mills, or beaten in mortars, or baked in pans, and prepared in cakes. Thus two (?) writers appear. Had one and the same author described this extraordinary food of the Israelites, he would not have presented such varying accounts. Kalisch (Commentary on Exodus, p. 213 et seq.) can only explain the fact by assuming that two sorts of manna are meant; what he calls 'air-manna' and 'tree-manna.' He omits to notice the true cause of diversity in the description -- difference of authorship. The tamarix manifera or tarafa shrub yields the substance in question by the puncture of an insect, the coccus maniparus, Ex. 16:9-26 is Elohistic; Num. 11 is Jehovistic.”

"There is also a double account of the miracle of the quails in Ex. 16 and Num. 11. The former represents them as a boon given by God to satisfy the people’s hunger, and convince them of their dependance on the covenant God (vv. 4, 12). The gift of manna to the people is also connected with that of the quails. Both were granted together in the second month of the first year after the exodus. The latter account is very different. The quails are brought by a wind from the sea, and the eating of them produces a plague among the people. Because the people lusted, this food was sent in anger to destroy them. The book of Numbers does not contain the least hint that quails had been previously sent to the people; but the narrative leaves the impression that this was their first and only bestowal, a year after the time specified in Ex. 16 at Kibroth-hattaavah, after the people had become tired of the manna. Is it not probable then that the writer in Exodus puts two different facts together which were separate in time; viz., the sending of quails and manna? It is no improbable that the writer in Exodus puts two different facts together which were separate in time; viz., the sending of quails and manna? It is no explanation to assert that there is nothing improbable in supposing that the Israelites twice murmured for flesh, and that God twice sent them quails. The manna of Num. 11 renders this supposition extremely improbable. Part of Ex. 16 is Elohistic; Num. 11 is Jehovistic.

First it is not the fact on the ground of rationalistic theory that one is a whit more Elohistic than the other: Jehovah is the term used in Ex. 16 as certainly and exclusively as in Num. 11. Next the difference of description is not only not inconsistent, but most natural in the circumstances respectively. When first given, its appearance to the eye, and its novelty suggesting its air-manna, not as "air-manna," but as the exudation from a tree, which is medicine, not food.
with this we have the Sabbath introduced, type of the rest of God. This is alone marked out and secured for us by Him who came down from heaven. Christ Himself is the manna of the people of God. Elsewhere we see Christ, not humbled, but heavenly and in heaven the food for the people viewed as in heavenly places. But it is well to note at the end of the chapter the omer of manna laid up before Jehovah for the generations of Israel, which Aaron laid up before the Testimony. It is Christ the hidden manna, Christ in His humiliation never to be forgotten by our hearts.

The force of this is made still more manifest by what follows. In Ex. 17 we have not Christ given from above, the bread of God for us while we are in the world, but the rock smitten with Moses’ rod when the waters flow abundantly. It was the last place where man would have looked for refreshing streams. But the rod of God smites the rock, and the people drink of the waters it gave out. 44 But the name of the place was called Massah and Meribah, because of Israel’s strife and tempting of Jehovah, saying, Is Jehovah among us or not? Immediately after they came into conflict at Rephidim with Amalek, the proud enemy of Israel. Joshua (who always represents Christ acting by the Spirit) fought and won, while Aaron and Hur held up the heavy hands of Moses on the top of the hill.

43. (…continued)
fully displayed to his shame his ignorance of God. Psa. 105:40, 106:14, 15, might be profitably compared by friends or enemies of the Bible. The one will find the amplest confirmation of Ex. 16 and Num. 11 as distinct accounts illustrating sovereign grace and creature-responsibility; the other can hardly avoid seeing a further and independent proof of his ruinous unbelief. The psalmist sets forth at full length the distinction which pseudo-criticism would avoid seeing a further and independent proof of his ruinous unbelief. The illustrating sovereign grace and creature-responsibility; the other can hardly find the amplest confirmation of Ex. 16 and Num. 11 as distinct accounts of many facts which fall under the principles already indicated.

44. “Another duplicate account,” says Dr. D. (Intro. O.T. i. 63), “is in Ex. 17 and Num. 20:1-13 of the water brought out of the rock, and the origin of the name Meribah. As the same name could not be given twice, both must have grown out of one. It has been ascertained that Ex. 17:2-7 is Jehovahistic; while Num. 20:1-13 contains portions of different documents.” A more unintelligent criticism it is impossible to conceive. The point of both histories is absolutely lost for those who fail to see a contrast in them, instead of both having grown out of one. We have apostolic authority for believing that the rock is Christ. In Exodus the rock was by divine direction smitten -- smitten by Moses’ rod of judgment. The gift of the Spirit is from Christ after He was smitten, and suffered for us. In Numbers, on the contrary, Moses was told to take the rod (i.e. Aaron’s rod of priestly grace from before Jehovah), and he and Aaron to speak to the rock before the eyes of the people, when it should give forth water. But there they failed. For while Moses took the rod, Aaron’s rod as Jehovah commanded him, he smote the rock twice with his rod. Thus they failed in faith to sanctify Jehovah before Israel. Smiting was as wrong now as it was right before, and so consequently was the application of Moses’ judicial rod. The repetition of the work of humiliation is uncalled for. Had Moses only spoken with the rod of the priesthood in his hand, the sign of grace which brought forth fruit out of death, all had been according to God’s mind and the provision of His mercy to bring a weak and faulty people through the wilderness. It is not true that there are different documents in Num. 20:1-13 any more than in Ex. 17:2-7: “Jehovah” characterizes both as any one can ascertain.

That any difficulty should be raised about the name “Meribah” being used twice on those two contrasted occasions where man behaved equally ill, God equally in grace, only proves the disposition to cavil, especially as on the first occasion their chiding gained them a specific name, which was not given the second time.

And Jehovah said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua; for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven {Ex. 17:14}.

The bearing of this on the Christian is most evident. The free gift of the Spirit of God to us in our thirst and weariness depends simply on Christ suffering for us -- Christ coming under judicial dealing, the rod of God as applied to that rock. As then the living streams flowed, so the Holy Ghost, we know, was not given till Christ was glorified as the result of redemption. But then what follows this is not the Sabbath, but conflict with the enemy. Amalek has to be fought. And here comes in another principle of immense importance. For the believer it is not prowess or wisdom that secures the victory. It is entirely dependent on the uplifted hands of the Mediator on high. Here Moses was but the type, and consequently there is feebleness. On either side Aaron and Hur support his arms when heavy, and thus victory is secured for the people of God. Whatever may be the power, there is no taking them out of the place of dependence. They are made to feel the necessity of dependence on the one who is not in the fight, but outside it, and above it all. They must fight; but victory turns on the one who is pleading for them on the hill. Need I add that we have a better than Moses, who requires neither Aaron nor Hur to support His arm in interceding for us? Nevertheless it remains true, that although the victory is assured, the fight must be maintained to the very last.

And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi: For he said, Because Jah hath sworn that Jehovah will have war with Amalek from generation to generation {Ex. 17:16}.

This is a war which must be without intermission maintained by His people; but it is Jehovah’s war. What shall man do to us?

The last of these chapters that I would now notice is the typical picture of the scene of glory; and there too is seen the Gentile in singular prominence -- Jethro eating bread with the elders of Israel. Thus there are all the great elements of the future kingdom. We have the type of Christ; we have Israel in their proper place and order; we have the Gentile represented there. This will be found in the reign of glory that is coming. But it is well to direct our attention to the order of the millennial day, foreshown in the regulations made by the legislator for the due administration of justice among the people called to be the display of Jehovah’s will in earthly righteousness. The Gentile will unfeignedly rejoice for all the goodness Jehovah will have done to Israel, delivering them from the hand of all enemies from first to last. The inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness when His judgments are in the earth, and will then know with Jethro that Jehovah is greater than all gods, for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly [judgment came] upon them. And He shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Jehovah, and

45 Is not this literally, Because the (or a) hand (is) on the throne of Jah, war (is) from Jehovah with Amalek from generation to generation? The Authorised Version gives the sense.

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His name one. None but God could have drawn the picture. It is only to be read in the light of Christ and of God’s revelations about Him: all then is clear and plain. And there cannot be a more affecting feature than that the very people to whom these living oracles were committed are those who see least in them, unless it be those apostates from Christianity, who borrow but exceed the unbelieving thoughts of the Jews, and then vaunt their destructive system as critical and rational. What beauty can they trace in that which has been occupying us? It must be so because of their rejection and scorn of Christ, whereas the whole secret of entering into the mind of God is that we know and have believed His Son -- that we have received Him as indeed the Savior of the world, as was confessed by the Samaritans when they heard Him themselves. The Holy Ghost can then lead on in the growing discernment of His image impressed on each incident which is made to be the means of setting forth His glory in the written word. How far does Christendom, more than the Jews, own either salvation by grace, the gift of the Spirit, or the kingdom when Christ appears in glory?

May the Lord then grant us unfeigned and growing confidence in all that which He is!

In the next part of the book of Exodus is a change of the greatest magnitude; but we shall find also that God never forgets His own people. Although circumstances may alter, He abides alone wise and alone good. May we delight in all He has given us!
In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai {Ex. 19:1}. Up to this point all the dealings of God have been the simple application and outflow of His own grace. This is all the more striking too, because even after the redemption of the people from Egypt there are grievous faults, unbelief, complaints, and murmurs; nevertheless, not a blow, not a single answer on God’s part save in tender mercy towards a poor and failing people. All changes now.

The reason is manifest. They left the ground of the grace of God, which they had in no wise appreciated. Their conduct proved that His grace had not at all entered into their hearts. It was a perfectly righteous thing therefore that God should propose terms of law. Had He not done so, we should not have had duly raised the solemn question of man’s competence to take the ground of his own fidelity before God. Not a soul that has been since brought to the knowledge of God but what at least ought to have profited -- in point of fact, must have profited by this grave lesson. It is true that God had taken every care to show His own mind about it. From the time that man fell, He presented grace as the only hope for a sinner. But man was insensible, and therefore, insomuch as his heart was continually taking the place of self-righteousness, God’s law put him thoroughly to the test. This accordingly was proposed. Had there been any true understanding of their own state in the sight of God they had confessed that, however rightful the obligation to render obedience to the law, they being unrighteous could only be proved guilty under such a proof. The test must have brought inevitable ruin. But they had no such thoughts of themselves, more than real knowledge of God.

Hence therefore, no sooner does God propose to them that they should obey His law as the condition of their blessing at His hands, than they at once accept the terms:

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine {Ex. 19:5}.

The result soon appears in their ruin; but Jehovah shows that He knew from the first, before any result appeared, their inability to stand before Him:

Lo, says He to Moses,

I come unto thee in a thick cloud; that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever {Ex. 19:9}.

But in this chapter, and indeed in the next still more, the people entreat that God’s voice should not speak to them any more.

Then (Ex. 20) are uttered those wonderful ten commandments which are the great center of divine communications through Moses -- the fundamental expression of God’s law. On this, being so thoroughly familiar to all, I of course do not enlarge. We know from our Lord Jesus its moral summary and essence -- the love of God, and the love of man. But it was presented here for the most part in a way that betrayed the condition of man -- not in positive precepts but in negative ones -- a most humbling proof of man’s estate. He loved sin so well that God had to interdict it. In the greater part of the ten commandments, in short, it was not “Thou shalt,” but

Thou shalt not {Ex. 20}.

That is, it was a prohibition of man’s will. He was a sinner, and nothing else.

A few words on the law may be well here. It may be looked at in its general and historical bearing, more abstractly as a moral test.

First, God was dealing with Israel in their responsibility as witnesses of Jehovah, the one true self-existing God, the almighty God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His relationship was with them as they then were, redeemed from Egypt by His power and brought to Himself indeed, but only after an outward sort, neither born of God, nor justified. They were a people in the flesh. They had been wholly insensible to His ways of grace in leading them out of Egypt to Sinai. They lost sight of His promises to the fathers. They stood in their own strength to obey the law of God, as ignorant of their impotence or of His holy majesty. Accordingly we may regard the law as a whole, consisting not only of moral claims but of national institutes, ordinances, statutes, and judgments under which Israel were put. These consequently were to form and regulate them as a people under His special government, God suiting them to their condition and in no way revealing His own nature as He afterwards did personally in the Word made flesh in the New Testament as a full display of His mind, and in the Christian individually or the church corporately as responsible to represent Christ, like Israel in relation to the tables of stone (2 Cor. 3). Hence we can understand the earthly, external, and temporal character of the legal
economy. There were believers before it and all through; but this of course wholly distinct from Judaism. It was now a question of a nation, and not of individuals merely, thus governed -- of one nation in the midst of many which were to behold in it the consequences of fidelity or the lack of it toward the law of Jehovah. The Old Testament proves, and indeed the New Testament also, how utterly Israel failed, and what the consequences have been alike in the justice and in the grace of God.

But, secondly, the law is a test morally and individually. This always abides; for the law is lawful if a man use it lawfully. Christianity teaches its value instead of neutralizing it. It is false that the law is dead. It is not thus that the lawfully. Christianity teaches its value instead of neutralizing it. This always abides; for the law is lawful if a man use it lawfully. Christianity teaches its value instead of neutralizing it. It is false that the law is dead. It is not thus that the law is dead. Christianity teaches its value instead of neutralizing it. Such was no doubt the doctrine of those whom the apostle censures as wishing to be law-teachers, understanding neither what things they say nor whereof they stoutly affirm. It is not Christianity to talk of "deficiencies of the Spirit," any more than of "still remaining tendencies to sin;" still less to call in the discipline of the law to mend matters. Is it not known that for a righteous man (which assuredly the believer is) law is not in force, but for lawless and insubordinate, the ungodly and sinful? {1 Tim. 1:8-11}. They that are of Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. It is a question of mortifying our members which are on earth, on the ground of our being dead, and of walking by the Spirit, even as we live by Him, and of those not in anywise fulfilling flesh's lust. Thus, if the law be the power of sin, grace is of holiness. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ.

However, we find that God was pleased to give subsequently and separately, but yet in connection with the ten words, certain ordinances which concerned Israel in their worship.

All the people then saw the thunderings and the lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, and stood afar off, asking that not God but Moses should speak with them. He accordingly drew near into the thick darkness; for so God dealt with Israel as a people in the flesh. For the Christian it is not so. The veil is rent; and we walk in the light as He is in the light. Yet even then Jehovah, while warning against making gods of silver and gold, deigned to direct them to make to Him an altar of ground for burnt-offerings and peace-offerings: if of stone two prohibitions instruct His people. It must not be of hewn stone, as their work would profane it; neither must the Israelite go up by steps, as thereby his nakedness would be manifested. Grace covers through the expiation of Christ, as it flows in virtue of God's work and in maintaining God's order.

In the beginning of Ex. 21 we find the type of the servant. There cannot be a more striking illustration of the truth that Christ is the continual object of the Holy Ghost than that, even in these temporary ordinances, God cannot refrain from looking onward to His Son. No doubt it was connected with the earth, and what was in itself anything but a condition suitable to the mind of God. It is the condition of a slave; nevertheless even there God has Christ before Him. If a Hebrew servant were bought, he was to serve for six years, -- in the seventh to go out free for nothing.

If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have borne him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever {Ex. 21:3-6}.

Such was the choice of Jesus -- not to be merely a servant here on the earth for a time -- He has chosen of His own gracious will to be servant for ever. No doubt He cannot but be a divine person, the Son, as He is also the exalted Lord; but He is nevertheless by His own grace the servant for ever. Even in glory we shall know Him thus. What is He doing now? He gave a sample of it before He went up on high. When the time was come, He took a basin of water and a towel, and washed His disciples' feet. What they knew not then, they were to know hereafter, as we know it now. Intimacy with what is unseen and heavenly is quite as much the portion of a Christian and even more characteristically so than the knowledge of what passes around us now. We ought to know heaven better than the earth. We may know and ought to judge what is passing in the world, though it be through an imperfect medium; but we know heaven and heavenly things from God. It is not merely as having the word that reveals heaven; but we know it from Him who comes from heaven and is above all, and testifies what He has seen and heard; we know it through the Holy Ghost who has come down from it, and hence should know it better than the earth, and the things of the world which ensnare the flesh. But looking onward to the day of glory that is coming, when the Lord will be publicly manifested, and we manifested with Him, changed into His glorious likeness, it might have been thought that surely His service will cease then. But not so: it will take a new shape. He is the servant of His own choice for ever. As He will never cease to be God, He will never cease to be man. In His love He is become a servant for ever; and He loves to be so.

After this follow the general institutions of the law, which mainly insist on retribution. Advantage must not be taken of the weak or subject; violence cannot go unpunished, any more than dishonor where we owe reverence; responsibility for
what is allowed, were it but a mischievous brute; restitution
must be made, and this double, fourfold, or even fivefold,
according to the wrong; neither a witch nor an offender
unnaturally could live; neither stranger nor widow nor orphan
must be vexed or afflicted; neither poor must be burdened, nor
judges reviled; but God is to be honored with the first of the
fruits, and of the sons, as well as of the cattle. Israel are to
approve themselves as holy men to God. False report and
 testimony are forbidden, were a multitude to lead the way; as
on the other hand there must be no partiality to the poor man’s
cause, nor a refusal to help an enemy, nor falsehood, nor
bribery, nor oppression. The seventh year was to be enjoyed
as the land’s Sabbath, even as the seventh day by each
Israelite, who must avoid naming false gods, but keep the due
feasts thrice a year to the true God, not offering blood with
leavened bread, nor letting the fat remain till the morning. A
prohibition occurs of a peculiar kind, and is repeated not only
in a later part of this book, but also in Deuteronomy:

Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother’s milk
{Ex. 23:19}.

God would guard His people from an outrage in comeliness,
were it even about a dumb or dead animal; as Satan triumphs
in all that is abnormal and unnatural in the superstitions which
 usurp the place of the truth, and are bound up with idolatry.
His angel is promised, not only to keep and lead Israel, but to
bring them in, spite of the doomed Canaanites, who should be
 driven out: they should have no covenant with them or their
gods (Ex. 21-23). These points do not call for particular
 remarks.

Along with them there is the greatest possible care for the
maintenance of one true God -- an immense principle. No
doubt the time was not yet come for God to reveal Himself as
He is. Into that wondrous knowledge we are brought by the
Son come down here below; and above all by the Holy Ghost,
now that Christ is gone up on high. For in point of fact, when
God was only known as the one God, however true this may be,
He could not really be known as He is. Now we do so
know Him. We know Him better than even His earthly people
will know Him by and by. The knowledge of Israel in the
millennium will be genuine, for they shall be all taught of
the Son by the Holy Ghost. This I maintain to be peculiar
 to Christianity in all its fulness. When God the Father shall have
accomplished His present purpose here below, then will be
called to meet the Lord those among whom the Spirit is
thus making known God; and after that the ordinary dealings
of God will resume their course through this world. No doubt
all was advancing as regards the world; but that which was
brought to us now was before the world, and altogether above
the world in its own nature. How greatly blessed then is the
Christian, and what the manner and measure of the worship
and the walk which become those to whom grace has given
such a knowledge of God!

At the end of these communications a call is given Moses
to come up to Jehovah (Ex. 24).

And he said unto Moses, Come up unto Jehovah,
thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of
the elders of Israel, and worship ye afar off
{Ex. 24:1}.

There is distance, even though they are called to this place of
distinction.

And Moses alone shall come near Jehovah, but they
shall not come nigh, neither shall the people go up
with him {Ex. 24:2}.

And there the solemn compact into which Israel had passed is
renewed. All the people answer when the words and
judgments are pronounced,

All the words which Jehovah hath said will we do
{Ex. 24:3}.

They promise obedience, but it is obedience of the law. Now
we must always bear in mind that, though in the Christian
walking aught the righteousness of the law will surely be
fulfilled, never has Christianity either a legal principle or a
legal character: not a legal principle because it flows from the
known grace of God to the soul; not a legal character because
it is consistency with Christ risen from the dead, not merely
with the Ten Commandments. But inasmuch as Christ differed
from Moses, as grace differs from law; as that which suits
God the Father known in heaven, though manifesting Himself
upon earth, differs from a process of mere dealing with the
first man according to righteous claim; so it is with the
Christian man: while faithful to Christ, as he knows Him, he
will never do anything which the law could possibly condemn.
Against the fruits of the Spirit there is no law, as the apostle
so emphatically says to the Galatians. But then the fruits of the
Spirit can never be attained by the law; nor are they even
contemplated by a legal measure.

In short therefore the children of Israel stood on the
ground of man in the flesh; and man in the flesh, as he is a
sinful being, can neither deny nor accomplish his obligation to
do the will of God. As surely as God is, man’s conscience bears witness to Him. If the true God deigns to give a law to man, it must be an unimpeachably wise and worthy law adapted to the condition of man, as far as a law possibly can be; and such is God’s law — holy, just, and good. But the difficulty is this, that man being a sinner is as far as possible from ability to meet God’s law; for how indeed can there be any real stable bond between a bad man and a good law? There lay the insuperable difficulty once; but now grace perfectly meets it, and meets it in a way which evinces alike the goodness and the wisdom of God.

Law is essentially incapable of helping, because being only a claim on God’s part, and a definition of His demands, it can only condemn him whose condition makes due obedience impossible. It is evident that law as such, first of all, has no object to present to man. It can press duty to God and man on pain of death, but it has no object to reveal. Secondly, it cannot give life; and this is another necessity of man. In addition to atonement, these are the two urgent wants of fallen humanity. Without life it is impossible for one to produce that which is according to God; and without a worthy object, nay without a divine object presented, there can be nothing to draw out divine affections. As divine life alone can have affections according to God, so a divine object alone can either act on those affections or minister to them. Now this is exactly what grace does in Christ. He who has wrought expiation for our sins is our life, and at the same time He is the object whom God has revealed to our faith. This shows the essential difference between law and grace, which last means God giving in Christ all that man really needs for His own glory.

Undoubtedly there is another measure of responsibility. A few words on this subject may not be amiss for any souls that have not adequately considered the matter, as there is hardly anything on which men are so much at fault as this question. Some seem on the very verge of denying it altogether, in their one-sided zeal for the grace of God; others who stand stoutly and so far well for the responsibility of man misuse this truth so as apparently to swamp God’s grace. Scripture never sacrifices one truth to another. It is the peculiar property and glory of the word of God that it communicates not merely a truth here and there, but the truth; and this in the person of Christ. The Holy Ghost is the only power for rightly using, and applying, and enjoying the truth; and therefore He is called the truth {1 John 5:6; John 14:17, 15:26,16:13}

no less than the Lord Jesus. He is the intrinsic power by which the truth is received into the heart, but Christ is the object. Where Christ is thus received in the Holy Ghost, a new kind of responsibility is created. The measure of it for the Christian is based on the fact that he possesses life, and that he has Christ Himself, the object which shows him the position in which he stands, and consequently the character of the relationship that attaches to him. His relationship is that of a son, not merely of one adopted into that place with no more reality than he obtains in human things. We are adopted sons; but then we are more than that. We are children, members of the family of God. That is, we are children as having God’s own nature. We are born of God, and not merely adopted as if we were strangers to Him. Every Christian has a nature that is intrinsically divine, as we are told in 2 Pet. 1:4.

Thus, it is plain, nothing can be more complete. We have a nature which answers morally to God whom we imitate as well as obey in light and love, in holy and righteous ways, in mercy, truthfulness, and humility. We have the position of sons, a relationship which the Lord Jesus had in all its perfection, and in an infinitely higher sense, in which no creature can share it along with Him. Still Christ does bring us into His own relationship as far as it is possible for the creature to possess it. Hence, as duty is ever measured by responsibility, that of the Christian is according to the place in which grace has put him. It is certain therefore that all the common-places about the law as the rule of the Christian’s life are practically a denial of what Christianity is. Those who reason from Israel to us, without intending it, ignore the relationship of the Christian, and set aside the bearing of redemption on our walk: so serious is that error which to many seems a pious thought, and I am sure taken up by them with the desire of honoring God and His will. But sincerity will not serve in lieu of His word; and our own thoughts and desires can never be trusted as a standard of principle or of practice. God has revealed His mind, and to this, if wise, we must needs be subject. In divine things there is nothing like simplicity; by it we enjoy a wisdom far higher than our own and real power to strengthen and guide the heart.

In Israel’s case it was not so. First of all they promised obedience; but it was the obedience of the law. Secondly, when the blood of the victims was shed, it was sprinkled on the book as well as on the people (Ex. 24:7, 8) {Heb. 9:19}. What was the meaning of the blood? Not atonement. The prime idea in blood seems always to be the life given up, i.e., death, in acknowledgment of the guilt of the one concerned. This is true, no doubt; but unless it goes farther than this, it is a declarative sanction of God’s punishing in case of failure to meet His demands. The grace of God applies the blood of Christ in a totally different way; and this is what is referred to in 1 Pet. 1:2. He describes the Christian in terms which at once recall Ex. 24. He says that we are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. The Israelites were elect as a nation according to the sovereign call of Jehovah -- the known God of their fathers. Ignorant of God as well as of themselves, they dared to take their stand on His law. Accordingly they were severed by the ordinance of circumcision and other rites. They were sanctified from the nations by this fleshly separation to obey the law under its solemn and extreme penalty. The blood threatened death on every one who transgressed. The Christian position is altogether different: we are elect as children according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit {1 Pet. 1:2}, meaning by this the separating power of the Holy Ghost from the very first moment of our conversion. This vital separation to God, and not practical holiness, is what is here called
sanctification of the Spirit -- the most fundamental meaning of it indeed anywhere. But practical sanctification there is, and amply-insisted on elsewhere; but it is not the point here, and if we attempt to bring practical sanctification into this verse, we destroy the gospel of grace. Nobody doubts the good intentions of such as interpret it thus; but these are not enough with the word of God.

We must take care that we receive the sense which God intends, otherwise we may err seriously, to His dishonor and to our own hurt and that of others. Let us then bow to God instead of forcing our own meaning on scripture. What for instance would be the meaning of our being practically sanctified to obedience as well as to have the blood of Jesus sprinkled upon us? It simply proves that he who expounds unwittingly sets aside the gospel. Practical sanctification for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus! What do people mean by restricting themselves to a sense of sanctification which necessarily involves in it so portentous a conclusion? Evidently the language of the Spirit of God is as unambiguous, and the construction as plain and simple as possible.

Take a case in illustration. A man hitherto has been altogether indifferent to the word of God. He hears it now; he receives Jesus as the gift of God’s love with all simplicity. Perhaps he has not peace at once, but at any rate he is thoroughly arrested; he desires earnestly to know the gospel from the very first. If the Spirit of God has thus wrought in him, he is separated to God from what he was. This is here called

sanctification of the Spirit {1 Pet. 1:2}.

For, as we said, the sanctification is
to obedience {1 Pet. 1:2};

and this is the very first desire implanted in a soul from the moment that there is a real divine work in him. Such an one may be very ignorant, no doubt; but at any rate his heart is made up to obey the Lord -- his desire is Godward. It is not a merely legal way of escaping the dreadful doom that he sees is the just portion of those that despise God. The truth has touched his conscience by grace, and God’s mercy, however dimly seen, is enough to attract his heart to obey. Thus he is sanctified by the Spirit unto the obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. He would now obey, because he has the new nature through receiving the name of the Lord Jesus, and would enter into the grace of God that sprinkles the guilty with the blood of Jesus. He would obey like Jesus, not under compulsion like a Jew, and is sprinkled with His blood in remission for his sins, instead of having the blood sprinkled on him as a menace of death in case of disobeying the law. The Christian loves to obey, and is already forgiven through faith of Jesus and His blood. This I believe to be the true meaning of the passage, and especially of the term

sanctification of the Spirit

here; though it is frankly and fully allowed that this is not the only meaning of

sanctification in scripture.

The sanctification here in question then applies from the start of an effectual inward work even before a soul knows pardon and peace, but there is also room for the practical power of the Holy Ghost in subsequent work in heart and conscience severing us more and more by the truth to the Lord. The latter is practical sanctification, admits of degrees, and is thus relative. But in every soul there is the absolute separation of the Holy Spirit from conversion. Thus there are plainly two distinct senses of sanctification: one absolute, in which a man is severed once for all from the world to God; the other relative, as being practical and hence differing in measure in the after career of each Christian.

But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God {1 Cor. 6:11}.

Here it seems in substance the same thing as in 1 Pet. 1:2.

Sanctified in this sense is clearly before justification; and so the apostle puts it. It is of no use to decry the plain meaning of the scripture because the Romanist theologian perverts the fact more fatally than the Protestant. If the Spirit of God here puts

sanctified before justified,

our plain duty is to learn what is meant, not to wrest His word because of Popish misuse of it -- a misuse due largely to the common ignorance of the primary force of sanctification. Why should souls be driven from the truth by prejudice or clamor? It is not to be allowed that God’s word makes mistakes: man does, but is it with the Spirit of God? Does not He mean what He says? When He says they were washed, He is referring to the water of the word used by the Spirit of God to deal with man. This looks more at evil;

sanctified

to the good which attracted the heart now. But these are not the only things.

Justified is not when the prodigal son returns to his father, but when the best robe is put upon him; then he is, according to 1 Cor. 6, not washed and sanctified alone but

justified.

It is the application of the full power of the work of the Lord Jesus. It is not always immediate on conversion. It may be, and, if you please, ought to be, soon; but still it is far from being always so; and in fact there is and perhaps must be always an interval more or less before comfort or peace is enjoyed. It may be ever so minute, but there is habitually a dealing of Christ between the touch that stays the issue and the word which declares, with no less authority than love,

Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace [see Luke 8:48].

Very often it is not so little a while, as many of us know to our cost. But it remains always true that there is this
difference. And it seems well to remark it, because it is of considerable practical and also doctrinal importance, contrasting as it does the place of the Christian with that of the Jew. The tendency of some to insist on the whole in an instant is a reaction from the popular unbelie夫, which, if it allow peace at all, allows it as a matter of slow, laborious and uncertain attainment. But we must not be driven into any error, even the least to avoid the greatest; and it is certainly an error to swamp in one all the ways of God with the soul.

In the latter part of the chapter we have clearly the legal glory. This does not take them out of their condition of flesh and blood and all that pertains to it. It is in no way the glory which is the hope of the Christian.

Ex. 25 introduces us to a new order of figures, not only earthly ordinances, but that which appertains to the tabernacle. Undoubtedly in itself it composed a worldly tabernacle; but this does not hinder these figures from typifying what was to be for the most part of a heavenly character.

After the call to the people to bring their offerings, we find the use to which they were to be applied. First and foremost stands the center of Levitical worship -- the ark. We must remember that they are but shadows, and not the very image of the thing. In none of these types can one find the full truth of Christ and of His work. They are only a faint and partial adumbration of the infinite reality, and could not possibly be more. Hence they have the imperfection of a shadow. In fact we could not have the full image till Christ appeared and died on the cross and went to heaven. As Christ is the true and perfect image of God, so is He the expression of all that is good and holy in man. Where will one find what man should be but in Christ? Where the faultless picture of a servant but in Him? And so one might go through every quality and every office, and find them only in perfection in our Lord Jesus. There indeed is the truth. The legal ordinances and institutes were but shadows; still they were types distinctly constituted; and we should learn by them all.

In these shadows 47 we may see two very different characters or classes, we may say, into which they are divisible. The first and foundation of all the rest is this: God would disclose Himself in some of them to man, as far as this was possible then; secondly, founded on that and growing out of it, man would be taught to draw near to God. Impossible for such access to exist and be enjoyed till God had drawn near to man and shown us what He is to man. We can see therefore the moral propriety and beauty of this distinction, which at once separates the shadows of the latter part of Exodus into two main sections. The ark, the golden table, the seven candlesticks, or rather the candelabrum with its seven lights, we clearly see the type of Christ as the power and giver of the Holy Ghost in testimony for God. This is in connection with God’s sanctuary and presence. Now, in all these things it is the display of what God is to man; God Himself in His own sole majesty in the ar...
boards with their tenons and bolts, the sockets of silver and the rings of gold.

Then we have the vail and screen. Now we know what these mean. Scripture is positive that the vail is His flesh, but then it is as manifesting the Lord as man here below. As long as this was the case only, man could not come to God. When the vail was rent (namely, by Christ dying as a man), man could go into the presence of God, -- at least the believer. I do not mean man as man, but that there was no bar to man. The way was now open into the presence of God.

In the brazen altar it is the same side of truth; but there is this characteristic difference (Ex. 27). Not less than the ark, the golden throne of God in the most holy place, it shows us God’s righteousness; but with this difference between them -- that gold is the righteousness of God for drawing near where God is; brass is the righteousness of God for dealing with man’s evil where man is. Such is the line which divides them. It is the display of God in both cases -- the one in the presence of God where He manifests Himself; the other in dealing with man and his wants in this world. Hence we find, for instance, the righteousness of God in Romans. If we consider with any care Rom. 3, it is the righteousness of God presented to man as a sinful being in this world. But if I look at the passage where it is said,

He made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him {2 Cor. 5:21},

it is evident that we are brought into the very presence of God. Thus 2 Cor. 5 corresponds with the ark rather than the brazen altar. Everything has its beautiful and perfect answer in the word of God; but then all is useless to the soul, except just so far as one sees and receives the Lord Jesus Christ.

Next, from the latter part of Ex. 27 we have a change evident, and of more weight.

The last two verses are, I think, transitional. They prepare the way for types which, instead of displaying God in Christ to man, set forth rather man drawing near by the appointed channel to God. They are occupied with the provision of light where God manifested Himself, and in order to the due service of those who entered the sanctuary.

And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always {Ex. 27:20}.

It may be added here, as some have found an apparent inconsistency in comparing the passage with 1 Sam. 3:3, that the Hebrew means not “always” in the absolute sense, but continually or constantly. It was from evening to morning, and of course uninterruptedly for that time.

In the tabernacle of the congregation without the vail, which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall order it from evening to morning before Jehovah {Ex. 27:21}.

This is greatly confirmed by what follows.

In Ex. 28, 29 is given the prescribed ceremonial in consecrating the priesthood. And what was the object of the priesthood? Clearly it was for drawing near to God. This is the new division brought in and what might seem at first sight a notable irregularity, as has been observed before, is simply an effect of the perfect arrangement of God’s mind. Doubtless to a superficial glance it appears somewhat unaccountable, in the midst of describing the various parts of the sanctuary, to interrupt the course of it by dragging into the very midst of it the consecration of Aaron and his sons. But if there be two separate objects in these types -- first, God displaying Himself to man; and, secondly, man in consequence drawing near to God -- the way of all is clear. The priesthood undeniably consisted of that class of persons who had the privilege and duty of going into the sanctuary on behalf of the people. And the vessels of the sanctuary described after the priesthood are those which preserve the same common character of presenting the service due to God approached in His sanctuary. Now, let me ask, what mind of man could ever have thought of a decision so excellent, though surely far below the surface? As the foolishness of God, says the apostle, is wiser than man, so (may we not say?) the seeming disorder of God is incomparably more orderly than man’s best order.

Thus it will always be found in the long run. We may have absolute confidence in the word of God. Our only business is to learn what He is, what He says, and, more than that, to confide in Him; and when we do not know what He means, always to take the ground of faith against all adversaries. We may be ignorant, and unable to expose them; but we may rest perfectly sure that God is never wrong and man ever untrustworthy. The habitual means whereby God gives proof that He is right, graciously enabling us to understand is by His word. There is no other means of knowing the mind of God; the power for understanding is the Spirit of God; and the object in whose light alone it can be understood is Christ. But the written word of God is the sole instrumental means and the revelation of it all.

Then, after the priesthood has been fully brought before us, we have the various portions of their dress. A few words will suffice here before passing on. A remarkable provision is that the ephod of the high priest, which was the most important part of his costume, had the names of the children of Israel twice over. One inscription was in the shoulder-pieces. There were the names in a general way -- six on one shoulder, six on the other. Besides this their names were written on the breastplate. There the names were all found together on his heart. He who cannot appreciate the blessedness of such a place, with the great high priest bearing up thus the names of God’s people before God, must be very insensible to the highest favors. But God, who showed how He would continually remember those He loved, and who could not have a high priest without having their names in honor and love before Him -- that blessed God has given us much more. He ordered that there should be the Urim and the Thummim connected with the high priest’s breastplate; that is the means of divine guidance for the people. The Christian has it also, and in a far better way. The Jew had it after this outward sort, all being comparatively external in Israel. We have it intrinsically by the Holy Ghost Himself. It is in vain for any person to pretend that it was better to have the Urim and Thummim, for which one had to seek the priest from
time to time when wanted, than to be indwelt always by One who knows all the truth. May Christians believe and use for God the portion each has in Christ!

But besides, when the high priest went into Jehovah’s presence, there was the sounding of the bells between the pomegranates of blue, and purple, and scarlet on the skirts of his garment. Such is the effect, it is to be observed, when he goeth in and when he cometh out {Ex. 28:35}.

Under this falls the Christian testimony now, as the result of the entrance of Christ into heavenly places; and under this will fall the future fruit-bearing portion and testimony of Israel in the day when Christ will appear in glory from the heavens. The bells give their sound when the high priest goes in and when he comes out. When Christ went into the presence of God, what a mighty effect did not the Spirit produce! The church comes under that now. When Christ returns the Spirit will be poured out once more on all flesh, and Israel will be brought into the blessed position of bearing fruit in testimony for God. But, again, Aaron with the golden plate (engraved Holiness to Jehovah {Ex. 28:36}) always on his forehead, bears the iniquity of Israel’s holy things that they may be accepted; an important consideration, especially when we know the seriousness and the facility of iniquity therein. Is it not true that there is scarce anything in which we feel more the need of gracious care than in the holy things of God? We know His tender mercy in the smallest matters; but in that which so nearly concerns His honor, it is indeed a truly merciful provision that the Great High Priest bears the iniquity of holy things, where otherwise defilement would be fatal. The coat of fine linen embroidered means personal righteousness in ways, set off with every beauty of grace. Aaron’s sons were to have coats, priests’ girdles, and bonnets for glory and for beauty. It is Christ put on us. Then follows the ritual required in the act of consecrating Aaron and his sons.

In the hallowing of the priestly family the following points are observable. First, they were all washed in the water, Aaron and his sons.

He who sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one {Heb. 2:11}.

Christ is essentially apart from sin and sinners; we by grace are set apart. Further, our Lord says,

For their sakes I sanctify myself (i.e. on high), that they also might be sanctified by the truth {John 17:19}.

Then Aaron is duly clothed; as in the priestly character Christ appears before God for us. Then the high priest alone was anointed; as we know Christ could be and was sealed of God the Father without blood, the Spirit thus attesting both the absolute purity of His person and the truth of His Sonship as man. Aaron’s sons were then clothed, and girded for priestly work. The blood of the bullock for a sin-offering was put on the horns of the altar; the blood of one ram for a burnt-offering was sprinkled round about upon the altar; and the blood of the other ram for consecration was put on Aaron’s right ear, and that of his sons, on their right thumb and right great toe. It was necessarily so with the high priest taken from among men, after the witness already given to Christ’s exceptional place. So Christ entered by His own blood -- entered in once for all -- into the holies, having obtained eternal redemption that we might have a common place with Him by blood and in the Spirit’s power. Grace binds us with Christ as Aaron with his sons. As no sacrifice was absent here, so we enjoy all the value of Christ and His work.

But after the form of hallowing the priests, the Spirit prescribes in the end of Ex. 29 (Ex. 29:38-46) the sacrifice of the daily lambs which presented the continual acceptance of the people of God, with the renewed and most express assurance of His dwelling among them. Ex. 30 resumes the account, for a reason already explained, of the various vessels of the sanctuary which had to follow the priesthood, and pursue the truth meant by it, namely, the means of access to God.

Among the vessels of the sanctuary the altar of incense stands first (Ex. 30:1-10). Who does not know that this was to secure the people always being acceptable before God? It is the type of Christ interceding for us, and along with this the high priest’s work that the manifestation of the Spirit be not hindered.

In Ex. 30:11-16 is introduced the ransom money of the people, rich and poor alike, as an offering to Jehovah, their atonement money for the service of the sanctuary (for this is the great point here), the link of all with the priests who actually entered on their behalf.

But there was another requisite next set forth. The brazen laver judged sin by the word of God, just as the brazen altar judged it sacrificially. We need the washing of regeneration {Titus 3:5} and generally the washing of water by the word. This follows here. The former in its scriptural usage is not merely, I apprehend, that we are born of God, but goes beyond new birth. It is the putting the believer into an entirely new place before God, which is a different thought from his receiving a new nature. As being a position, it may have so far a more external sound, but it is a real deliverance, which grace now confers on us in Christ Jesus, not merely the communication of a life which hates sin, but the putting one according to the new place of Christ Himself before God. With this goes also the action of the Spirit of God in dealing with us day by day according to such a beginning. This we need, -- the application of the word of God by the Spirit to deal with every kind of impurity. Just as in the type the priests had not only to be washed completely in the laver in order to be consecrated; but whenever they entered into the presence of God, they washed their hands and feet. We have what answers to it. Let us not forget it.

Then we have the holy anointing oil, which also had to do with fitting the priests for drawing near to God. It was the power of the Spirit. It was not merely a new nature or a new position, but it was a corresponding power of the Spirit of God. For the bare possession of a new nature or place would not enable us to do the will of God. It would make us feel what
ought to be done, but gives not of itself the power to do it. The Spirit given to the Christian is of power, love, and a sound mind. A new nature finds its great characteristic in dependence -- in weakness, or sense of weakness certainly; but the Holy Ghost gives the consciousness of power, though no doubt exercised in dependence. The new nature accordingly has right affections and gracious desires; but there is power in the Spirit through Christ Jesus. God

hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind [2 Tim. 1:7].

The last of these types is the holy perfume. Here it seems to be not so much what we have by Christ, but that fragrance in Christ Himself of which God alone is the adequate judge, and which rises up before Him in all its perfection. How blessed for us! It is for us, but it is only in Him before God.

In Ex. 31 we have all this closed with two facts -- the Spirit of God empowering man to make a tabernacle according to the pattern, and the Sabbath-day connected with the order of the tabernacle. It has been remarked by another, and it is perfectly true, that in this book when we meet with any dealing of God, of whatever kind it may be, the Sabbath-day is always introduced. For instance, in the earlier half of Exodus, where we have God's dealings in grace, the Sabbath-day is brought in, marked out by the bread God provided for His people, the manna -- the figure of Christ come down from heaven to be the food of the hungry on earth: then followed the Sabbath at once. Next, when the law was given, in the very center of its requirements stands the Sabbath-day. Again, in these various figures or institutions of good things to come, the Sabbath re-appears. Thus it is evident that, no matter what the subject may be, the Sabbath has always a place assigned to it. God therefore makes much of the sign. The reason is that He would impress on His people that all His dealings, varied as they may be, are intended to keep before their minds that rest to which He was steadily working, and into which He means to bring His own in due time. Therefore whatever the work introduced meanwhile -- whether of grace, as the effectual working of God, or whether of law as proving the inefficiency of man -- He always holds out His rest, to which He would also direct the eyes of all who love Him.

Ex. 32 reveals a sad interruption after the wonderful communications of God to His servant. Here at least the people are at their work -- earnestly at work in dishonoring God -- striking at the very foundation of His truth and honor to their own shame and ruin. Poor people! the objects of such countless favors, and of such signal honor on God's part. They, with Aaron to help them, aimed a blow at the throne of God by making a golden calf. It is needless to linger on the scene of the rebellion. Jehovah directs the attention of Moses to the camp, saying,

I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation [Ex. 32:9, 10].

He wanted to prove and manifest the heart of His servant. He loved the people Himself, and delighted in Moses' love for them. If the people were under the test of law, Moses was under the test of grace.

And Moses besought Jehovah his God and said, Jehovah, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and [not merely Jacob, but Israel, thy servants, to whom thou sarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever [Ex. 32:11-13].

See the ground Moses took -- the unqualified promises of God's mercy, the grace assured to the fathers. Impossible for Jehovah to set aside such a plea. Nevertheless Moses comes down with the two tables in his hand, the work of God. He hears the noise, which Joshua could not so well understand, but which his own keener and more practiced ear fails not to interpret aright; and as soon as he came near, and saw the confirmation of his fears -- the calf and the dancing -- his anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it [Ex. 32:19, 20].

At once we find him reproaching Aaron, the most responsible man there, who makes a sorry excuse, not without sin. But Moses took his stand in the gate and said,

Who is on Jehovah's side? Let him come unto me [Ex. 32:26].

Thus he who rejected every overture for his own advancement at the expense of the people now arms the Levites against their brethren.

And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses; and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men [Ex. 32:28].

Yet we know on the best authority that Moses loved the people as not another soul in the camp did. There is hardly a subject on which men are so apt to make mistakes as the true nature and application of love. Moses loved Israel with a love stronger than death; yet he who thus loved them showed unsparingly his horror of the leprosy that had broken out among them. He felt that such evil must at all cost be rooted out, and banished from amongst them. But the same Moses returns to Jehovah with the confession --

Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written [Ex. 32:31, 32].

Jehovah however stands to His own ways, and says to Moses,

Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore now go, lead the people unto...
the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the
day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them. And
Jehovah plagued the people, because they made the
calf, which Aaron made {Ex. 32:33-35}.

Nevertheless Moses persists in his plea with Jehovah, who does
not fail to try him to the utmost by adopting the language of
the people. They had denied God, and attributed their deliverance
merely to Moses: so Jehovah takes up these very words, and
says,

Deport and go up hence, thou and the people which
thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, unto the
land which I sware unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to
Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it {Ex. 33:1}.

He reproaches them once more with being a stiff-necked
people; He will not go up in the midst of them, lest He should
consume them in the way. The people thereon mourn; and
Moses has recourse to a remarkable act. He takes and pitches
the tabernacle, it is said,

without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called
it the Tabernacle of the Congregation {Ex. 33:7}.

After this follow two things worthy of all heed, -- a
nearness of communication between Jehovah and His
servant never enjoyed before, and more than that, -- a
blessing secured to the people never vouchsafed before.

From this moment a new plea is urged: the faultiness of the
people is used as a reason why God should go up -- the very
reason which righteousness made a ground for refusing to go
with them, lest His anger should burn against such a stiff-
necked people. But, argues Moses, for this very reason, we
most of all want Jehovah’s presence. Astonishing is the
boldness of faith; but then its pleading is grounded on the
known grace of God Himself. Moses was near enough to God
in the tabernacle, outside the camp, to get a better view of His
grace than he ever enjoyed before. And so it always is. No
doubt there was large and rich blessing and of the most
unexpected kind when God sent down the Holy Spirit here
below, and His church was first seen. But is it a fact that the
church at Jerusalem had the deepest enjoyment of God in
apostolic times? This, one may be permitted to question. I grant
you that, looking at the Pentecostal saints, in them we see the
most powerful united testimony that ever was borne in this
world; but it was borne in what was comparatively not the
severest trial -- in earthly things chiefly, -- the superiority of
those who had been newly created in Christ to the wretched
selfishness of human nature. But is that the highest form of
blessedness? Is that the way in which Christ was most glorified?

When the earliest phase of things passed away -- when not
merely there was the unbelief of the Jewish people but the
unworthy sights and sounds which Satan introduced among that
fair company -- God, always equal to the occasion, acts in the
supremacy of His own grace, and brings out a deeper
understanding of His truth more difficult to appreciate; not
striking the people of the world perhaps in the same way, but
that which I think has a more intimate character of communion
with Christ Himself than anything that was found before. It will
scarcely be affirmed that what we discern in the church, while
limited to the circumcision, had the same depth and heavenly
character stamped upon it, as what was found when the full
grace of God broke all barriers and flowed freely among the
Gentiles. It is in vain to argue that the fruit of the teaching of
Peter or of James had the same power with it as the fruit of
Paul not very long after, or of John latest of all. I grant you this
-- that, looked at as a whole, distressing failure was setting in
just as it was here; yet as here the very failure isolated the
truehearted, but isolated them not in want of love but in the
strongest possible manifestation of divine charity and sense of
God’s glory. Assuredly Moses in the tabernacle outside had not
less love for the people, nor more loyalty to God, than within
the borders of Sinai when the ten commandments were uttered.

In the scene which follows we have the magnificent
pleading of Moses still more touchingly, and, I am persuaded,
in advance on what went before. This is not the time to enter
into details; but hear what Moses says to Jehovah now:

See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and
thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with
me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou
 hast also found grace in my sight {Ex. 33:12}.

What can be more lovely, more according to Christ, than this?
He uses all the personal confidence that God had in him on behalf
of the people. That is the bearing of it all.

Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in
thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know
thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider
that this nation is thine {Ex. 33:13}.

He will not give up his love and desire for Israel. God may
treat them as the people of Moses, and say, “They are the
people you have brought up: they are your people.” “Oh no,”
says Moses, “they are Thine; and Thou art their only hope.”

He will not be put off. Jehovah loves to surrender to Moses,
as of old to Jacob with far feebleer forces. Faith, hope, and
charity abounded in the mediator; and if the people were to be
blessed, from God He drew on every spring of the blessing for
His own glory. Mark the answer of Jehovah:

And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I
will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If thy
presence go not with me, carry us not up hence
{Ex. 33:14, 15}.

Moses wanted nothing apart from the people; even if he went
out of the camp, it was to gather so much more of blessing for
the people that he had left behind.

And Jehovah said unto Moses, I will do this thing also
that thou has spoken: for thou hast found grace in my
sight, and I know thee by thy name {Ex. 33:17}.

He asked to see His glory. This was impossible yet. It awaited
the coming of a greater than Moses. But at any rate His
goodness is caused to pass before him, which in Ex. 34 he
sees.

But here we must take care. It is a great mistake to
suppose that the proclamation of divine goodness in this scene
is the gospel. They greatly err who in this sense quote

Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity,
transgression, and sin,
and stop there. God does not stop here. He immediately adds,
and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the
iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third
and fourth generation {Ex. 34:7}.

There is no doubt that it is the goodness and mercy of God;
but it is to a people still under the government of the law. This
is the peculiarity. What we find here then is not law pure and
simple, but law with mercy and goodness and longsuffering in
the government of God -- His condescending love and patience
mingled along with law. Hence we see its character and the
reason why it appears here. Without it the guilty people never
could have been spared, but must have perished root and
branch, as it was in consequence of this change that a new
generation of the people of Israel entered into the land at all.

Had He dealt on the ground of pure law, how could it have been?
They were guilty, and must have been cut off.

Now this mingling of grace with the law is the kind of
system which Christians have accepted as Christianity. No real
believer ever takes the ground of pure law. They take a
mingled system; they mix up law and grace together. This is
what is going on every day now in Christendom. It was the
state in which the children of Israel were put here, and was
a very great mercy for them in a certain sense. It is no less a
misfortune for the Christian, because what those in Christ are
called to is neither law, nor the mingled system of law
interspersed with the gracious care of those under it (who must
have been consumed had law reigned alone), but pure grace in
Christ without the law. At the same time the righteousness of
the law is fulfilled so much the more in those that
walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit
{Rom. 8:4}.

In answer to Moses who advances in his demands, yet
withal no less suiting them to the divine glory than to the
people's wants according to the light then vouchsafed, God
makes a covenant different from what went before.
(Ex. 34:10). Moses had prayed Him as Adonai to
go among us: for it is a stiff-necked people; and
pardon our sin, and take us for thine inheritance
{Ex. 34:9}.

Thus he avails himself of the special affection God had shown
him to put himself with the people, and to secure God's
presence going with the people, who otherwise could never
enter the land. It was bold faith, working in unfeigned love of
the people, and with a deep sense of what God is spite of all
dererits; yet its highest petition is based on revealed grace,
and is therefore the very reverse of human presumption.

The Lord accordingly hearkens in grace, and undertakes
for Israel against the Canaanites, warning them against a
covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and insisting on His
own sole worship, His feasts, His firstlings and firstfruits; on
His sabbaths, on the absence of leaven and unseemly ways,
the fruit of Satan's wiles among the heathen.

This is pursued to the end of the chapter, and in a very
interesting way. We have a figure to which the apostle refers
(2 Cor. 3), confirming what has just now been stated. For the
first time the face of Moses shines after communications with
God. There was no such effect when it was merely the ten
commandments or the ordinances connected with the people
and the land; but after the communications of heavenly
shadows and the mercy of God which intermixed itself with
the law, Moses' face shines, and the people of Israel could not
bear it. The glory of God, or at any rate the effect of seeing
His goodness, was brought too near to them. He had to put a
vail on his face. The apostle uses this to show that, as the
vailed Moses speaking to the people of Israel is the most apt
possible figure of the actual state in which they were placed
(that is, not law simply, but with gracious care for the people
mingled with it), so the condition of the Christian is in marked
contrast. For our position the true image is Moses not when
speaking to the people, but when he goes up into the presence
of God. In him unveiled there we have our figure, not in
Moses vailed, still less in Israel. The Christian in his full place
is nowhere set forth by the Jew. Certain things which
happened to Israel may be types for the Christian, but nothing
more. As far as this figure is concerned, then, our place is
represented by Moses when he takes off the vail and is face to
face with the glory of God Himself. What a place for us, and
for us now! Surely this is a wondrous truth, and of the greatest
possible importance. We should remember that we are heavenly
now (1 Cor. 15) as truly as we ever shall be. More manifestly
shall we be heavenly at the coming of Christ, but not more
reasonably than at present. I speak of our relationship and title.

As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly
{1 Cor. 15:48}.

By and by we shall bear the image of the heavenly. This is
another thing, and only a consequence when the due
day arrives. For the soul the great change is a fact; it
remains for the body when the Lord comes.

The rest of the book of Exodus consists of the people’s
response, and the actual accomplishment of the directions that
were given in Ex. 25–30, and calls for no lengthened remarks
in such a sketch as this. But we may refer to Ex. 35 as the
witness to the zeal of the congregation for the construction and
service of the sanctuary, opened by the law of the sabbath
stated here for the last time in the book. Whatever be the work
of God, His rest remains for His people. The utmost alacrity
in answer to the call for material, useful and ornamental, common
or costly, is shown by all.

And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up,
and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they
brought Jehovah's offering to the work of the
tabernacle of the congregation, and for all his service,
and for the holy garments. And they came, both men
and women, as many as were willing hearted, and
brought bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets,
all jewels of gold: and every man that offered offered
an offering of gold unto Jehovah. And every man,
with whom was found blue, and purple, and scarlet,
and fine linen, and goats' hair, and red skins of rams,
and badgers' skins, brought them. Every one that did
offer an offering of silver and brass brought Jehovah's
offering: and every man, with whom was found
shittim wood for any work of the service, brought it.
And all the women that were wise hearted did spin with their hands, and brought that which they had spun, both of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine linen. And all the women whose heart stirred them up in wisdom spun goats’ hair. And the rulers brought onyx stones, and stones to be set, for the ephod and for the breastplate: and spice, and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense. The children of Israel brought a willing offering unto Jehovah, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work, which Jehovah had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses (Ex. 35:21-29).

Nevertheless, here as everywhere God maintains His right to call, and gives the requisite gifts.

And Moses said unto the children of Israel, See, the Lord hath called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; and to devise curious works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in the cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work. And he hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and Aholiab, the son of Abisamach, of the tribe of Dan. Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work (Ex. 35:30-35).

Ex. 36 shows us the chosen workmen engaged in their allotted tasks, and even begging Moses to check the over-abounding supplies of Israel’s liberality. The work is described with as much minuteness, in the execution as in the plan, throughout Ex. 36–39, till Moses, inspecting all and seeing that they had done it as Jehovah had commanded, blessed them.

It is of great interest to observe that the silver paid in by the children of Israel, a bekah or half shekel each, was applied to the production of the silver sockets of the vail, and the hooks of the columns. Now if gold represents God’s righteousness which we approach within; and if brass or rather copper means, when thus symbolically viewed, His righteousness as applied to man outside in His immutable judgment, what is the force of silver in this connection? Is it not His grace shown in man, even in the man Christ Jesus? Thus the redemption price was the basis; and on hooks made of the silver expiation money were suspended the hangings of the court which separated the sanctuary service of God from the world. The judgment of One who could not bear sin was represented in the copper sockets of the boards which gave immutable stability; but grace in redemption was that on which all hung and shone in the chapiters and fillets also, the ornament of the work. Both unite in Christ and His atoning death.

The last chapter records, first, Jehovah’s call to Moses to set up the dwelling of the appointed tent on the first day of the first month (i.e., in the second year, Ex. 40:17), with all its parts and vessels in due order; secondly, the obedience of Moses according to all that Jehovah commanded him. It is remarkable that on this occasion the tabernacle and all within it were anointed with oil. Thus, whatever sin on our part may call for, we have here the whole scene of creation, all things in heaven and all things on earth, claimed in the power of the Spirit in virtue of Christ’s person and title, just as He was in fact anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power apart from bloodshedding.

Finally, when the work was finished and all duly set up, a cloud covered the appointed tent, and the glory of Jehovah filled the dwelling. And Moses was not able to enter because the cloud dwelt thereon, and the glory filled the tabernacle. Thus solemnly did Jehovah mark His dwelling-place in the midst of His people redeemed from Egypt; and He deigned to guide their journeys through the desert also by the same sign; for when the cloud was taken up, they journeyed; and if not taken up, they abode till it was. But cloud by day and fire by night, the token of His presence was ever before all Israel (Ex. 40:34-38).
Lectures on the Pentateuch  
Lecture 6  
Leviticus 1–15

The book of Leviticus has its own character quite as manifestly as Genesis or Exodus. Its peculiar feature is that from its very starting-point it is the revelation of what God saw in Jesus Christ our Lord, the typical application which grace made of Him and His work to souls, to a people and their land. It is the most complete direction-book of the priests, setting forth in all the detail of the Levitical service the various offices of the Lord Jesus. For this reason we see the propriety of the ground and circumstances with which it opens.

Jehovah called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation {Lev. 1:1}. 

There is not the rich variety of Genesis, neither is there the special object of Exodus as unfolding redemption or the legal conditions which the people undertook through ignorance of themselves and of God. Here we have, as its characteristic feature, access to God; not God acting in grace toward men to deliver, but Christ as the means of approach to God for a people in relationship with Him, sustaining them there or warning of the ways and consequences of departure from Him. It is admirably calculated to act on the soul of the believer and acquaint him better with God as He reveals Himself in the Lord Jesus.

Thus the Spirit of God begins not with the sinner and his wants, but with Christ, and gives in the opening types a wonderful analysis of His work and sacrifice. This is a familiar remark, but it is well to repeat it. And as He begins with Christ, so in the first place is given the highest thought of our Lord’s death in atonement -- the burnt-offering. It is that aspect of His sacrifice which goes exclusively God-ward -- an aspect which believers are apt to be in no small danger of attenuating, if not losing sight of altogether. There is no child of God that does not see the need of Christ to be a sin-offering for him, but far too many stop there. In a general way they have the sense of His grace undoubtedly; but as we are now occupied with the offering of Christ in all its fulness, it does not seem too much if one deplores the habitual disposition, in looking at Christ’s sacrifice, to think of nothing but His adaptation to our wants. Indeed this is the very reason why many souls so fail to appreciate the boundless grace which has met them in their wants, but which would raise them to enjoy that which is incomparably above themselves.

Hence we here commence with the type of the burnt-offering, the sweet savor of Christ to God for us indeed, but not limited by the circle of human thought, -- not His bare adaptation to our need. Freely I must grant that the man who begins with Christ apart from his own necessities and guilt is but a theorist where it most of all becomes one to be real. We may well distrust the faith of the soul which, professing to be awakened from the sleep of death, only cares to hear of the profound truth of the burnt-offering in the death of Jesus. Must we not fear that such an one deceives himself? For, when dealing with the sinner, God begins with him as he is. And sinners we are, verily guilty. Doubtless God meets the man in the mind and heart, yet never truly saves but through the conscience; and if there be an unwillingness in any one to have his conscience searched -- in other words, to begin as nothing but a poor sinner in the sight of God, he must be brought back to it some time or other. Happy he who is willing to begin where God begins. Happy he who escapes the painful sifting and humiliation too, when, for the time he ought to be making advance in the knowledge of Christ and of His grace, he has to turn back again through having overlooked his real state in the sight of God; when he has to learn what he is himself, it may be years after he has been bearing the excellent name of the Lord.

In Leviticus then the Spirit of God shows us the all-important truth that, whatever may be the divine way of dealing with individuals, God has Christ before Himself. He surely thinks of His people as a whole, but, above all, He cannot overlook His own glory as maintained in Christ.

First of all then we are in presence of the holocaust or burnt-offering (Lev. 1). We have to learn that special aspect of the Lord in which He,

by the Eternal Spirit, offered himself up without spot unto God {Heb. 9:14}.

This is the burnt-offering. There, if anywhere, it could be said that God was glorified in Him. Apart from this, Scripture nowhere says that God, as such, was glorified in the Son of Man till Christ gave Himself up to death. The Father had been glorified in Him in every step of His life; but our Lord Jesus refrains from saying that God was glorified in Him, till the fatal night when Judas goes out to betray Him to His murderers, and the whole scene is before His eyes (John 13). He

became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross {Phil. 2:8}.

And this principle we find in a very lovely way brought before us in John 10. Undoubtedly He laid His life down for the sheep; but the believer who sees nothing more than this in the death of Christ has a great deal to learn. It is very evident
he does not think much about God or His Anointed. He feels for himself and for others in similar wants. It is well that he should begin there unquestionably; but why should he stop with it? Our Lord Jesus Himself gives us the full truth of the matter, saying,

I am the good Shepherd, and know my [sheep], and am known of mine; even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock, one shepherd

(John 10:14-16).

After these words, we come to what gives the more particular import of the burnt-offering in the total and willing surrender of Himself in death.

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again (John 10:17, 18).

The only One who, as a man, had a right to life -- to all blessedness and glory as a living man on the earth -- is the only One entitled to lay down His life of Himself. And this He did -- not merely for the sheep, but He laid it down of Himself; and yet He could say,

This commandment have I received of my Father

(John 10:18).

It was in His own heart, and it was obedience too, absolutely, with trust in God. It was glorifying God in the very matter of death, and as we know, on account of sin -- our sin.

Thus Christ glorified His God and Father in a world where His enemy reigned. It was the fullest proof of One who could confide for everything in Him who sent Him; and this He did. God was glorified in Him; and if the Son of man glorified Him, no wonder God glorified Him in Himself, and also that He straightway glorified Him. This He did by taking Christ up and setting Him at His own right hand in heaven. This of course is not the burnt-offering, but its consequence to Him who was so. The burnt-offering exhibits the absolute devotion of the Lord Jesus atoningly to death for the glory of God the Father. It is allowed fully that there is nothing here which seems to make blessing to man prominent. Were there no sin, there could be no burnt-offering, nothing to represent the complete surrender up of self unto God, even to death. But the expression of sin in its hatefulness and necessary banishment from God’s presence was reserved for another offering and even a contrasted class of offerings.

The prime thought here is, that all goes up as a savor of rest to God, who is therefore glorified in it. Hence it is that in the burnt-offering of this chapter, in what is called the meat-offering, and in the peace-offering, no question of compulsion enters. The offering was in nowise wrung out from Israel. So, as we see, in the words of our blessed Lord, no one took His life from Him; He laid it down of Himself.

If any man of you bring an offering unto Jehovah, ye shall bring your offering of the beasts, even of the herd and of the flock. If his offering be a burnt-

sacrifice of the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it for his acceptance at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before Jehovah

{Lev. 1:2, 3};

but there was no demand.

This is so much the more pointed, because from Lev. 4 we find wholly different language. We enter on another character of offering there, as we anticipate for a moment.

If a soul shall sin,

it is written,

against any of the commandments of Jehovah, then let him bring for his sin {Lev. 4:2, 3},

so and so. This was an absolute requirement. There was no discretion left to the Israelite. It was not an open matter. He must do it; and accordingly it was defined in all respects. A person had no option in bringing what he liked. If he were a ruler, he must bring a certain kind of offering; if he were one of the common people, another kind was prescribed. There was both the command in the first place, and next the signifying of what must be brought to God in case of sin.

But all the earlier offerings in Lev. 1–3, the burnt-offering, the oblation, and the peace-offering, were left to the heart of the offerer -- were left open, and with the fullest consideration of the means. God would make no burden of that which should be a joy. It was the heart giving to Him what it might otherwise value, but what expressed at any rate its value for the Lord. How perfectly Jesus met this -- how He surpassed all that it was possible for a type to represent -- our souls know well. He gave Himself.

The offerer then brought for his olah or burnt-sacrifice which ascended up to God the best animal of its kind according to his heart and means, of the herd or of the flock, of turtle-doves or of young pigeons. In the nobler forms (i.e., when from the herd or flock) an unblemished male was taken, on the head of which the offerer laid his hand. It is a mistake to suppose that this act in itself involves confession of sin, or was always accompanied by it. It was quite as often the sign of the conveyance of a blessing or official honor. And even if we look at it only as connected with sacrifices, it had an import in the burnt-offering quite different from its bearing in the sin-offering. Transfer there was in both; but in the former the offerer was identified with the acceptance of the victim; in the other the victim was identified with the confessed sin of the offerer. The sweet savor of the burnt-sacrifice represented him who offered it. The animal was killed before Jehovah. The priests sprinkled its blood round about upon the altar. The victim itself, if a bull, was flayed; if a bull, sheep, or goat, it was severed. The pieces, head, and fat, were set in order upon the wood on the fire of the altar; the inwards and legs were washed in water; and then the priest caused all to ascend in fumes on the altar, a fire-offering of sweet odor to Jehovah. All was laid open; and when in the victim any question of defilement could be, the washing of water made clean the parts, inward or outward, to be a fit type of the Holy One of God.

On another fact let me say a word in passing. Not only is
there a tendency to confound things that differ, and to make Christ’s sacrifice to be solely one for our sin, for our wants before God, but there is in these various forms of the burnt-offering a little intimation, it seems to me, of that very tendency; for as we gradually go down it will be noticed that the offering approaches in some slight degree that which might be more appropriate for a sin-offering.

And if the burnt sacrifice for his offering to Jehovah be of fowls, then he shall bring his offering of turtle-doves, or of young pigeons. And the priest shall bring it unto the altar, and wring off his head, and burn it on the altar; and the blood thereof shall be wrung out at the side of the altar. And he shall pluck away his crop with his feathers, and cast it beside the altar {Lev. 1:14-16}.

There is not the whole animal going up to God in the same marked way as in the first case. That is, the lower the faith (which I suppose is what is meant by the sinking of the value of the offering) the more the offering approaches to the notion of one for our sins: we see what is unworthy and cast away as well as what goes up to God.

In the meat-offering {meal-offering} is quite another thought. There is no thought whatever of atonement here. It was really the best of food given up to Jehovah, corn and oil, not without salt, as we see later on. But it was only for priestly food, besides Jehovah’s memorial and all the frankincense, not for the offerer or his friends. Here it is well to bear in mind that the word “meat” might convey a wrong impression. This rendering of עוגת, possibly obsolete now, seems somewhat faulty, as the idea is an offering of what was bloodless, emphatically that which never possessed animal life. Clearly therefore the burnt-offering and the meat-offering stand in distinct contrast. The very essence of the burnt-offering is the surrender of life absolutely to God. This no man but a divine person was capable of doing; but, Jesus being such, infinite is the value of His self-sacrificing death on the cross. In the meat-offering the Lord is pre-eminently viewed as a man living on the earth. That there is no thought of death, but of life consecrated to God, is the general truth of the food or cake-offering.

Hence,

when any will offer a meat-offering unto Jehovah, his offering shall be of fine flour; and he shall pour oil upon it, and put frankincense thereon {Lev. 2:1}.

It is simply the beautiful emblem of Christ as man in this world. His humanity is represented by the fine flour, and the power of the Holy Ghost (which is so set forth in scripture from His very conception) by the oil poured on the flour. The frankincense shadowed His ever acceptable fragrance which went up to God continually. All this was brought to the priests, one of whom took out his handful.

And he shall bring it to Aaron’s sons, the priests; and he shall take thereout his handful of the flour thereof, and of the oil thereof, with all the frankincense thereof; and the priest shall burn the memorial of it upon the altar, to be an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto Jehovah. And the remnant of the meat-offering shall be Aaron’s and his sons {Lev. 2:2, 3}.

Therein we see another marked difference. The burnt-offering as a whole went up to God, or in its lowest form a part might be thrown away; but all that was used was solely for God. In the oblation-offering it was not so. Part of it went to the priestly body -- to Aaron and his sons.

Thus here we have devotedness not in death so much as in life -- the Holy One absolutely consecrated to God, in whom the power of the Holy Ghost molded every thought and feeling, and this viewed as a man here below in all His ways and words. Of the oblation-offering not merely has God His portion, but we too are entitled to feed on it. Aaron and his sons represent the Lord Jesus and those that He has made priests; for He loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and made us not only kings but priests unto God {Rev. 1:5, 6}.

Clearly then in Christ and Christians we have the antitype of Aaron and his sons. Now we are entitled to delight in that which Jesus was here below; and certainly it were a great and irreparable loss to the soul if a Christian said or thought that he had nothing to do with Christ thus -- that he had the death of the blessed Lord, but no special portion in Him as He lived for God here below. It is well to resent those who slight or ignore the value of Christ’s sufferings, but we must beware of error on the other side. Why such scant measure? why such carelessness? You who by grace are priests to God -- you at least should value that which is so distinctly marked out as your portion and proper food. Is it not the miserable working of unbelief, similar in principle though opposite in form, to what we have already noticed -- the heart rising in faint degree above the sense of sins, and after all sins but poorly felt? God would give us communion with Himself in Christ -- in all that He is.

The first presentation is simply the oblation in its constituents, setting forth Christ as a living man, His nature in the power of the Spirit with every grace offered to God without distraction or deflection or drawback (Lev. 2:1-3).

The second part (Lev. 2:4-10) distinguishes between the mingling and anointing with oil -- holiness in nature and power for service. For there are different forms of which it may be well to speak.

If thou bring an offering of an oblation baked in the oven {Lev. 2:4};

and, again,

an oblation-offering baked in a pan {Lev. 2:5}.

In the latter case the oblation was parted in pieces, when oil was poured on all, as before sundering it had been mingled with oil. Thus, besides being conceived of the Spirit, Jesus knew this trial to the uttermost; and His suffering in obedience displayed most intimately the power of the Spirit in every pang, when He knew as none ever did rejection, desertion, denial, treachery, not to speak of the ignominy of the cross.
The break-up of every hope and prospect which befell Him at the close only revealed His perfection of spiritual power in an inward way and in the least particular. Surely this is not a mere figure without meaning: there is nothing in vain in the Bible. It is not for us to presume or to exceed our measure, but we may search with at least the earnest desire to understand what God has written.

I take it then that in the first part we have the simple typical expression of the nature of our Lord Jesus as man; that in the second, the oblation baken in the oven, the pan, and the frying-pan, we see the Lord as man exposed to various phases of severe trial. The oven indicates trial applied in a way of which man may not particularly be the witness. The oven does not so much represent public manifestation; the pan does. If the pan means that which was exposed to others, which I suppose to be its force here, the frying-pan 49 is only another shape of the same principle, the shade of difference being in intensity. Thus we have secret trial, public trial, and this to the utmost -- in different forms the Lord Jesus tried in every possible way. Fire is always the emblem of that which searches judicially; and the Lord Jesus, it is not too much to say, in every way was put to the proof. What was the effect? His excellency shown more than ever -- the manifestation of the perfection, and of nothing but perfection, that was found in Him.

There is a further point which may be profitably noticed here: the Spirit of God particularly mentions that this cake-offering is

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\text{a thing most holy of the offerings of Jehovah made by fire} \quad \text{(Lev. 2:10).}
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There is another offering which is said to be most holy. This remarkable phrase the Spirit of God applies in two cases out of the four. Not only is it used about the cake-offering which represents His life as man here below, the very thing in which man has dared to suspect a taint; but in the sin-offering the same expression again occurs -- the very occasion which man would have suspected, if anywhere, of sullying the perfectness of His glory. He was as really man on the one hand, as on the other our sins were really borne by Him. Nothing seems to exceed therefore the perfect care of the Holy Ghost for the glory of Christ. For in the offering for sin, where man would imagine Him in some way lowered, He takes care most of all to say that it is

\[
\text{a thing most holy.}
\]

Or again, if man inferred a taint in His humanity, the word of the Spirit, ever jealous to glorify Him, is

\[
\text{most holy.}
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49. I know not whether some would translate, with sufficient reason, דְּרַכִּים as "boiling pot." No doubt among the poor one utensil was made to serve more than one purpose. Certainly דְּרַכִּים would seem to express a large pot or caldron. If boiling be meant here, we should have first the uncooked elements (Lev. 2:1-3), which typify Christ viewed in His nature as devoted to God, and tested fully by the fire of trial; next (Lev. 2:4-7), the three cases where the oblation was cooked, whether baked, fried, or boiled, representing the blessed Lord viewed as a concrete man here below, and tried as we have seen in every conceivable way, but in all a sweet savor to God.
indicate the means of making peace for a sinner with God, though it may, as in the plural, imply things relating to peace, of which communion and thanksgiving are chief. The ground of peace for us laid in the blood of the cross so naturally suggested by the common rendering, is what one would guard souls against: it could only mislead. The thought seems to be a feast-offering. It is not here all going up to God (Christ surrendering Himself to God up to His death); nor only has God His portion, but the priestly family have theirs (Christ surrendering Himself in His life); but Christ is alike the means and object of communion. It rightly therefore follows both the offerings of a sweet savor, -- the holocaust and the oblation; it approaches the former, in that it supposes the death of Christ; it resembles but it surpasses the latter, in that if part is for God there is part for man. It was pre-eminently therefore what united all who partook of it in joy, thanksgiving, and praise. Hence the fellowship of God, the priest, the offerer and his family, is the impression engraved on it. We need not anticipate more of the details now, as it is in the law of the peace-offering that we find the particulars just referred to.

A few words will suffice for the sacrifice itself. The victim from the herd or flock was not necessarily a male. This more perfect image of Christ was not here sought as in the burnt-offering. The feast-sacrifice descends more to man and his having part in Christ. Still the offering must be unblemished; and here as always the priests alone sprinkle the blood, though anyone might slay. We find here much stress laid on the inwards being offered up to God, --
The fat that covereth the inwards, all the fat that is upon the inwards {Lev. 3:3}.

Some expressions bring this out very strongly, as

It is the food of the offering made by fire unto Jehovah {Lev. 3:11}.
And the priest shall burn them upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire for a sweet savor: all the fat is Jehovah's {Lev. 3:16}.

The fat and the blood were claimed exclusively for Him in the very offering which apart from that admits and displays the communion of others with Him. Now what is the meaning of that? And why such prominence given to the offering of the fat? For of the blood I need say no more here. Where anything is diseased or poor, the fat is the first thing to betray it. Where some state wholly wrong exists, energy in evil would be displayed by the condition of the fat. Where all was good and sound, the fat would manifest that all was perfectly according to normal condition. On the one hand, it was a sign of flourishing in the righteous; on the other, of self-complacent evil in the wicked. Hence, in describing Israel as a proud and self-willed people, we well know how Moses used this very figure as the index of their energy in evil. They waxed fat and kicked. It was evil unchecked in will and its effects, and the extreme sentence of judgment on the people of Israel. In our blessed Lord it was the energy that went forth in the continual business of obeying His Father with joy of heart.

I do always the things that please him {John 8:29}.
It is here then that we find our fellowship in Christ Himself, all whose strength of devotedness and self-sacrifice were for God; and here is the basis and substance of fellowship, for this was what the Father tasted there, and delights that we should enjoy. The fat and blood are His bread {see Ezek. 44:7}, as the prophet says, -- the blood sprinkled by Aaron's sons round about on the altar, and the fat and inwards burnt carefully there.

All the fat is Jehovah's. It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings that ye eat neither fat nor blood {Lev. 3:16, 17}.

But save His claim, the peace-offering was for communion in joy, not at all for expiation. It was eucharistic. It was not for Aaron and his sons like the mincha or oblation, but for the united joy of all who partook, Jehovah, the priest, the offerer and his guests. But Jehovah's portion was to be burnt on the burnt-offering; the link was thus manifest on an occasion of joy with that deepest display of Christ's obedience up to death.

In the sin and trespass offerings which follow (Lev. 4–6:7) we have another line of truth, in which the person ("soul") as well as the nature of the offence are characteristically prominent. It is not now the truth of Christ's dedication of Himself in death as well as life to God; neither is it the eucharistic character of the thank or peace-offering in praise, vow or free-will. We have here vicarious offerings for sin, a substitute for the sinner. Different measures are defined.

In the case of the priest that was anointed (Lev. 4:3-12) -- for this comes first -- a bullock was to be offered without blemish unto Jehovah for a sin-offering. And he shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before Jehovah; and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head, and kill the bullock before Jehovah. And the priest that is anointed shall take of the bullock's blood, and bring it to the tabernacle of the congregation. And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before Jehovah, before the veil of the sanctuary {Lev. 4:3-6}.

He had to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of sweet incense. It is of deep interest to note that here is no promise of expiation for the high priest, nor consequently of forgiveness, as in all the other cases. Is this accident? or part of the profound mind of God in scripture?

It is the same thing substantially when the whole congregation sinned (Lev. 4:13-20). In this case also a young bullock had to be slain, and the elders must do what the anointed priest did in the former case. The blood was sprinkled precisely in the same way, and put on the horns of the same altar, and the rest poured out as before. So too the fat was burnt on the brazen altar, and the rest of the victim burnt outside the camp as in the former case.

But when we come down to a ruler, there is another procedure. The word in this case is, that he shall offer a kid of the goats {Lev. 4:23}, not a bullock; and the priest was to put of the blood on the
horns of the altar of burnt-offering -- not on the golden altar.

When a private person or one of the common people sinned, there was to be a female kid, the blood of which was put on the same brazen altar. In neither case of the two last was the body burnt outside.

It is evident therefore, we find a graduated scale in these different instances. Why so? Because of a most solemn principle. The gravity of sin depends on the position of him who sins. It is not so man is prone to adjust matters, though his conscience feels its rectitude. How often man would screen the offence of him that is great, if he could! The same might be hard on the poor, friendless, and despised. The life of such the offence of him that is great, if he could! The same might be hard on the poor, friendless, and despised. The life of such

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When the anointed priest sinned, the result was precisely such as if the whole congregation sinned. When a prince sinned, it was a different matter, though a stronger case for sacrifice than where it was a private man. In short, therefore, the responsibility of the person that was guilty determines the relative extent of the sin, though none was obscure enough for his sin to be passed by. Our blessed Lord on the other hand meets each and all, Himself the true anointed priest, the only One who needs no offering -- who could therefore be the offering for all, for any. This is the general truth, at least on the surface of the sin-offering. The offence was brought forward, confessed, and judged. The Lord Jesus becomes the substitute in this case for him that was guilty; and the blood was put in the case of individuals on the brazen altar, as it only needed to be dealt with in the place of sinful man’s access to God. But where the anointed priest, or the whole congregation sinned (either interrupting communion), it was done in a far more solemn manner. Consequently the blood must be brought into the sanctuary, and be put on the horns of the golden altar.

There is a sensible difference in the offerings which follow. It would seem that the sin-offering is more connected with nature, although it might be proved by a particular sin, and that the trespass-offering is more connected with that which, while it might be in the holy things of Jehovah, or at least against Him, involved the offender in a fault or wrong towards his neighbor, and needed amends as well as a confession of guilt in the offering. On this however there is no call for discussion at present. There might be a kind of mingling of the two things, and to this there seems to be regard in the beginning of Lev. 5:1-13. There is nothing more astonishing than the accuracy of the word of God when we submit humbly as well as honestly search into it.

Let it be observed, moreover, that in all the proper sin-offerings, the priest not only put some of the blood on the altar (golden or brazen, as the case might require), but poured all the blood at the bottom of the altar of burnt-offering. It was a substitute for the life of the sinner, and was thus poured out where God, in righteousness but in love also, met him in virtue of Christ, who, lifted up from the earth, drew thither to Himself. There accordingly, precisely as in the directions for the peace-offerings (Lev. 3:9, 10), the fat, especially on the inwards, kidneys, and caul (or lobe) above the liver, were taken and burnt on the altar, while the bullock as a whole, skin, flesh, head, legs, inwards, and dung, had to be taken without the camp and burnt in a clean place there, in testimony to God’s vengeance on sin -- at least wherever the blood was sprinkled before Jehovah, before the vail. (Compare Lev. 4:7-12, 17-21.) In the case of an individual Israelite, whether a prince or a soul of the people of the land, there was neither sprinkling of the blood before the vail of the sanctuary nor burning of the body without the camp, and the blood was put by the priest on the horns of the brazen (not the golden) altar.

In the transition cases of Lev. 5:1-13, the offering seems to be called both a trespass 52 and a sin-offering (compare

50 Does not גֵּדָה mean "upon the fire-offerings of Jehovah," rather than "according to" them? De Wette takes it as "for fire-offerings."

51 It may not be amiss to give a sample of Bishop Colenso’s critical candor and intelligence in his remarks on Lev. 4:11, 12 (Part i. ch. vi. I quote from the fourth edition revised, 1863). In his citation he ventures to insert (the Priest) after “shall he” and before “carry forth.” His comment is: "In that case, the effal of the sacrifices would have had to be carried by Aaron himself, or one of his sons, a distance of six miles (3); and the same difficulty would have attended each of the other transactions above-mentioned. In fact, we have to imagine the Priest having himself to convey, -- we may suppose, with the help of others; -- from St. Paul’s to the outskirts of the Metropolis the ‘skin, and flesh, and head, and legs, and inwards, and dung, even the whole bullock;’ and the people having to carry out their rubbish in like manner and bring in their daily supplies of water and fuel, after first cutting down the latter where they could find it.” Now even in our language it would be unwarrantable for a man professedly honest or truthful to fix on the words “shall carry” the necessity of personally doing this work in order to cast doubt or ridicule on the record. What shall be said of one ostensibly in the position of a chief servant of Christ so doing by holy scripture? But this is far short of the gravity of his guilt. For a tyro in Hebrew knows that verbs are susceptible of a change in form which gives a causative force. Such is the fact here. The verb originally means to “go forth;” in the Hiphil it means “to cause to go forth,” leaving entirely open the agency employed. If it be sorrowful to make blunders in scripture exposition with good and reverent intentions, what can account for such excessive ignorance as is displayed in this instance? Were it a heathen enemy who thus reproached God and His word, one could understand that the haste to blame what is above man’s mind often exposes itself thus; but what shall we say of one who so comes to us in the clothing not of a sheep merely but of a shepherd?

52 I am aware of the confident statements of Drs. Davidson and Fairbairn on this point. The question is whether they are well founded. The former (Intro. O.T. i. 267) says, “Whosoever wishes to ascertain the points of difference between these two classes of offerings must carefully read Lev. 5:14-26 and 7:1-10, relating to the trespass-offering; and 5:1-13, 6:17-23, which refer to the sin offering. He should particularly guard against the mistake of referring 5:5, 6 to the trespass-offering, since it relates to the sin-offering alone. The passage says, that if one be guilty in any of the things mentioned in 5:1-4, he shall confess that he has sinned, and bring his חֲרָׁשָׁה his debt, his due compensation, or simply his offering. The word has the same sense in 5:15; Num. 5:7. Nothing can be more incorrect than to affirm with Kitto, that the same offerings and trespass-offerably sin-offerings are the same in Lev. 5:6-9. חֲרָׁשָׁה has three meanings -- viz., guilt, as in Gen. 26; debt, or what is due for contracting for guilt; and sacrifice for certain sins, i.e., sin-
Lev. 5:6, 7, and 9, 11, 12); yet only a connecting particle opens the section. The former class regarded sin in itself where the conscience was bad from the first; the transitional class that follows treats rather of sin viewed in its consequences, and admits of consideration, which the first class did not with a single and slight exception. But here we have an option of unexampled largeness, and the more to be noticed because sin was in question. When the sin came to be known, the guilty person confessed it, bringing a female lamb or kid; if his hand were insufficient for this, two turtle-doves or two young pigeons -- one for a sin-offering, and the other for a burnt-offering; and if his hand reached not to this, the tenth of an ephah of flour was brought by the sinner, but no oil nor frankincense, as it was a sin-offering. The priest grasped his handful, its memorial, and burnt it on the altar in expiation for his sin which should be forgiven, retaining the rest as an oblation. Here, again, what compassion for the poor in divine things! Yet there is the nicest care of holiness, not only where conscience at once told the tale of sin, but where it may not have been bad till it knew the consequence of overlooking some ordinance of government or legal purity. When it thus became bad, there must be both confession and sin-offering in order to forgiveness. On the other hand, God would not let circumstances hinder the poorest from the comfort of atonement as well as the duty of confession. The offering of fine flour for sin is exactly the exception which proves the rule, as it was manifestly owing to destitution on the offerer’s part, and only a graciously-allowed substitute for a bloody offering otherwise indispensable. A soul may feel its need of atonement, and look to Christ as a sin-bearer without anything like a full perception of His blood and death: will the grace of God shut out from the effects of His work because of untoward circumstances which hindered more knowledge? Assuredly I do not think so.

Lev. 4:14 gives a new word of Jehovah to Moses, as we see in the beginning of Lev. 6 also. Both sections however (Lev. 5:14-19 and Lev. 6:1-7) share the common principle of making amends, or restitution, and the common name of trespass or guilt-offering, which was necessarily a ram, the blood of which (as we learn from its law (Lev. 7), was sprinkled round about upon the altar, not poured out or shed at its base as with the sin-offering. The proper offerings for guilt or trespass, then, consist of two classes: first, wrongs done in the holy things of Jehovah (probably firstfruits, tithes, &c.), or by doing something against Jehovah’s commands, afterwards found out; secondly, wrongs which Jehovah counts done against Him, though not sacrilegious or transgressive like the former, but acts of fraud and violence with deceit against men. In all such cases, besides an unblemished ram for the trespass-offering, with the payment of the value of the wrong that was done, a fifth was added according to the valuation of Moses, and given either to the priest in the former class, or to the party wronged in the second class.

Then follow the various laws of the offerings (Lev. 6:8–7).

As before, the burnt-offering stands first. Here it is an interesting fact to learn that the fire burning on the altar was never to go out. Nothing can be more express than this repeated injunction. All night it must burn, and never go out. It is night as regards the world -- not for those that are children of the day -- in a certain moral sense at any rate. But the fire never goes out, and when God wakes up His people and the nations, how precious to find that the offering has been once offered by reason of which those who submit to His righteousness will be acceptable to God! All was burnt to God, nothing-eaten by man.

Next comes the law of the oblation or food-offering, in which we find particularly specified that Aaron and his sons are to eat of it.

With unleavened bread shall it be eaten in the holy place (Lev. 6:16).

Those that partake of Christ and are priests to God enjoy by faith His devoting Himself in life unto God, and had better beware of that which ill assorts with it. With unleavened bread, which sets forth absolute separation from the evil of nature, it was to be eaten, as also in the holy place. Is it not most derogatory to the grace which brings us nigh to trifle with Christ thus known? I know nothing more hatefully defiling than the way in which men who have no faith in Christ, nor sense of their sin or need, nor care for the glory of God, affect in an eulogistic way to take up the life of Christ and pronounce on His excellency here or there. Is not this to eat the oblation in the world and with leavened bread?

Besides we have the offering of Aaron and his sons on the day of his anointing -- a peculiar case of the oblation.
At the end of Lev. 6 is the law of the sin-offering; and in the beginning of Lev. 7 that of the trespass-offering. Here, as in the oblation, the priests were to eat in the holy place: in the former it was communion with His grace as man, in the latter communion with Him on behalf of the sinner through His work.

But, remarkably enough, and nicely distinguished as we shall see, the thank or peace-offering only appears after these, and at great length. Thus it stands last in the list of the laws, whereas it preceded the sin and trespass-offerings themselves. Can it be doubted that all this has designed significance, and that here the Spirit of God reserves for the last place the sacrifice which typifies Christ for communion, when it is a question of the law of its use? For there is nothing finer among the offerings than this sacrifice when we come to practice. Whatever may be the order of communication on God’s part as we look at Christ; whatever the application to the sinner as we look at ourselves, the peace-offering is the last when we come to take it up as a matter representing practically the state of our souls. Communion as set forth by the peace-offering is what most of all answers to our soul’s state, in order that we be able to turn to God in praise and thanksgiving. There were two chief forms. If offered as a thanksgiving, it was to be offered on the same day, and no part kept. But if it was a vow or voluntary offering, on the morrow the remainder might be eaten. We constantly find the same thing true in our souls now. There are two different measures in worshiping God; both real, but by no means possessing the same power. We see souls thoroughly happy in the sense of what the Lord has done for them, and they break forth in grateful thanks. Who would not join them in it? It is truly delightful, and quite right in its place. It may be elementary, it is true, but real worship of God. Yet it wants the power that sustains. In the vow we see more, where it is not simply a question of what has been done for us, and what we have ourselves received, but the heart can thoroughly delight in what Christ is Himself before God. This abides. There is no change here.

In Lev. 8 we begin the history of the consecration of the priests; for now having been given the offerings, with their laws, we in due order come to the persons who had, if not to offer them, certainly to act for the people as to them in the sanctuary. That which had been laid down as a requisition in Ex. 28, 29 is now carried out practically as to the family of Aaron.

Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments, and the anointing oil, and a bullock for the sin-offering, and two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread; and gather thou all the congregation together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

And Moses did as Jehovah commanded him {Lev. 8:2-4}.

And there Moses brings forth Aaron and his sons, and washes them with water. In this we see the failure of any type to represent Christ. Aaron of course, as well as his sons, had to be washed. In Christ there was no need; nay, He came to cleanse others. What the washing did for Aaron, Jesus was, and infinitely more. The absolute purity of Christ as man no doubt fitted Him so far to be a priest. At the same time, we must carefully remember that there is an element in the priesthood of Christ that could not be given in any type, of which the epistle to the Hebrews makes much. The personal basis of the priesthood of Christ consisted in this, that He was the Son of God. Others were merely sons of men; and so in this case a priest was one taken from among men. This was not the ground of Christ’s priesthood. It was no doubt necessary that He should be a man, but that which attested His distinguishing character as Priest was that He was the Son of God. And hence the title applied to Him in the second Psalm the Holy Ghost reasons on in the same fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in contrasting Him with Aaron and his sons. Accordingly they, as knowing what man was, could feel for poor man, because they were poor men themselves. But the Son of God was altogether different. Immeasurably above man, all His heart could go out for man. He was absolutely above the condition in which man was involved by the fall, not merely in so much as He was a holy man, but as the Son of God. For this very reason there was perfect liberty of heart to take up the need of others; and so He did. This does not at all clash with the distinct truth of His suffering. Much which He endured was just because He was the Holy One. His sufferings therefore essentially differed from that kind of chastening which we, alas! know when buffeted for our faults. There never was in Jesus anything short of sufferings for grace or for righteousness, except when we come to the cross, when there was suffering for sin; but it was ours entirely -- not His.

In this case then Aaron washed could be but a feeble type of Jesus in His own essential purity. Upon him the coat and the girdle and the robe and the ephod were put, and with the curious girdle bound upon him.

And he put the breastplate upon him: also he put in the breastplate the Urim and the Thummim. And he put the mitre upon his head; also upon the mitre, even upon his forehead, did he put the golden plate, the holy crown; as Jehovah commanded Moses. And Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was therein, and sanctified them. And he sprinkled thereof upon the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all his vessels, both the laver and his foot, to sanctify them. And he poured of the anointing oil upon Aaron’s head {Lev. 8:8-12}.

Mark that it was without blood: a most striking fact. Although a sinful man like the priests, his sons, still (that he might not stand in flagrant contradiction to Him of whom he was a type) Aaron was anointed with the oil before the blood was shed. It is worthy of observation that the tabernacle was anointed (Lev. 8:10) and all therein, the altar and all its vessels, with the laver and its base, before the sprinkling with blood. The force of this is plain and momentous as applied to the power of the Spirit in which Christ claims the heavenly things and indeed the universe; especially when we notice that the altar is purified by blood but no anointing follows.

Afterwards (Lev. 8:13) we find Aaron’s sons brought, and they are clothed too, but they are not anointed.
And he brought the bullock for the sin-offering: and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bullock for the sin-offering {Lev. 8:14}.

Indeed, Aaron was a sinful man; but there was this careful reserve -- that Aaron received the anointing oil before the sin-offering was killed, and before the blood therefore was sprinkled on him. Notwithstanding, when the sin-offering was slain, Aaron and his sons alike laid their hands on its head; and Moses took the blood, and put it on the horns of the altar to purify it, and poured the rest at the base. Then, after burning the sin-offering without the camp, we are told of one ram for the burnt-offering, and another for consecration, to set forth special devotedness to God as priests. Thereon the blood is put on Aaron's right ear and thumb and foot, as well as on his sons'. But we must remember that in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as here, the points of analogy, however strong, always fall short of the full glory of Christ. They were the shadows, and not the very image, as we are told. The anointing oil was not wanting, nor the appropriate oblation and peace-offering -- Christ in all His acceptance.

In Lev. 9 we have the eighth day, when Aaron and his sons were to stand forth fully consecrated, and the glory of Jehovah appears. After the various offerings in their order, all closes with a very striking scene.

Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people and blessed them, and came down from offering of the sin-offering, and the burnt-offering, and the peace-offerings {Lev. 9:22}.

The eighth day sets forth the time of resurrection glory. Then we read,

And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of Jehovah appeared unto all the people {Lev. 9:23}.

The bearing of this cannot well be doubted. First of all the high priest acts alone in blessing on the conclusion of the consecration and according to the efficacy of all the sacrifices. Then Moses and Aaron go into the tabernacle. It is the type of the full character of Christ, when there is the blending of regulative authority with the priesthood. Now Christ acts simply as priest; by and by He will take the kingdom, as well as maintain priesthood. As a sign of this, Moses and Aaron come out together, and bless the congregation, and the glory of Jehovah appears to all the people. It evidently prefigures the day of Jehovah, when the Lord Jesus shall be displayed in glory to every eye, and shall be a priest upon His throne {Zech. 6:13}. Our portion is a very different one, and is defined and distinguished from that of Israel, as far as a type could be, in Lev. 16; but this I will not now anticipate.

In the next chapter (Lev. 10) we have a humiliating fact -- the total feebleness of man in this new relationship of blessing to which he was called.

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before Jehovah, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from Jehovah and devoured them, and they died before Jehovah {Lev. 10:1, 2}.

The consecration was but complete. Scarcely did they actually stand forth as priests of Jehovah, when two of them had so failed that the fire of divine judgment devours them, instead of signifying in peace the acceptance of the victims.

Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that Jehovah spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.{Lev. 10:3}.

You will find this always to be the difference between that which is of God and that which is of man. A human religion instinctively makes excuses for its officials, and never fails to allow a certain latitude and license for those that propagate it. The true God nowhere maintains the nice exigencies of His own character so much as in those who are nearest to Him and most favored by Him. There is not a heart and conscience renewed of God but must feel how right and becoming it is that so it should be. No doubt flesh shrinks from such searching work; but Christianity means and is based on the judgment, not the sparing, of the flesh -- the gospel of Christ, and the Christian boasts in it with the apostle. There is nothing like the cross for God morally; but it is God acting in our interest, as well as for His own glory. Nothing more dishonoring to Him, nothing less wholesome for us than to give a dispensation for unholiness -- to sell indulgences; yet it is what every religion under the sun has done in effect, save that which is revealed of God. Even in the lowest form of God's revelation, when it was a question of schooling the first man, not yet of the Second, we see man's way judged unsparingly: how much more where all sin is discerned and dealt with fully, whether in the cross itself or by the power of the Spirit of God in the consciences of those that believe! But immediately God with solemn severity is seen gravely resenting the liberty which two of those standing high in religious rank took that day; -- so much so that men might taunt and say that the whole building had broken down before the very walls were complete. But the mediator was enabled to meet the occasion, and turns the chastening into matter for holy exhortation.

And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar, and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which Jehovah hath kindled {Lev. 10:6}.

He felt that it did not become those so near to Jehovah to yield themselves up to natural grief, any more than to allow a carnal excitement in His worship. Henceforward this is forbidden. The outward signs of mourning for death are prohibited for the priests. Certainly the occasion was a serious one, and fully tested the principle. But connected with it we learn that excitement is just as uncomely on their part who enjoy such nearness to God.

And Jehovah spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations {Lev. 10:8, 9}.

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No doubt it had also a practical bearing. Drinking wine or the like might unfit one for putting difference between holy and unholy. But first and foremost, and most rightly, it did not suit the presence of God: next, it unfitted for the safe and holy help of man surrounded by evil and perplexity.

Afterward oversight appears even in the rest of Aaron’s sons, inasmuch as they burnt the goat of the sin-offering, for which Moses was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar. The failure thus was complete. Two of them paid the penalty with their lives; the other two were only spared in answer to the intercession of Aaron.

The next chapter (Lev. 11) gives in detail this very difference of clean and unclean, but here the multiplicity of minute points admonishes for this sketch no more than a passing survey. It was not the point to furnish information as to the wholesome or unwholesome; but a moral end is everywhere uppermost. Jehovah would have Israel confide in Him and His choice for them as a peculiar and consecrated people. Doubtless He chose what was good, nay, the best; and His restrictions were not without the discerning insight of One who made each creature and had called out His people to be under His righteous government, and looked onward to a heavenly family who would gather His mind by the Spirit couched under these outward shadows.

It may suffice for the present that these remarks be made as to it — that the essential condition in the land animals at any rate allowed for food consisted in this, that there should be a clean and firm walk, and along with it mature digestion. If there was failure in either, it was not fitting food for an Israelite (Lev. 11:2, 3). Hence the camel, the coney (or daman); the hare, and the swine, failing in one or other of these conditions could not be eaten nor their carcasses touched without defilement (Lev. 11:4-8). Thus, if we apply this practically enough to show its bearing, let us suppose a person ever so clear in apprehending truth, but without conscience as to his ordinary walk, all is good for nothing; or again let us take a person ever so blameless in walk, but his walk in no way flowing from the truth, all is good for nothing. For what can be right that is not the effect of revealed truth received into the heart, and becoming a part of one’s vital system by the Spirit’s application of it to our souls? Only then surely will the walk be firm, conscientious, free, and holy; such as suits the communications of God. But it is plain that the two things, not merely one of the two, are absolutely necessary, and are the fruit of the Spirit’s dealing savingly with the conscience. It is a miserable thing to deceive ourselves on one side or the other. Let none ever content himself with being hoped to be a Christian in what people call the judgment of charity. Let us look well to it that our hearts be open to the searchings of the word by the Holy Spirit, and let us not shrink from suffering the word of exhortation. Others will look for the resulting fruit day by day in our ways and spirit. But it is only where both these features are combined that there can be communion according to God. This seems to be the lesson for us typically couched under eating of that which was clean.

The Israelite was not to partake of each animal which he might meet with. What was monstrous in one way or another was forbidden; what was according to divine order was lawful to him. Thus animals in the waters without fins and scales; winged insects without springing hind legs distinct from their four legs; the ravenous and nocturnal among birds; the carnivorous among beasts were of course excluded; but there were others also in divine wisdom and with a typical regard. When dead too, their touch defiled, even to a vessel or raiment, &c. (Lev. 11:9-35). Not so a fountain or pit, or gathering of water, which cleansed instead of contracting uncleanness (Lev. 11:36); not so sowing seed (Lev. 11:37). The power and life of the Spirit are incontaminate. Reptiles which did not fly or leap were all unclean. Jehovah laid all this on His people, who were to be holy because He was.

In Lev. 12 comes in another remarkable type, namely, the condition in which sin has plunged men and women. Every child of Adam suffers from the defilement of an evil nature. In case there was a man-child, as we are told, there was such a result, and with a female child still more manifestly. The Lord never forgets how sin came into the world. His righteousness takes account of the first temptation to the end. So it is remarkable how the Apostle Paul turns this fact even for a matter of practical guidance in the question whether a woman ought to teach in the church. Assuredly our thoughts ought to be formed by the word of God. It is a question of government on earth, not of heaven nor of eternity in all this.

In Lev. 13 leprosy is set forth with much detail as a general defilement of the person, also in the head or beard; and in divers forms. Here we have the most characteristic type of sin under the sign of that foul and hopeless disease. There might be other maladies wearing its evil appearance, but in fact only suspicious symptoms. Hence there was this important provision: -- a man is not made the judge of his own sin. It was laid down in the law that the Israelite should submit his condition to the inspection of another, and this other the type of a spiritual man, for a priest means that. It is really one who is called to have title of access to God, and who therefore should have his senses exercised to discern both good and evil according to the standard of the sanctuary. As such he is bound not to be carried away by conventional opinions, or traditional thoughts, or what men call public opinion -- one of the most mischievous sources of depraving the holy moral judgment in the children of God.

The leper then, whether so in reality or in appearance, submits to the priest, whatever might be the fact. The spot looked ill; it might be only a rising in the flesh, some passing evil. On the other hand a very trifling symptom in appearance, the least bright spot, with the hair turned white in it, and the plague or sore deeper than the skin, might have real leprosy lurking under it. The priest judges seriously. If these active and deep indications, however small, are there, he pronounces the man unclean. If he has a doubt, the suspected person is shut up, and remains to be seen again. If there are hopeful symptoms, they are noted; if there be no raw flesh, no fresh effects of active disease, but on the contrary the return of
vigor, they are cherished, and if continued and increasing after a week’s remand, the priest pronounces the man clean. If the hair turned white, if the evil lay deeper than the skin, and if it tended to spread, uncleanness was there. A boil or a burn might issue in leprosy. Nothing is trifled with, nothing passed over, nothing left without watch to work its own unimpeded way of evil. After a certain definite limit the priest looks again. He still perceives evil somewhat deeper than the skin. If it is a well-defined case of leprosy, he pronounces at once on it; if there is still uncertainty, there must be a farther term of waiting.

A plague might be in the head or beard, as well as the body; then if deeper than the skin and in it a yellow thin hair, the priest must pronounce it leprosy; if not so deep, he must delay, when if it did not spread nor deepen, he must delay again, and then if all went on thus favorably, he might pronounce him clean. Other cases are gone through with the utmost care, and I have no doubt that every minute difference is full of instruction; but the proof of this would carry us away from my present object.

The result in one instance (Lev. 13:12, 13) is indeed remarkable -- the whole person was covered with the effects of leprosy. To the inexperienced eye it might look the worst of all; for the leprosy was all out and over the sufferer. Yes, and just because it was, the priest had warrant to pronounce him clean! Thus, when a sinner has got to his worst and felt it, he is forgiven. It was evil no longer at work but manifest. If it was evil no longer at work but manifest, the priest must pronounce it leprosy; if not so deep, he must delay, when if it did not spread nor deepen, he must delay again, and then if all went on thus favorably, he might pronounce him clean. Other cases are gone through with the utmost care, and I have no doubt that every minute difference is full of instruction; but the proof of this would carry us away from my present object.

The case of the leprous garment does not call for lengthened remark. It refers to leprosy not so much in the nature as in the circumstances -- in what was displayed (Lev. 13:47-59).

Lev. 14 is occupied with the wonderfully instructive statement of the cleansing of the leper. There is no such thing as the cure of leprosy named here. This belonged to God alone. No ceremony, no rite, could really heal, -- nothing but divine power mediate or immediate. Supposing somehow or another the leprosy stayed, the man must be cleansed. This is the ceremonial laid down in the beginning of the chapter. It presents an obvious and striking type of Christ dead and risen in the two birds. When the blood of the killed bird was mingled with running water (representing the action of the Holy Spirit dealing with man), and seven times sprinkled by the high priest on him, he is pronounced clean forthwith. The living bird dipped in the blood of the slain one is let loose into the field (type of Christ’s resurrection); and he that is to be cleansed begins to wash his clothes, shave and otherwise cleanse himself for seven days more; and on the seventh day he shall be clean {Lev. 14:9}.

Not till then could he be, though he was not longer outside the camp.

But on the eighth day we have the types of Christ in the fulness of His grace, and all the efficacy of His work before God applied to the man, so that the soul might realize the place of blessing into which it is brought. There is often a danger of our contenting ourselves with the first part without the last. Of how much we rob our souls by this poverty in the presence of the riches of the grace of God! The chapter closes (Lev. 14:33-53) with the leprosy of the house, which is clearly corporate evil, and with a reference to each case (Lev. 14:54-57).

* * *

In Leviticus 15 we have cases of the evil of nature in the aspect of man’s utter weakness as he now is through sin. If we find such awful but true characteristics of man, may we delight ourselves that God and God alone brings together in the same book the contrast as the rich and full presentation of Christ’s sacrifice in all its variety and perfection! After such an introduction we may well bear to see that dismal picture of man in all his loathsomeness, -- leprosy in his person, leprosy in his character, leprosy in his connection, with the antecedent uncleanness and the defilements which follow. Yet Mercy rejoiceth against judgment {James 2:13}.

We shall find however that it is not bare mercy, but a God who acts in power, and will have us in communion with Himself, while we are in the old scene of folly and evil, instead of having us to wait till we get to heaven. How blessed thus to know Him here! I hope to dwell a little on that which will illustrate this side of His grace, when proceeding with the portion of the book of Leviticus which follows.
Lectures on the Pentateuch

Lecture 7

Leviticus 16–27

We have seen the various forms of the work of Christ, of His offering of Himself to God, whether in all the perfectness of His life, or in His death as the means of our acceptance. We have seen further the consecration of the priests naturally following the offerings and their laws, then the directions whereby the priests might learn to distinguish between clean and unclean, with the various forms in which the total defilement of the people was represented, in birth, disease, and infirmity.

Now we have the great atonement-day. Not more truly does this chapter stand out singly, and in a literally central position of the book, than the atonement itself does in the ways of God. It is evident that, however all may have prepared us for it, and however that which follows too may flow from it, atonement has a place to itself -- a place to which there is nothing similar or second -- a place that lies at the very basis of all God’s ways -- the only possible means for the blessing of a sinful creature before God. It is well that we should enjoy all the privileges with which God’s grace may invest us, and that we should delight in that which He makes known to us as the revelation of His own nature as well as of His counsels and ways; for He would make us truly happy; and there is no happiness except in communion with Himself. At the same time the atonement has incomparably the deepest place of all truths in scripture, save only Christ’s person, in whom all the fulness dwelt bodily. God revealed Himself thus with a view to the atonement, and the atonement itself, besides having this character of center and foundation-stone, becomes the capital means of bringing the soul out of all its wretched and sinful selfishness (which indeed is sin and misery) into the knowledge of God, so as God Himself never could have given, had there not been sin to draw out the Son of God to die in atonement. In short the very evil of the creature has given occasion to such a knowledge of God as never could have been enjoyed without it -- to its own shame indeed, but to God’s everlasting glory.

For this reason then the forms in which God gave the intimations of the atonement have the deepest possible interest for our souls. We must bear in mind however, that here as everywhere we have only the shadow, and in no instance the very image of the thing. We shall always find that which falls short. There could be but one Christ, the only begotten Son; and so but one work in which He has brought out not merely God but God glorified as to our sin -- glorified in His own moral being and in His gracious provision that we should be delivered from it.

First of all then we have that which shows us the necessary imperfection of all the provisional dealings.

The law made nothing perfect {Heb. 7:19}.

We may see indeed how true is this very feature in the beginning of the chapter; for

Jehovah spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered before Jehovah, and died; and Jehovah said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not {Lev. 16:1, 2}.

Now it is evident, that to have the glory of God as the element of our joy -- and we are entitled to rejoice in hope of it even as we are to joy in God Himself -- supposes nearness to Himself. To keep the soul out of the presence of God is incompatible with real enjoyment of Him. Nevertheless, though the circumstance of failure on the part of Nadab and Abihu gave occasion to requiring distance on man’s part, there could have been none other provision under the law or till the cross.

When Aaron henceforth entered the sanctuary, he must come after the following fashion. He was to bring a young bullock for a sin-offering, and a ram for a burnt-offering. But as for his garments of glory and beauty, he could not bring them into the sanctuary. And this again lets us know how totally all signs fail in consequence of man’s condition. Indeed what they showed was not the entrance of man according to the counsels of God into His own presence, but that the first man could not so enter; for whatever might be the forms of glory and beauty represented by that clothing for the high priest, in point of fact he never could wear it in the presence of God. The only time at which he did enter the most holy place was when he wore the linen clothes to be put on expressly on the day of atonement. At other seasons he might not enter there. He was to put on these linen clothes after having put off the others. He was to wash his flesh in water, and so put them on, in aim shadowing the purity of Christ, but in fact confessing the impurity of the first man. Intrinsic purity was found in its perfection in Christ.

And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin-offering, and one ram for a burnt-offering. And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin-offering, which is for himself {Lev. 16:5, 6}.

The first thing here to which I would draw your attention is the single offering where Aaron and his house were
concerned, and the double one on behalf of the people of Israel. This is evident on the face of the chapter. When we come to the facts to which these types looked onward, need it be said that there was but one sacrifice -- but one comprehensive sacrificial act which met all that was meant, whether in the bullock on the one hand, or in both the goats on the other? But still no serious soul can question for a moment the importance of the truth intended to be conveyed by this typical difference. For in the case of the priestly family, with Aaron at the head of it, there was but a single act. The bullock was slain, and the sprinkling of its blood alone met all the exigencies of God’s holiness and nature as regarded Aaron and his house. But in the case of the children of Israel we have a far more complicated system. There was a marked distinction drawn between the two goats, one of which was slain. It was called Jehovah’s lot; for lots were cast for them as to which was to be slain, and which sent alive into the wilderness. The latter, carefully reserved till all was over with the bullock and the other goat, was brought forward at a later moment.

Now what is the prominent truth to be gathered from this marked difference? To me it appears to be of no small moment for our souls. We all more or less tend toward Jewish ideas. So it has invariably been, and there are natural reasons why it should be. I do not mean merely the power of Satan in always seeking to corrupt God’s testimony, whatever it may be at any given time. But there is this essential difference between the ways of God with the Jew and with the Christian -- that those with Israel are more adapted to the senses and the reason, as well as the working of natural conscience; whereas those addressed to the Christian flow simply and solely from the revelations of God’s counsels and grace, and suppose the faith that acquaints itself with His mind and love. For instance, take the law itself. Every upright conscience feels what may be called the reasonableness of its demands, and the justice of its decisions. Conscience can conclude about it, and feel how right it all is. Of course, when one speaks about its reasonableness, it is not meant in a mere mental way, but so as to satisfy what conscience owns to be due to God and man.

But the Christian has an altogether higher standard, where all depends on the simplicity of receiving what is above nature, and where, if nature presumes to reason, it invariably draws false conclusions. In short the Christian never can form a right conclusion, except in reasoning from what God is as He has revealed Himself in His word, and never from the feelings of conscience, or that which would seem to be just. Now this is invariably true, and therefore it is that, when persons are simply awakened, they are apt to fall into a legal state. It has always for its effect the conscience set in action through the Spirit of God, who brings in the light of the word, and deals with the heart, showing no doubt mercy behind it all, but nevertheless discovering the evil that is within. In such a condition there is always danger of reasoning from what we are to God; and we all know what immense anguish of soul this may produce, and how perfectly the gospel meets all such anxieties; for while it gives conscience the fullest place, nevertheless it brings liberty of heart by the full revelation of God’s grace in Christ. The consequence is that the effect wrought by the truth of God in the full light of grace is incomparably simpler; and for this reason -- that by the light of Christianity all that is in or of man is put down as thoroughly evil. In point of fact the cross entitles us to pronounce ourselves dead before God; and beyond question death settles all questions. Now I do not believe that even in the dealings of God with Israel by and by there will be anything like such depth of dealings; and certainly it was not so in the past. We can see it in the psalms, as well as in the accounts given of the saints of God, making due allowances where there is a type of greater things.

In this respect we may illustrate it by the difference of two well-known characters in the very first book of the Bible. Take Abraham’s faith and way, as compared with Jacob. Abraham walks in communion by faith. Jacob has to be chastened; the ground of his heart must be constantly ploughed up, that he may learn what Abraham did not need in the same way, being occupied with what God was towards him and with His word, instead of requiring the painful and humbling, however salutary, lesson of what he had failed to be for God. It would seem that the difference is somewhat of this kind between the provision for the Jewish people in the two goats, as compared with that which is represented by the single bullock, where the whole mighty work of the Lord Jesus Christ, as applied to the Christian and to the church, is found. Of course the word “church” is employed here only in a general sense; for it is granted fully that all types fail to reveal the mystery as such. Certain figures there are connected with the mystery, but there is no type whatsoever which brings out the mystery in its fulness.

In the case of the bullock there is no distinction drawn between the judgment of sin in the vindication of God’s own nature, and the dealing with the sins of the priestly house. All was contained in the one unbroken work that was here represented. The bullock was brought out and offered as it is said as a sin-offering for Aaron and for his house. Afterwards the two goats are taken and presented before Jehovah, and lots are cast upon them, one lot for Jehovah, and the other lot for the scape-goat. Aaron then brings the bullock of the sin-offering, and makes an atonement for himself and his house. He carries incense within the vail, and there sprinkles of the blood upon the mercy-seat and before it seven times. In this manner the whole work is done with extreme simplicity. But for this very reason there is a depth in what God represented by the death of the bullock that is looked for in vain in the more complicated type of the two goats.

The blood of the bullock is brought into the holiest -- part sprinkled upon the mercy-seat, part before it; then the first goat having been killed, its blood also is brought in to make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel {Lev. 16:16}.

In point of fact, as we know, when we come to the reality of atonement by the Lord Jesus, all was contained in His one and only sacrifice. Particular emphasis is laid on the fact that there was no man present; it was all a question between God and the high priest for sin. After this it is said,
And he shall go out unto the altar that is before Jehovah, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about. And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel. And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat: and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat into the wilderness {Lev. 16:18-22}.

There was nothing at all analogous to this in the bullock for Aaron and his house where we found the representation of Christ’s work for the heavenly people. Mark the difference. In their case all was settled in the presence of God. There was nothing more needed. The blood was carried straight into the sanctuary, and all was closed. Undoubtedly a most important inference is intended by the coming out of the high priest, when there ensues the dealing with the other goat, the substantial result of which I deny not to us, viewed as individuals, sinners, in this world; but in the precision of the type, as far as our full place is concerned, it does not directly set forth what is done for the priestly family. This is exceedingly observable. We have to do with the work of Christ as measured by God Himself in the sanctuary. The divine estimate of it all is the ground of our perfect peace with God; and how blessed thus to rest on what God has found in the precious blood of Jesus! -- of Jesus going straightway, we may say, after having offered up Himself upon the cross, into the presence of God. It is not denied that for peculiar and important purposes there was a delay of forty days, in which He showed Himself here below. This was necessary, according to the wisdom of God, for reasons of great moment. But on the ground of His work He goes up into the presence of God and there stands or rather sits down, God Himself in His own heavenly light and glory giving us the full value of what He has found in the cross of Jesus.

There is a marked difference when we come to Israel. There it is not put in the same way. And why? Because of the prominence given to their transgressions. Having been put under law in a sense which was never true of the Gentiles, the law brought out the transgressions of those that were under it, and there the mercy of God provides a special means for comforting them in their necessary trouble of conscience. A specific assurance was given in His pity where their transgressions were made so patent. The Christian learns in short what his guilt was, and the inbred evil of his nature, by the infiniteness of Christ’s sacrifice, the glory of His person, and the place into which He has now entered in the presence of God. Of the perfectness of the work for us, these are the great evidences; but to the Israelite there is the type of something else. The high priest goes forth, and publicly stands with a living goat before him, upon the head of which he confesses definitely and distinctly the sins of the children of Israel. They will need it. The special position of Israel, in particular their having to do with the law of God, accounts for the difference. Our place is most evidently that of men who walk by faith and not by sight. In Israel’s case the goat which had the sins thus articulately confessed upon it goes away, and bears them far away from the people into a land not inhabited. I do not think the idea here has any link with the resurrection, any more than with heaven which is far from being a desert which none inhabit. It is merely a connected fact which refers to our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross: only that on one side of it He suffers as bearing our judgment from God, and on the other side there is the full bearing away of the sins of man, of course more particularly of Israel. For the Christian believer all is summed up in Christ having borne our judgment, then going in before God; as here the high priest carries the blood into the holiest of all.

Our portion is where Christ is. It is there that we must in spirit follow Him. The whole of Christianity is bound up with what is transacted within the vail. This is what is peculiar to us as Christians; so that, if we find our true place, it must be in Him who goes into the presence of God. It is not so with the people of Israel. They yet anxiously await His coming out, and when He does appear, they will have the comfort then, and not before, of knowing that their sins are all completely borne away; whereas we need wait for nothing. On the ground of His sacrifice, as estimated of God and made known by His Spirit while Christ is within the vail, we draw near where He is. We know that His standing in the presence of God is the best of all evidence to prove how perfectly our sins are gone. If there were a question of any single one remaining, how could He rest in the presence of God? There He is, the man that bore our sins, but He is now seated at the right hand of God. Consequently the demonstration to us that our sins are gone is not some fresh action. There is for us no distinctive bearing of our iniquities confessed on the scape-goat. Those who believe without seeing do not -- ought not to -- require this, whereas to the children of Israel it is expressly given. They will need all possible comfort. Accordingly we find in the prophets there is that which answers to this type, when, if the Lord’s appearing in glory will set all their sins, as it were, before their eyes, at the same time there will be the fullest conviction wrought in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, that the sins, though thus brought before them, are borne for ever away. This may serve to make somewhat plainer the difference between Israel’s destiny and what concerns Aaron and his house in the one bullock that was offered for them; as it seems to be the reason why in the types of the sacrifices for the priests and the people there is an undeniable distinction.

Another thing may be observed. There is care taken to show that the high priest made an atonement for the holy place, and for the tabernacle of the congregation. For this we are not left to our own thoughts. The word of God is plain that, when our Lord Jesus effected reconciliation, it was not only for those that believed but for the universe of God -- for all things in heaven and on earth. This is clearly what is
represented by it.

Further, observe the beauty of the type in another respect. Although in point of fact what was set forth by the two goats did take place in the offering of Christ, nevertheless the bringing forward of the scape-goat, after the high priest leaves the sanctuary, seems not obscurely to indicate that the application would be after the whole business of what was represented by Aaron and his house is completely over. The Christian follows the Lord into the antitypical sanctuary -- into heaven itself; and then, when He comes out, Israel will learn the blessed truth to which they are now so blind. They will know that on His cross atonement was made for their sins, completely borne away, but borne away by the One that shed His blood before it was a question of Christianity at all on earth; for I speak not of divine counsels.

† † †

Consequently this chapter has an immense comprehensiveness of meaning; and that which might seem irregular in its parts is most explicable when we come to leave room for the various dispensational dealings of God. It involves a certain difficulty at first sight, which is very often the case. The most obvious meaning is rarely the true one; but when the truth is once seen, it commends itself to the heart and conscience by its self-evidencing force, simplicity, and harmony with other truth.

Afterwards follow certain communications in the rest of the book grounded on the atonement.

Thus, in the next chapter (Lev. 17) we have a very serious and solemn injunction, spoken to Moses in the first instance, but set forth in a very comprehensive manner.

Speak unto Aaron, and unto his sons, and unto all the children of Israel, and say unto them; This is the thing which Jehovah hath commanded {Lev. 17:2}.

A most jealous care as to blood was insisted on. The reason of this is given:

The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar, to make an atonement for your soul; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul {Lev. 17:11}. 53

It is clear that this is the deep truth which lay under all the ceremonies of the day of atonement. It was an ancient requirement, pressed in Noah's day, when death first furnished food for man, and now bound up with man's ordinary life of every day. Whatever may be the blessedness of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for God and heaven -- whatever our own satisfaction and rest and joy in looking through it to eternal hopes -- we deprive ourselves of much, if we separate it from our work-a-day life and common-place duties. Undoubtedly it has an efficacy which brings us into the presence of God. There is nothing that we ever can have by and by which, in a certain sense, exceeds in moral depth what we are brought into now by faith; but at the same time we have to bear in mind this other aspect of it -- that is, namely, the way in which it mingles itself, and is intended to mingle itself, with everything that comes across us from day to day. It ought not to be apart in daily scenes and among men. Take for instance the commonest matter of our daily food and raiment. Ought we to exempt from Christ any one matter of our personal or relative life, or any one earthly duty? Be assured it is our joy and privilege to share all with Him. I am sure it is also our duty -- that whatever we do we should do in His name. Nor can we do aught in His name except as having before our souls that wonderful work which accounts for every blessing which God has given us even now.

Hence it was then that God would not permit the life of any creature that was needful for the food of His people to be taken, unless there was the witness of that which had its most solemn testimony on the great day of atonement. But this was not enough. Every day and every day's wants were to witness the same truth of God, to render the same confession of man. This is the reason, it appears to me, why we have the ordinance of the blood following the great atonement-day; and most properly after it, and not before it. That is to say, we have the truth in its deepest and highest reaches before we are enabled to estimate it in its common and ordinary application. The blood shed is the witness that sin is in the world. In the first state of things no such thing was allowed. Before sin came into the world there was no question of blood. Directly after sin entered among men, we hear of life offered, of sacrifices; but man was not permitted to touch the blood, even when after the flood he might eat of animals. Blood was then as always sacred to God and forbidden to man on every ground of nature or of law.

And this gives amazing force to the wonderful difference in which redemption places the believer; for now (and how startling it must have been to a Jew to hear it!) except ye eat the flesh, and drink the blood of the Son of man, ye have no life in you {John 6:53}.

No doubt the one was a literal injunction, while the other was an immense spiritual truth. At the same time the Lord could have chosen some other form for expressing that truth, unless there had been particular emphasis laid on the very figure of what was most repulsive to a Jew's mind according to the law.

So thorough was the change that now He enjoins what would have been before the greatest sin. Except one eats the flesh and drinks the blood of the Son of man, there is no life. The sign of His death yields life to us, and is indispensably needful. To have life one must drink that which was due peremptorily, exclusively, to God the judge of sin. But now contrariwise Christ has changed all for us. The very blood that it would have been most of all criminal before to touch or taste must now emphatically be drunk by us. Hence the standing testimony to the work of Christ the Christian beholds, as we know, in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. Therein the very same image is ever recurring. We eat His body and drink His blood.

53 In v. 11 the general principle is stated. The literal rendering seems to be this: “For the life (soul) is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to atone for your souls; for the blood with (through) the life (soul) atones.” The blood had this expiating value in the type as the expression of the life or soul given up to God for the offerer, and this of course judicially, not in a simply moral way, which falls rather under the minchah or meat-offering.
In Lev. 18 the people being treated now as a holy people, everything that was contrary to the order of God in nature is here strictly and solemnly prohibited. It is important to hold the same principle always. God does not absolve from that which offends His natural order. Grace may bring us into a higher place, where we do not use our liberty as to nature; but God habitually maintains His own order there; and so should we. Grace, I repeat, may withdraw one from the operation of it because of a higher call, as for instance in the service of God. We see this in the case of Paul himself; nevertheless was there any one who more firmly and distinctly held fast the wisdom, the propriety, the holiness of God’s order in nature, than that man who through grace had been lifted above it? Hence we have simply the prohibition of what was contrary to God’s will here below. Neither Egypt nor Canaan must regulate the practice of Israel: He who spoke to them was Jehovah their God, who, as He laid down the broadest principles, knew how to descend into the smallest details which concerned His people.

And let me take the opportunity of remarking another thing: the chief means by which the devil brings in what is so offensive is by high pretensions, which affect to slight the order of God. This ordinarily is the precursor of an outrage on holiness, as a little experience will prove.

It is beautiful to trace the unbending authority of revelation. Moses was inspired to interdict such a marriage as that of Abraham and Sarah, to speak of no more. There is no apology for the past, though of course the guilt would have been aggravated for the future.

In Lev. 19 we have again the same principle, though now in its positive form.

Ye shall be holy, it is said; and this is founded on a very precious reason:

for I, Jehovah your Elohim, am holy {Lev. 19:2}.

Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father {Lev. 19:3},

— beginning with the one that might naturally be somewhat less held in awe, and bringing her unexpectedly for this very reason into special prominence. Not the smallest change occurs in the word of God, while having some ground of divine wisdom and beauty as its purpose and its sanction. The precepts here given do not call for any particular delay. Let us never fail to bear in mind, for the principle holds good everywhere, that holiness is and must be according to the relationship in which one stands. Hence the character of holiness varies according to our place. Here it was a people in the flesh, and accordingly the various requirements of God were suitable to their place. Our condition is altogether different. We

are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in us {Rom. 8:9}.

Christ has Himself brought us into a heavenly position. This is the meaning of what He says in John 17:

For their sakes I sanctify myself {John 17:19}.

Not as if there ever was or could be the smallest thought of evil in Christ’s nature, or in any of His ways, I need nor say; nor as if He were here thinking of the mighty work of redemption by which He has set us apart to God. This is not its meaning; but the place that He has taken according to the dignity of His person and the results of His work for us — His place in heaven, that He might be there as man in that new scene — not only lifted up from the earth, but in the glory of God above, and consequently stamping a heavenly character upon us who know Him there. It is well to make this remark, because Christian holiness is bound up with the place where we know Christ now, when we come to look at it in its full character according to God’s mind.

In Lev. 20 we have the same thing maintained, with a strong caution against all that was inconsistent with God’s moral ways, and this in every kind of natural relationship, or indeed what might be unnatural. It is mainly in view of the enormities practiced by the Canaanites.

Lev. 21 brings in something more special. There the word concerns the priests, the sons of Aaron; and we learn the important principle in it, that what might be quite lawful in an Israelite is excluded from a priest. The reason is of the greatest interest. The whole book is founded on access to God. It begins with this, and goes through with it. Everything is measured according to the tabernacle of witness between God and His people. It is a question here of approaching God in His sanctuary, and of its effects. So here we have those who enjoy the privilege of drawing near to God as far as it was permitted under law. The effect of this is not merely that they were not allowed the excitements which were admissible in an ordinary Israelite, as we learnt in Lev. 10; but they may not know the indulgence of sorrow for the nearest dead. Thus it is said:

There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people; but for his kin that is near unto him, that is, for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother, and for his sister a virgin, that is nigh unto him, which hath had no husband; for her may he be defiled. But he shall not defile himself, being a chief man among his people, to profane himself {Lev. 21:1-4}.

Thus a number of different regulations are laid down which are all in view of this — that he who enjoys nearness to God must have his conduct in every particular affected and governed by that master privilege. How sweet and cheering for those who stand in a relationship of grace, not law! At the same time, let us not forget its extreme seriousness; for what the Jew had only in show we have in divine reality. It is impossible to be a Christian without having a nearness to God that is measured by Christ Himself. When He was here, He always walked in this conscious intimacy with His God and Father. He had it no doubt in absolute perfection according to the glory of His person; so that of Him alone it could be said,

The Son of man who is in heaven {John 3:13}.

But it was morally true also of the Lord Jesus as He walked here below; and what was true of Him alone personally — I mean true as a matter of fact by the power of the Spirit in Him morally is now our very place, as far as it is possible to be
given to a creature. Redemption has brought us to it, and the Holy Spirit seals us in it. We are brought to God; and the consequence of this is, that it goes far beyond the setting aside of what is wrong and what is evil now. We are never right unless we judge things around us that might be quite lawful and legitimate otherwise; the one question for us is, how do they suit a man who is brought to God? Unless we bring in this, we shall find ourselves continually entangled in the conventionalities of men, or in what is possibly even baser -- the mere traditions of a corrupted Christendom on the eve of its judgment.

In Lev. 22, we have this continued, not so much as to matters of conduct, but as to questions of a blemish in some form or another. Jehovah was more than ever jealous of the personal state and household of the priests.

Lev. 23 calls for a fuller notice. Here we are on the instructive theme of the feasts of Jehovah -- the displays of His ways from first to last with His people. First and foremost the Spirit of God brings in here, as at the beginning of the Bible after His work was done, the rest of God. There is nothing that man so little understands. It will be strange perhaps to many here to know that what the wisdom of this world counts happiness is the unrest of change -- the miserable proof that man is fallen and far from God. Yet it is the fact that man so defines his own pleasure -- the shifting to which a burdened conscience has recourse in order to lose the sense of what it has lost through sin. For God and His children all is different. The very first word He speaks is the pledge of that rest which He Himself first instituted at the beginning, and into which He will bring His people at the end. This He would impress on their souls, and give them ever to have it before them. He deigns to think of us, and to give us to share rest with Himself; but that rest will be His rest. He will have wrought for it, and will finally bring us into it.

This then was what was represented by the sabbath-day, and the reason why it was put in the first instance. Indeed there is no truth, one may say, more important, as far as these facts are concerned; and no doubt the tendency in man to lose sight of it was one ground why it was the only feast that was always recurring. The sense of need would make the passover sight of it was one ground why it was the only feast that was in the year, the passover necessarily has a fundamental place. In a certain sense the Sabbath is one of these feasts, but in another it may be viewed apart. We have looked at the first of them.

Now in those that were strict feasts, which occurred once in the year, the passover necessity has a fundamental place. The reason is manifest. It is the well known sign of the death of our Lord Jesus.

In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is Jehovah’s passover {Lev. 23:5}.

Immediately connected with it is the feast of unleavened bread; that is, purity according to Christ, where the leaven of man’s nature cannot be allowed; and this too through the whole circle of man’s day here below.

Seven days, as it is said,

Ye must eat unleavened bread. In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto Jehovah seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein {Lev. 23:6-8}.

Then comes another and a very distinct statement of the Spirit of God, -- not exactly a feast, but what was essential to the next feast.

And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest unto the priest: and he shall wave the sheaf before Jehovah, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath {Lev. 23:9-11} -- the evident type of our Lord’s resurrection. On the very day that our Savior died on the cross the Jews kept the passover. There are none who have made greater difficulties than those who have written most on the subject; but the reason is that they almost invariably bring in western notions of time, instead of taking their stand upon time as God speaks of it to His ancient people. In short they count days from sunrise to sunset. Such is not the scriptural way. On the one hand our Lord did Himself eat the passover on the regular day. It is not true that it was a different day. He ate the passover on the day prescribed by the law. On the other hand even the Jews that had played their part in seizing the Lord with a view to His crucifixion, according to Jewish reckoning eat the passover on the very same day. Though it was our next morning, it was their same day. Christ died before that day was over. If we hear the law, all these three facts which were severed by a considerable length of time really happened on one and the same day according to God’s method of counting the day.

Similar difficulties have been made about the resurrection, it may just be observed in passing. It is only noticed in order to help the Christian in reading God’s word. The truth is that the subject has been confused by the very men who ought to be a help. There are none who have more embroiled the subject than the commentators. It would be hard to name a single one that has rightly used the light of the scriptures on this point. To me this seems humiliating; for the true solution lies on the surface of scripture both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. What we need is more thorough confidence in the unerring word of God, all of which if read in simple faith will be found to convey nothing but light.

Our Lord then died on the due day according to the passover regulations. So He rose on the first day after the sabbath, when the priest waved the sheaf of corn that had been cast into the ground and died and had sprung up again. Christ was as much the waved sheaf as the paschal lamb. In this case you will observe that, when it was offered, there was a lamb
without blemish for a burnt-offering, and a meat-offering of two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto Jehovah for a sweet savor, with its appropriate drink-offering but nothing more: there was no sin-offering. Whenever Christ appears in that which is brought before us, there is none required, He Himself in fact being the true sin-offering for others. The sheaf of first-fruits became thus a type of Him who knew no sin. It was Christ risen from the dead, just as the passover pointed to His death.

And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings {Lev. 23:14}.

This day becomes the point of departure from which to reckon the morrow after the sabbath; as it is said,

Ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave-offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days {Lev. 23:15, 16}.

And then comes another type of great significance:

And ye shall offer a new meat-offering unto Jehovah {Lev. 23:16}.

What is the meaning of this? Perhaps there is scarce one here present who does not know, by the clear light of the New Testament, that it was Pentecost. The new meat-offering on that day ought to call for few words of explanation, not because it lacks interest, but because we at least, all the children of God, ought to know its bearing well. It is the beautiful type, not of Christ, but of those that are Christ’s, -- of those called according to that name which was given to Himself, the true sheaf of first-fruits with its burnt-offering and meat-offering and drink-offering. In it there could be no question of defilement; but in the first-fruits which followed fifty days after, when the new meat-offering was offered, another provision tells its own tale:

Ye shall bring out of your habitation two wave-loaves {Lev. 23:17}.

The law made nothing perfect {Heb. 7:19}.

It is not the complete figure of the church, nor could be; nor is there any adequate setting forth of its unity: still there is a sufficient testimony to those that compose the church; and we must always make this distinction in looking at these types. The two wave-loaves may possibly indeed refer to the two houses of Israel, out of which were called such as should be saved, and in an ulterior sense perhaps to Jew and Gentile. At any rate there was no proper sign of that which is so characteristic a feature of the church, namely, the one body of an exalted and heavenly Head. This could not yet come into view. But the two wave-loaves of two tenth deals were to be brought out of their habitation; they were to be of fine flour, but expressly baked with leaven -- a surprising feature when we bear in mind Lev. 2; and the more as they are said also to be the first-fruits unto Jehovah.

What was true of Christ is true also of those that are Christ’s. They were first-fruits to Jehovah. But then there was this difference, that as they were baken with leaven to show the evil still existing in the nature of those that compose the Christian body, so there is the need of a sin-offering to put away that evil, and confess withal the sense and the judgment of it before God.

Ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be for a burnt-offering unto Jehovah, with their meat-offering, and their drink-offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savor unto Jehovah {Lev. 23:18}.

There is the full witness of acceptance; but there is more than this.

Then ye shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin-offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace-offerings {Lev. 23:19}.

There is the recognition of the evil that needed the sacrifice of Christ. At the same time there is the witness of the communion into which we are brought, founded upon the blessed sacrifice of Christ. This was not the case with what represented Christ.

And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the first-fruits for a wave-offering before the Lord, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to Jehovah for the priest. And ye shall proclaim on the self-same day, that it may be an holy convocation unto you: ye shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations {Lev. 23:20, 21}.

It is much to be noted that here closes all reckoning of time from the sacrifice of Christ and that new meat-offering which followed it on the day of Pentecost. There is a break. Undoubtedly a quite new set of feasts begins afterwards, and a marked lapse now comes before us.

Thus the wisdom of God provided far a mighty work to be founded on the death and resurrection of Christ, setting forth, as far as this could be without revealing the mystery, a place of association with Christ of the nearest kind, though there is the most careful guard against confounding the Christian with Christ. Whatever may be his union with Him, still there is care to hold up the unsullied purity of Christ. The Christian has Him for his life, as we know; but there is the most distinct confession that his nature needs the sacrifice for sin to meet it.

Then follows, it is true, a little glance at the harvest before the new course. This is brought forward in a remarkably mysterious way.

And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor and to the stranger: I am Jehovah your God {Lev. 22}.

All this is left with comparative, and I believe with purposed, vagueness. There will be a peculiar testimony of God in the end of the age. The heavenly people will be taken into the garner, but there will be a remnant in the field left who will be
really of Himself. The gleanings are left, as it is said here, for the poor and the stranger. The Lord will maintain His testimony even in the darkest times, and in the most peculiar way. This however is lightly passed over, because it does not belong to the properly economic dealings of God.

The recommencement is very significantly set forth by a new beginning in Lev. 23:23:

And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, in the seventh month.

Here we come down to the closing scene, as far as the feasts could represent it.

In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. Clearly it is a fresh testimony, and a loud summons goes forth, sounds unheard before. It is no longer a sheaf waved before Jehovah, but the attention of men is drawn in a most striking manner. The public dealings of God for the earth now openly begin. Though Jesus was presented to man's responsibility, God knew perfectly that the offer of the kingdom in His person as Messiah would break down through the unbelief of man; and nothing shows more clearly than these types how well it was known all along. Man never surprised God; nor is there any after-thought on His part. All was known and settled beforehand, while man thoroughly manifests what he is. How the light will burst on Israel when their eyes are opened to it in the day that is coming! How they will beat their breasts in amazement and sorrow for their blindness of unbelief! God will work in their consciences, and they will bow at length to the grace of their glorified Lord. They will sorrow indeed, but it will not be mere unavailing sorrow; it will be holy gracious sorrow, not without shame as far as they are concerned; but none the less will there he the simple enjoyment of the mercy of God toward their souls. In the seventh month then, and on the first day of it, there is the feast of trumpets. No servile work is to be done, but ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto Jehovah.

And then we are told --

On the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement.

-- that very day which was brought before us already in all its solitary excellence and glory, both in its connection with us and also with Israel (Lev. 16). But here we have it in sole connection with the earthly people. For the time is now come for man, the Jew, to have his sins covered before God; and therefore, as we are told, there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto Jehovah. For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people.

And whatsoever soul it be that doeth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people.

There was enough and to spare of work for other days; but for this day there must be none. Man has absolutely no part in the task. None but the Savior can work for it, and He in suffering for us.

Ye shall do no work in that same day; for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before Jehovah your God. For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people.

The soul that presumes to rest on grace without self-condemnation because of its sins before God is trifling with Him, and has not yet learnt to hate its unholiness as at thorough issue with God's own character. And again the soul that presumes to work shows its presumption in putting itself, so to speak, on a level with Christ and God Himself; for the work which alone suffices as a basis for atonement must be done before God by One who is God's own fellow.

On the fifteenth day of the same month begins the final festival of the Jewish year -- the feast of tabernacles. This does not call for any considerable length of remark. It was the shadow of coming glory, but presented in a singular manner, especially in Leviticus.

The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto Jehovah. On the first day shall be an holy convocation. Ye shall do no servile work therein. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord; on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you, and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto Jehovah. It is a solemn assembly, and ye shall do no servile work therein.

God thus shows us by this remarkable introduction of the eighth day here the connection of the earthly blessing with the heavenly glory of resurrection. Resurrection points to heaven, and can never satisfy itself except in heavenly places; and therefore a link is here intimated with glory on high, while there is the fullest possible recognition of a day of rest and blessedness for the earth and the Jewish people. As we are
told here in the latter part of it, they were all to keep this feast with gladness and joy.

Ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before Jehovah your God seven days [Lev. 23:40].

The eighth day is evidently brought in in a mysterious way -- not now pointing to those who may be a testimony for God where all seemed to be removed from the earth, as we saw in the notice of the harvest at the end; but now, when we have the fulness of the witness of glory here below, this finger, so to speak, points upward, showing that in some way not developed in this chapter there will be the connection of the resurrection and heavenly glory with the day of Jehovah for the earth. We understand it now from the New Testament, where all is clearly brought out. In point of fact the testimony of the New Testament is fullest on that which is but an added development in this chapter there will be the connection of the resurrection and heavenly glory with the day of Jehovah for the earth. We understand it now from the New Testament, where all is clearly brought out. In point of fact the testimony of the New Testament is fullest on that which is but an added circumstance here. In short our proper hope is in the heavens; and accordingly the New Testament makes this the prominent truth, as it was according to the wisdom of God it should be. But for the earthly people we find the prominent place given to the earthly part of it, although the heavenly part is not forgotten.

In Lev. 24 injunctions and circumstances are introduced in a very peculiar manner. First a command is given to the children of Israel to give pure oil-olive beaten for the light {Lev. 24:2}. This was to be ordered by the high priest, so that there should always be a candle-stick burning before Jehovah continually. Along with this there was to be the keeping up of the witness of Israel after the flesh, though not without Christ and the fragrance of His grace before God.

And thou shalt set them in two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before Jehovah. And thou shalt put pure frankincense upon each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, even an offering made by fire unto Jehovah. Every sabbath he shall set it in order before Jehovah continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant {Lev. 24:6-8}. This was to be Aaron’s food. Thus we have provision that there shall be always a testimony, although there may be an interruption, as we know alas! there has been in the dispensations of God. Still God will infallibly maintain what is suitable to His own character; and, as we know too, a heavenly testimony is precisely what comes in when the course of the earthly economy has been broken. Thus, although this might seem to be strangely brought in here, its wisdom, I think, will be apparent to any reflecting mind. The great High Priest keeps up the light during the long night of Israel’s history.

At the same time we have a contrasted fact:

And the son of an Israelitish woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel: and this son of the Israelitish woman and a man of Israel strove together in the camp {Lev. 24:10}; and in the strife he blasphemed the name [of Jehovah]. This fact, I am persuaded, is purposely preserved along with the former. Israel themselves as a whole have fallen under this dreadful curse. Therefore what might seem to be a singular connection, more particularly after the feasts of Jehovah, exactly suits the situation. That is, we have the solemn fact that the people, who ought to have been the means of blessing to all others, have themselves passed under the curse, and been guilty, in the most painful form, of blaspheming the name.

We know how this has been; we know how they treated Him who is the Word of God and declared the Father, who was and is Jehovah Himself. We know well how Israel, yielding to thoughts of the world (as it is said here, the son of an Israelitish woman whose father was an Egyptian), having fallen thoroughly a prey to carnal wisdom as to the Messiah, were guilty of rejecting God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and of blaspheming the name. Accordingly they have fallen under the curse, which would be final but for the grace of God, who knows how to meet the most desperate case. But indeed, as far as regards the mass of the nation, that judgment is definitive. It is the remnant that will become a strong nation in the day that is at hand. On the apostates wrath will come to the uttermost.

The judgment of this evil doer brings in some necessary distinctions, and the solemn truth of retribution is added as closing the rest of the chapter. Jew or stranger, the guilty in their midst must alike suffer.

In Lev. 25 another trait is laid down to complete the picture; that is, the regulation of the principle of the sabbath, not merely for the people, but for the land; not only a sabbatical year, but the full jubilee -- all on the same present principle of a sabbath. 54 Accordingly then this chapter brings in a most blessed privilege under the hand of the God of goodness, but a miserable thing when man meddles. The neglect of the sabbath -- not only in its weekly form, but on a larger scale for the land -- was indicated of God as a matter of fact in the history of the chosen people.

What is the result in God’s hand? Supposing by any iniquity the land passed from those to whom God assigned it, the jubilee was God’s principle for preserving His own rights intact. For in truth Israel were but tenants; Jehovah was the landlord. Jehovah therefore retains the earth in His own possession.

And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto

54. Even Ewald (spite of his ingenious folly of the Elohist, junior Elohist, Jehovist and redactor, not to speak of the Deuteronomist) is struck with the constant recurrence of the septenary numbers in various forms, days, weeks, months, and years, throughout the law as a strong indication that the whole system of its times and seasons was the product of one mind. The truth is that it pervades the Hebrew Scriptures from Genesis to Daniel, in whose chapter 9 we have the same principle in another and original shape. And this is the more striking, because there was so thorough a change from the pastoral character of the wandering fathers to the agricultural connection of the feasts when fully celebrated by the sons of Israel in Canaan, after they had been impressed by God in the times of the legislator with a profoundly historical stamp, the shadow of good things to come. That one mind could be none less than divine. May we be willing to unlearn in order to learn!
thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which growth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field. In the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession [Lev. 25:8-13].

Whatever troubles, whatever sorrows, whatever sins might alienate the land from those that were His tenants there, the jubilee year rectifies all. The land must revert to the landlord. He was perfectly entitled to it, and surely would maintain His own right for the blessing of His own people. Such is ever the way of grace. Thus we see that righteousness, so terrible a word to guilty man, when wielded by divine grace becomes the only hope for the ruined.

Grace, as everywhere,

reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ [Rom. 5:21].

So it is for us who believe in Jesus; but for them it will be found in the vindication of what God promised, when they had sinned away the promises as far as man could. God will maintain them in His mercy, and will use them so for the people in the future day of glory.

The law of jubilee is a remarkable instance of the bearing of Jewish ordinances on moral conduct. Thus a Jew might take advantage of it to exact a price for his land out of proportion to its value, which depended on distance from the fiftieth year. Hence it is written,

And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbor, or buyest ought of thy neighbor’s hand, ye shall not oppress one another: according to the number of years after the jubilee thou shalt buy of thy neighbor, and according unto the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee: according to the multitude of years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years thou shalt diminish the price of it: for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell unto thee. Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am Jehovah your God [Lev. 25:14-17].

Sale or purchase they were bound to regulate by this principle.

To the Christian the coming of the Lord is always at hand, and he, if faithful, will measure all according to that standard. So says the apostle,

the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not using it for themselves; 55 for the fashion of this world passeth away {1 Cor. 7:29-31}.

If the treasures and prizes of the earth will be worthless in that day, the hope of it burning brightly in the heart gives us present victory; for this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. I grant that there is a still deeper and more searching power in keeping Him before us who makes that day to be what it is; but He Himself has marked the danger of saying in our heart

The Lord delayeth his coming {Luke 12:45}.

We cannot then but love the appearing of the Lord Jesus when He will bring in deliverance to man and creation from their long and groaning slavery under Satan’s power and the blighting effects of the curse. For the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. We shall be manifested in glory along with Him, and shall enjoy that mighty and blessed change over the face of the universe to the praise of His name and the honor of the God who sent Him, the Second Man.

Meanwhile the Jew need not be troubled, any more than the Christian now, like Gentiles who know not God.

Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety. And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store. The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land {Lev. 25:18-24}.

What matters the difficulty if God is the guarantee?

It is of the deepest interest to notice how compassionately God in the rest of the chapter (Lev. 25:25-55) dwells on all possible vicissitudes of Israel in distress. There is first the brother waxen poor, who sold away some of his possession (Lev. 25:25 et seqq.); next, the brother waxen poor, whose hand is lowered and needed strengthening or relief (Lev. 25:35 et seqq.); then the poor brother who sold himself either to a Jew (Lev. 25:39 et seqq.) or to a stranger (Lev. 25:47 et seqq.) with his claim in Jehovah’s name on his brethren in each respective case. May we never forget the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might

55 Or “not using it in full.” It is not “abusing” the world which would be παραχρόμενοι, whereas here it is καταχρόμενοι, using it for oneself, not for the Lord.
be made rich! Assuredly, if we follow thus in His steps, not only shall we have joy and refreshment in the Lord now, but He will repay in that day.

Lev. 26 draws out in a solemn manner, not in the form of type now, but of direct statement, the prophetic history of the people, 56 and warns of the direct effect of their being tried on the ground of their own responsibility, which is the principle of law. What a contrast, save in the close, with the jubilee? I shall not of course enter on its details. Suffice it to say that God does not close this searching word of His without the remembrance of His covenant, as it is said, with Jacob, and His covenant with Isaac, and His covenant with Abraham. He speaks here in this unusually emphatic way of His covenant with every one of them; so that even from His mouth, against whom they had so long and deeply sinned, there should be a threefold witness for His mercy in that day.

And I will, says He, remember the land {Lev. 26:42}.

Thus we see the connection with the chapter before, and how perfectly therefore a divine order is kept up even where our dulness hinders us often from perceiving it.

The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths -- another link of the connection with what went before -- while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their souls abhorred my statutes. And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am Jehovah their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am Jehovah {Lev. 26:43-45}.

Thus God falls back on what He is Himself after He has fully detailed the sorrows that fell on the people because of what they were. But whatever maybe the necessary changes in the government of God because of a people changing -- alas! merely from one form of evil and opinion to another, God, the immutable eternal God, who has given this special name to them -- God in His own unchangeableness -- will show them mercy when He comes whose right it is to reign.

The last chapter (Lev. 27) lets us know what will regulate in fact when that day comes. Little need be said now about it. For the most part it treats of the vow, as showing devotedness to the Lord. This may have various forms; namely, devotedness in person, in property, and in what was given up to the curse (e.g., in the case of their enemies devoted to destruction). The main point insisted on, and the only thing which it is necessary to mention in this cursory notice, is that all is brought under the priest first, but the priest subject to another, according to what in the chapter is called thy estimation {Lev. 27}.

Thus Moses acts as type of the Lord Jesus Christ in another quality, and not merely as priest. What that is cannot be doubted. In short, it is the Messiah -- the one like unto Moses, but incomparably greater than the legislator, when it will not be merely a royal son of David vindicating His claims to the land in favor of His own people, but Jehovah having the only worthy image of Himself and of His glory. That same blessed Jesus who once came down to accomplish atonement for them will then act as the Judge of all devotedness. He will then interfere in every question in His own perfect goodness and wisdom, maintaining the people not only according to righteousness, but according to the infinite mercy of God Himself for ever.

56. The characteristic infidelity of rationalism betrays itself in their anxious excision of every element manifestly divine. Thus, as it is one of their assumptions that there is no such thing as prophecy, they must lower the age of such a chapter as Lev. 26 to a date that would put the supposed writer (the pseudo-Moses) on the same level historically with the events he professes to predict. Such a ready imputation of imposture to the sacred writers is a guage of their moral condition. People are apt to judge of others by themselves. The fact is that the close of the chapter is prophecy as yet unfulfilled, to which the Lord Jesus (Matt. 23:39) puts His seal, as well as the Holy Spirit by the apostle Paul (Rom. 11:26-31).
Lectures on the Pentateuch
Lecture 8
Numbers 1–9, 10:1–10

It is impossible to look at this book ever so cursorily without feeling the difference of the atmosphere from that of Leviticus. And this is so much the more striking because it cannot be fairly doubted by a believer that they were both the production of the same inspired author. Nothing therefore illustrates more clearly the way and measure in which the object of God gives the tone to the book in which He is communicating His mind to His people; for although there is quite enough to show the same human hand that He employed, the fulness of divine wisdom is equally manifest, as also the special forms which it thought fit to adopt for the purpose of enforcing the truth on our careless minds.

Now the specific object of Numbers is to set out the journeyings of Israel through the wilderness, and this typically as usual in scripture. It is no longer access to God. This we have seen in Leviticus, where the tabernacle stood in the foreground, out of which Jehovah caused His communications to be given to Moses, as well as to Aaron, or even to the people through Moses. In the book of Numbers the Spirit of God has the desert before Him, rather than the sanctuary. We shall find of course the sanctuary, but the question here is not one of drawing near to God as far as this could be then, but of the walk of the people of God on the earth. I say the earth, because it does not always set before us the earth as it now is -- a wilderness, but the earth even as it shall be when the Lord Jesus takes the kingdom. We shall find the importance of this remark before we have done with the book of Numbers. Still it is everywhere the earth as the scene through which the redeemed of the Lord are passing.

Hence the first thing brought before us is that we are now to look on and learn the varied trials whereby Israel were about to be proved, where occasional foes met them, where there were always dangers and difficulties, where the people might and as we know did manifest their lack of dependence on God, even to the point of rebellious and flagrant and fatal sin against Him.

It was needful in God’s wisdom that the census of the children of Israel should be taken. The primary object that is presented to us in the early chapters is a reckoning of the males that were fit for war; but we shall find that the numbering goes beyond this, and that there are other considerations and objects than for war and warlike purposes. In short, whatever might be the particular aim in various parts of the book, God impresses upon us this -- the care and the interest that He takes in everyone that belongs to Him. It is a very simple truth, but certainly full of comfort to the soul; and this, it will be observed, for the earth. We can all understand the sweetness of being numbered for heaven, and to that the heart of most people generally turns; but even those who have the greatest comfort in looking at the counsels of God securing them for eternity are apt to forget the present interest which the Lord takes in all our movements, ways, conflicts, and trials. This is the first thing with which the book opens.

After this numbering of the people attention is drawn to the exception of the tribe of Levi. Thus it is said,

Thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel: but thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle and all the vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle {Num. 1:49, 50}.

The two things are true; and the comfort of both (which at first sight might seem to be so opposed as to be incompatible with each other) the Lord would surely give us to taste. In the one case the census relates to those whom God has put in the place of trial and provocation (not yet, no doubt, the fullest form of conflict, which is reserved for the book of Joshua). Nevertheless conflicts there are, with trial of patience always, in the wilderness for the people of God. But then there is another truth which we need also to apprehend, which has no less consolation for our souls: we are not only God’s own people, every one of us counted up by Himself as those on whom He reckons, whatever may be the march, with whomsoever we may have to fight in passing through the wilderness; but we have to do with serving Him, and, above all, in reference to the sanctuary. In this point of view numbering as of a host would be out of season. The object is to stamp on service an unearthly character; yet undoubtedly it is while we are going through the earth. At the same time the exclusion from this census in the case of Levi was just as important as His interest in reckoning Israel up one by one in the midst of trials. For the Levites taken quite apart are thus viewed as out of all this reckoning and simply exempted for the service of God, without need of any such method of impressing God’s care on them.

Both truths were intended to be brought before us as having distinct and combined meaning in the Christian. Accordingly the very same persons who in one aspect are typified by the numbered tribes of Israel in another are Levites...
not numbered as yet because they belong to God simply and exclusively. This then is the double aspect. It would not be easy to adduce an instance which shows us more the importance of a right handling of the types, because the natural mind would be continually prone to set the two things in opposition, and to conclude that, as the Levites were contrasted with the other tribes of Israel, so what either represents must occupy each a wholly different position now. As this does not follow à priori, so the reverse is true in fact; and the types indicate different relations of the same antitypical persons. The truth is, when we think of a Christian, we have to remember the words of the Spirit of God in the New Testament:

All things are yours {1 Cor. 3:21}.

It does not matter whether it be the numbering of Israel or the absence of numbering of the Levites, both are true of the Christian -- not, of course, in the same aspect, but in distinct relationships equally true.

In Num. 2 is laid down the arrangement of the camp; and here we have another important principle brought before us. The tabernacle has a central place: the tribes are all ranged in reference to it.

Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign of their father’s house {Num. 2:2}.

And then we find,

On the east side toward the rising of the sun shall they of the standard of the camp of Judah pitch their armies: and Nahshon the son of Aminadab shall be captain of the children of Judah {Num. 2:3}.

God insists always on His own order.

And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were threescore and fourteen thousand and six hundred. And those that do pitch next unto him shall be the tribe of Issachar: and Nethaneel the son of Zuar shall be captain of the children of Issachar. And his host, and those that were numbered thereof, were fifty and four thousand and four hundred. Then the tribe of Zebulun: and Eliab, the son of Elon shall be captain of the children of Zebulun {Num. 2:4-7}.

Again we find that Judah comes before us.

On the south side shall be the standard of the camp of Reuben {Num. 2:10},

and again of Simeon. After all this we are told,

The tabernacle of the congregation shall set forward with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camp: as they encamp, so shall they set forward, every man in his place by their standards {Num. 2:17}.

Then follow on the west Ephraim’s standard, and on the north Dan’s.

Thus the tabernacle is surrounded by the Levites for the purpose of asserting their special and exclusive absorption in the service of God, instead of being left for purposes of war, or any object on the earth other than God’s own sanctuary. They hold the central place, with six on one side and six on the other. Such was the order of the march. Indeed the same arrangement appears when they encamp. We shall find however a subsequent modification of this; but I do not speak more of it until it comes in its own place. Then we are told as a summary that

These are those which were numbered of the children of Israel by the house of their fathers. All those that were numbered of the camps throughout their hosts were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty. But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel, as Jehovah commanded Moses. And the children of Israel did according to all that Jehovah commanded Moses: so they pitched by their standards, and so they set forward every one after their families according to the house of their fathers {Num. 2:32-34}.

In Num. 3 we come to more particulars of that which has a still nearer interest to us -- not now the general order of the host of Israel, but more especially what concerns the service of the Levites. This specially connects itself with our walk here below. Priesthood is just as remarkable in the book of Leviticus as Levite service is in the book of Numbers. In that respect Leviticus is by no means a happy name for the book. The truth is that much the greater part of the detail as to the Levites is found in Numbers, and not in Leviticus. We must remember that the name “Leviticus” is not given by divine inspiration: it is merely a name taken from the Greek version; in short it is a human name. I do not hesitate therefore to make the remark. The Hebrew mode of reference to these books was the mere citation of the first word in each book. In the book of Numbers then, where we have the walk on earth set forth, service finds its capital seat. In the book which develops access to God priesthood is as prominent as here Leviteship. A remark applies as to priesthood exactly similar to what we found true of Leviteship; namely, that the Christian, who in one point of view is of Israel and in another a Levite, is no less a priest. Only priesthood sets forth the drawing near to God Himself in the heavenly sanctuary -- no longer the figure, but the true -- the antitype; whereas Levitical service has to do with the service of the sanctuary while the people of God are passing through the earth. It is clear from this that the priestly functions of the believer have a very much higher character than his Levitical service, if we would express ourselves in the language of types. In the one case we have to do with God Himself; we draw near in the sense of what Christ is to Him as well as to us. In the other we have that which is a holy duty; nevertheless it is a duty which has to do with man and the earth in our passage through this world. It is of this latter that we are about to hear more particulars.

Numbers 3 accordingly brings before us the names of the sons of Aaron, who had the highest place among the Levites --

Nadab the first-born, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar {Num. 3:2}.

These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the priests which were anointed, whom he consecrated to minister in the priest’s office {Num. 3:3}.

Then the death of the two former, Nadab and Abihu, is
mentioned, Eleazar and Ithamar remaining to minister in the sight of Aaron their father.

Next follows the object for which this is introduced.

Jehovah spake with Moses, saying, Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him {Num. 3:5, 6}.

It is clear that gospel service is not the point; and the reason is manifest. Service in the gospel is not merely in but to the world. Here it is service in the world, but by no means the making known to the world the grace of God. The time was not come for this. It is characteristic of Christianity, and could not be set forth fully until the great work of redemption was done. Hence we do not find, except in a mere vague and general principle, anything that could properly set forth the service of the gospel; but there is a vast deal of other service which has and ought to be rendered while we are passing through the earth. This is represented by the different families of the tribe of Levi.

But the first and chief point to lay hold of in the type is the connection of the service with the High Priest -- with Christ Himself. Separate ministry in any form, divorce the service of the saints from Christ, Himself in the presence of God, and it is falsified and degraded. Even were this not complete, the precious spring of comfort is weakened. Thus the all-important point is what the Spirit of God first of all brings before us; that, although priesthood and ministry are in themselves essentially distinct, we must always bear in mind that ministry is a gift of God in the closest connection with Him who is the type of the great High Priest. It is for His honor, and for the accomplishment of what is connected with Him. What has to be done on the earth can only be rightly done in subjection to Him, and depends on His place as High Priest. The false principle which has ruined service here below is that men have naturally connected it with the church, instead of with Christ. I do not hesitate to say that this is always fatal, though not in the sense that there may not be good done, as men say, by those that minister. Neither would one deny refreshment to souls. Also we must particularly bear in mind the remark already made, that proper gospel ministry is not contemplated here.

But when we think not merely of man, of souls getting help, &c., -- when we think of the glory of God, the severing it from Christ, the One to whom it really belongs and to whom it is given of God, and the putting it in subjection to the church, completely ruin all testimony to His will and glory here below. Consequently service becomes either a selfish thing, turned perhaps into a mere worldly profession, or a matter of corporate sectarian vainglory. It allows of the love of a great following, or the desire after power and influence -- all of them abominable forms of flesh or world to which it has been perverted by the wiles of the devil. In any case, to say the least, ministry deprived of its relation to Christ is stripped of its own proper dignity, as it ceases to subserve His glory.

When cut off from Him and connected with an earthly stock, it is taken out of that which alone secures its true, holy and heavenly character. It becomes more or less dependent on the world by ceasing to be immediately linked with Christ Himself, the One to whom God has given it. Even if it be placed under the church, instead of kept in the hands of Christ, it invariably opens a door for pleasing self or pleasing others; and thus for worldly motives or selfishness in every possible form. Hence we see the all-importance of the truth as here typified:

And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given to him out of the children of Israel. And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest’s office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death {Num. 3:9, 10}.

But there is a further truth from the 12th verse:

And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine; because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am Jehovah {Num. 3:11-13}.

That is, we find them in a very special manner taken by Jehovah as the formal substitute for the firstborn of Israel who were spared when Egypt was visited by the destroying angel. They were redeemed by blood, and counted emphatically to belong to Jehovah. In lieu of Israel’s firstborn He accepted the Levites.

They shall be mine.

They are thus made the standing witness of the firstborn due to Jehovah from man as well as beast. The grace of God had exempted those to whom they answered in the time of judgment. Consequently the Levites, being thus identified with mercy -- the great distinguishing mercy which rescued Israel from the doom of Egypt, were so much the better fitted to do the service of the sanctuary. Who can presume to undertake the service of God without knowing that God has accepted him on the ground of redemption? Salvation precedes ministry, if we listen to God and dread the solemn warning of the Lord and His apostle (Matt. 7:22; 1 Cor. 9:27).

But there is something far more precise than this.

Number the children of Levi after the house of their fathers, by their families: every male from a month old and upward shalt thou number them. And Moses numbered them according to the word of Jehovah, as he was commanded {Num. 3:15, 16}.

Now we have their special numbering for the place assigned to each family. Here they are numbered (apart from Israel, but still numbered) from infants of days, designated to service long before it could begin. (Compare Gal. 1:15.) Strength is given before service is claimed; but from their earliest days they are reckoned apart according to the grace and intentions of God. There were three principal houses -- Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. They with their sons have each a line of service given into their hands in Lev. 4, where they are afresh numbered from thirty years old and upward. This also is of...
great moment. There is nothing practically more important than that each servant of God should know the work He has given him to do; and that when known he should stick to it. Be assured also that it is of no small importance never to interfere with another’s service. The Lord is sovereign in this. He divides according to His own will. This on the one hand we are bound to respect; while on the other there is nothing more lovely than mutual subjection according to the grace and in the fear of God. This very principle ought to make us jealous of trenching on that which we ourselves could not properly enter into. I hold it to be a certain truth, that every saint of God has a work to do entrusted by the Lord, which nobody else can do so well. The great business is, that we should find what it is, and that we should cherish unqualified confidence in God in carrying it out as now redeemed to Him. After all, this must be a secret between Him and ourselves, however we may be helped perhaps by the wisdom of others to find it out; for there are many ways in which we arrive at the conviction of the work God has given us to do.

Real Christian service cannot be settled in the simple external fashion in which it was appointed to Israel. Like all else in Christianity, it depends on faith, not on family, or birth-connection, as was true of Israel, a people after the flesh. But what was true of them in a fleshly sort is no less true of us in a spiritual way. Now we have to bear this in mind; and I believe that you will find the great value therefore first of all of settling between your souls and the Lord what the work is in which you prove His power with you, and His blessing on you. Surely now is the appointed time, the time of labor and of service, while you are passing through the world. Thanks be to God, we have a still better place, even the sanctuary where all is founded on the mighty work of redemption, whereby we rest in peace with God and in the communion of His love, as we draw near in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. In virtue of this we have our true worship while here below; but with this, as we have seen, Leviticus has more to do than Numbers.

But besides the privilege of worshipers, we have our work, and it is of the utmost possible moment for the glory of God that we should be found simple-hearted, devoted, respecting each other, not hindering but helping on in brotherly love. Grace no doubt teaches us what is due one to another, while earnestly and sedulously seeking that we should each discharge that in which God is with us. This seems very plain in the expressed directions which the Spirit of God lays down as to the sons of Levi. And we shall see how careful He is in His own sovereign choice; for man’s will has nothing to do with the matter. It was no question at all of picking out those who might seem best for carrying the boards and the curtains, or the vessels of the sanctuary. God arranged it all, taking it completely out of man’s hands: He chose suited men Himself. Where is anything happy unless in the simple carrying out of the will of God? Nothing else is so sweet. Our Lord Jesus has shown us this. It was His meat to do the will of His Father, and it should be ours.

These Levites then show us the special service framed, and the instruments arranged, by the will of our God: we find also certain positive directions laid down for all.

These are the families of the Levites according to the house of their fathers. Of Gershon was the family of the Libnites, and the family of the Shimites: these are the families of the Gershonites. Those that were numbered of them, according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, even those that were numbered of them were seven thousand and five hundred. The families of the Gershonites shall pitch behind the tabernacle westward. And the chief of the house of the father of the Gershonites shall be Eliasaph the son of Lel. And the charge of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation shall be the tabernacle (the outward frame) and the tent, the covering thereof, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the hangings of the court, and the curtain for the door of the court, which is by the tabernacle, and by the altar round about, and the cords of it for all the service thereof {Num. 3:20-26}.

Then we hear of Kohath.

And of Kohath was the family of the Amramites, and the family of the Izaharites, and the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites: these are the families of the Kohathites {Num. 3:27}.

Their number is given; and these were to be on the side of the tabernacle southward. All was laid down with the greatest possible care. God would avoid confusion in the service of the tabernacle, and also room for human will. He would make it to be the humblest thing on earth -- a matter of simple obedience. Their charge we gather was to be a most honorable service, even

the ark, and the table; and the candlestick, and the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof. And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest shall be chief over the chief of the Levites, and have the oversight of them that keep the charge of the tabernacle {Num. 3:31-32}.

Then come the Merarites, under whose guardianship were to be the boards of the tabernacle {Num. 3:36}.

And under the custody and charge of the sons of Merari shall be the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and the pillars thereof, and the sockets thereof, and all the vessels thereof, and all that serveth thereto.

Thus it is plain all was fairly portioned according to God’s mind.

What has been here pointed out it is of all possible consequence to apply practically. You will find that in the service of the children of God -- in those, for instance, that minister in the word, without confining it to them -- these distinctions turn up constantly. There are those whose blessed place it is to dwell on Christ Himself, who delight in dwelling on His grace, who have the deepest admiration for His person, His divine glory, His perfect devotedness to the Father. I need not say there is no ministry possessed of a higher character than this: what indeed has one so high? On the other hand
there are those who are more particularly occupied with that which displays the Lord to men. It is clear that the curtains, the tabernacle, all the outward part, do not so much set forth Christ before God as before man. The former sort of ministry contributes largely to a spirit of worship. The latter is adapted more to the wants of man. The difference may be better understood by this, that in the former it is a question more of the value of Christ, in the latter of His ways; in the one more what He is and does for God than what He appears before the eyes of man below, the means of a meeting between God and man, and consequently of a gracious supply for man’s necessities.

It is evident that those who drove in their wagons the tabernacle, with its tent and coverings, had the Gershonite service, as compared with those who carried the precious vessels of the sanctuary. And again there was somewhat between the two -- namely, what maintained the curtain. This therefore did not seem to represent so external a work as the Gershonite service; on the other hand, it does not suppose such intimate communion with Christ and His offices as belonged to the Kohathites. All this may serve to show that what is set forth in the service of these different families of Levites has an obvious bearing on different forms and shades and characters of ministry in the word here below.

But the same thing is also more widely true; for we must not limit ministry to the word, although this comparatively has the highest character. But there is also ministry in prayer, in watchful love and care for others, in lowly interest in all that pertains to the Lord and those that are His. These things must not be forgotten. There is many a soul that never appears as a workman in man’s eye, but who, I am persuaded, carries on a most important function for the good of those that do appear, bearing up and strengthening before God those who have to do more with the din and brunt and fog of the war that must be carried on as long as the enemy is in force here below.

All these things then we may well seek to understand. Above all, when we do understand, let us not content ourselves with this; for what is the value of truth, if we are not walking in it to the glory of the Lord? Is it not rather for such the deepest condemnation? Therefore there are none for whom one may justly dread so much as for ourselves -- for you and me, if careless. The more simply God has led us outside the mere reign of dreary tradition, with all its darkening and blinding effects, the more He has brought us in presence of His own word, and given us to bow to the free action of the Holy Ghost, that we may enjoy the grace and truth of Christ -- the greater the danger, shame, and pain, when we either act unworthily in our own persons, or take lightly in others that which dishonors the Lord Jesus. Such indifference, if it exist along with a better knowledge of the word of God, makes all the more sad the contrast with that precious expression of His own grace. Nevertheless be sure that there is not only the same danger of slipping as for others, but when those who have the better knowledge do trip, they are apt to fall lower with less shame than such as know less with more conscience. When such unseemliness appears, many not understanding this are scandalized. They wonder how it can be that those possessed of better knowledge of God’s word can so grievously turn aside. The truth is that the cause is painfully simple. Not a few go on decently in the religious world through love of reputation, and a desire to stand well one with another. With little power of godliness, they have the highest value for position and their interests. Can any one doubt who knows the general state of things that this exercises immense power of a low kind? But it is not so where the Lord has distinctly led them out into a platform practically Christian. There nothing is allowed of God to pass in the long run but the power of the Spirit; and the danger is like Peter’s, when he was no longer in the ship (where he was safe enough comparatively), but went out to Jesus walking on the waters. Then it is Christ who sustains, one way or another, or sinking is inevitable. Undoubtedly it was the place of true honor, but faith alone could avail itself of the divine power; for that reason the lack of it exposed him the more because of his ardent, though the Savior was immediately in sight to extricate from peril and sorrow. Nothing but dependence on Christ can rightly keep the Christian -- I do not mean from drowning so much as from dishonoring the Lord.

In order to this the sovereignty of God in service must be felt, learned, applied, and walked in. And the same feeling which maintains it as a matter of faithfulness to God will also respect it in others. Be assured that these things always go together. This must suffice for the distinctive service of the Levites in contrast, so to speak, with the common character of the priest’s work and position. In drawing near to God all differences disappear. Who and what are we in His presence? The one person that fills the scene is the Lord. And this is more manifestly true and known to us now, because the vail is rent. Hence therefore the immediate presence of God is incomparably more felt in Christianity than even the types of Judaism could possibly express.

The chapter closes with fresh calls from Jehovah to Moses: first, to number the firstborn males of Israel from a month old and upward, and to take the Levites for them; secondly, as the number of the firstborn exceeded that of the Levites by two hundred and seventy-three, to take redemption-money for this residue (five shekels apiece) to be given to Aaron and to his sons. 57

57. It is grievous to think how the ignorant or careless statements of good men furnish weapons to the ill-minded against the word of God. Bp. Patrick, if I mistake not, inferred from the ratio of the first-born to all the males that each Jewish family must have consisted of forty-two boys on the average, though he afterwards reduced it more than half. Such a mistake has been greedily re-echoed by rationalists abroad and at home, especially by Bishop Colenso in Pt. 1, chap. xiv. But these reckoners, so ready to impugn Scripture, have overlooked several elements which the record itself furnishes, so as to reduce the number to an average of at most eight children, boys and girls, in each family, which no man can pretend to be excessive. For, first, the heads of families -- first-born fathers, grandfathers, or great grandfathers -- are clearly not included here any more than in the death of the first-born throughout Egypt, but only those who were unmarried members of the house. Secondly, those numbered were not merely eldest sons, but strictly first-born males. Supposing the daughter to be the first-born in equal ratio, this would reduce (continued...)
In Num. 4 we come to another important point — the carrying of the vessels of the sanctuary through the wilderness; for now what the Kohathites had to do is taken up particularly. It was the highest form; it was what brought the service closest to Christ. Outwardly it did not look so well, as we shall find afterwards. It does not at all follow that the service which makes the greatest show or noise among men has the most honorable character in the eyes of God. This is important. We often mistake as to what really has the weightiest place. This is the one sure test of value; it is always Christ. Whatever brings one nearest to Christ, and brings out Christ most, is always the best. This seems to be the case typically with the sons of Kohath in their service. But if we look closer, you will find special ways in which their service is brought before us.

Thus they were told first of all,
When the camp setteth forward, Aaron shall come, and his sons, and they shall take down the covering vail, and cover the ark of testimony with it: and shall put thereon the covering of badgers’ skins, and shall spread over it a cloth wholly of blue, and shall put in the staves thereof {Num. 4:5, 6}.

This was, of all the vessels of the sanctuary, the fullest and the highest representation of God Himself, as displayed in Christ. The ark, as we know, was for the holiest of all. It was that which set forth Christ, -- and Christ not as He met the need of man in the world, but as He is seen in the presence of God -- Christ in the highest display of His glory and of divine righteousness on high. In this case the vail was that which covered it. It is not merely therefore the type of the Son of God as such, but as having taken humanity into union with His own person. I trust that my reader believes and knows that the Son of God was from all eternity; but what the ark covered with the vail represented is the Son after He took manhood into union with Himself.

Besides this, there is the covering of badgers’ (or tachash) 58 skins -- the figure, it would seem, of that which absolutely shut out all that was offensive. Such repellent power could only be represented thus, not in the intrinsic way in which it belongs to Christ. The form in which the figure expresses this power of moral guard is by a skin capable of warding off what was disagreeable. Badger’s skin therefore was fitly chosen in every case when it was a question of representing power that sets aside evil and forbids its smallest contact with the object so covered. Then over this type of His separation from sinners was a cloth wholly of blue, because, whatever might have been in our Lord Jesus Christ as just said, whatever might be the power that rejected evil, there was another aspect of Him pre-eminently presented to the believer: He was

the heavenly
One (1 Cor. 15). And it is remarkable, too, that several expressions which are used in John 3 combine these very thoughts.

The Son of man {John 3:13, 14}, it is said there rather than the Christ. Thus we find Him shown fully as man -- the title in which He speaks of Himself here and habitually; but we find also that He is the Son of Man which is in heaven {John 3:13}.

This never could be severed from Him when He was here below; it seems to be the allusion meant by the covering of blue. Even John the Baptist was earthly, and spoke of the earth, as did all others; Jesus alone came from above, and was above all. He was divine, the Word and Son, whatever He became, and coming from heaven He was above all.

Further, the table of showbread had a cloth of blue, and all the various appurtenances were so covered. Besides this it is said,

And they shall spread upon them a cloth of scarlet, 59 and cover the same with a covering of badgers’ skins, and shall put in the staves thereof {Num. 4:8}.

Whereas, on the contrary, with the candlestick there was simply a cloth of blue which covered all, and then the covering of badgers’ skins, but no scarlet cloth. What are we taught by this? Wherein lies the difference? Why is it that the Spirit of God directed that in the case of the table of showbread a covering of scarlet should be between the blue and the badgers’ skins? And why not in the candlestick? The reason, I conceive, is that scarlet is the well-known sign of His glory, not so much as Son of Man, but as the true Messiah -- as the one who takes the kingdom of His father David after the flesh. I conceive therefore that this is probably corroborated by the fact of its connection with the table of showbread. At that table were the loaves, which clearly bring before us the twelve tribes of Israel. When the Lord Jesus restores the kingdom to Israel, it is not the covering even of purple -- I shall show this by and by, -- but rather the covering of scarlet. The mistake of the Jews when our Lord came here below was that they only looked for His glory as the Christ. Our Lord Jesus was refused as such; but when it was manifest that unbelief rejected Him, then, as we all know, He brings in this further glory as the result of suffering unto death. His death and unbounded glory throughout all the creation go together. (Cp. Psa. 8 with Psa. 2.)

57. (…continued)
the number one half, as the former would to one-third. Next, there is a further reduction necessary when we take the mean number of children who survive to the twentieth year; for ordinarily not a few of the firstborn die before then. Lastly, the first-born under a month must be excluded. Hence, instead of forty-two sons, the first reduces (say in round numbers) to fourteen; the second to seven; the third and fourth to less than four. If we rate the first-born surviving at two-thirds for the whole period, and take the first-born under a month into account. The reader will find the minute proof of this drawn out in “The Exodus of Israel,” chap. 6.

58. It matters little comparatively for the typical truth conveyed whether פָּרָת means a seal or a badger. It was certainly an external protective skin, sufficiently strong (as in Ezek. 16:30) for women’s shoes to be made of it. The Septuagint translate it by ὑστήριγμα, as Aquila by ἄνεφαμαν and understood a peculiar color to be meant. But Gesenius rightly, I think, decides against this, as do most, though it be not clear what animal is meant.

59. The word seems properly to mean crimson. (Cf. Matt. 27:28; John 19:5.)
Hence therefore the evidence is plain, and God showed all along, that there never would be the limitation of His glory in connection with the twelve tribes of Israel represented by these twelve loaves, as the Son; He comes of man in all the fulness of power and glory. It would not be merely as of the Son of David, but the infinitely larger glory of the Son of man. But He will not therefore lose His royal rights over Israel as His special people. With this, it appears to me, the scarlet or crimson covering is connected. I shall show presently how the purple comes in; but for this we must wait till it occurs in its place.

In the case of the candlestick of light there is altogether a different thing. Nothing else but blue appears. There is neither scarlet nor purple; nor was there, you will observe, the covering vail. Why is this? Because here we have brought into close juxtaposition the light of divine testimony, which does not refer to the tribes of Israel, but is specially connected with the heavenly calling. Now it is precisely when Israel disappears that the power of the Spirit of God is given, which is the real means of manifesting this heavenly light. Consequently all reduces itself to two ideas: one is the heavenly link, and the other is the power that rejects all impurity. The church of God, as we know, or Christian body, is especially connected with that testimony. In the case of the twelve tribes there will be, when the due time comes for them, a connection through Christ with heaven, the power of holiness; but their hope is Christ in the glory of the kingdom, which He will take as the risen Son of David. This we have already seen in the foregoing type.

Further, it is directed that the golden altar should be covered with blue and badgers’ skins; that is to say, in near connection with the light comes the altar of intercession, the altar of priestly grace. How beautifully this applies to a time when not only there is the power of the Spirit of God in giving a testimony for God -- a heavenly testimony and a holy one, but besides also the power of grace that goes forth in Christ’s intercession! We know how both ought to characterize the Christian. These two objects are similar in kind, were found in the case of the two sons of Gershon brought distinctly before us, the Levites -- not merely of the children of Israel. But we have now the same sons of Gershon brought distinctly before us, not mixed up with the warlike houses of Israel; but when their service has been distinctly defined, they too are connected with the work, and summed up together.

It will be observed that here again as in Exodus I scout down the notion as erroneous, that the most holy place with its furniture sets forth Christ in contra-distinction to the holy place as directly referring only to the works and services of His people, -- the things to be believed concerning God, and the things to be done by His believing people, -- which leaves the court as a place where they might personally appear before God, and hold communion with Him as locally present among them. How poor this is, how it leaves out the true antitypical place into which the believer is now brought through the rent vail to hold communion with Him in the holiest (Heb. 10), does not call for more words. The Cocceian school was wild and vague; but their prime idea is incomparably better than this exclusion of Christ from His rightful pre-eminence and all-comprehensive functions in the mind of the Spirit. Besides, it does not seem consistent to admit, as these same typologists do, that the tabernacle as a whole sets forth the manifestation of God in Him, and then to allot it in this strange way, giving Christ’s royal dignity is connected not so much with His being the Son of man as with the lineage of David. I take it therefore that here we find what belongs to the Lord as suffering on the earth. Here He suffered, and here He is to reign. No doubt He is and could not be other than the means of meeting man where he is, in all his wants, and weakness, and sin, and distance: the blessed Lord never can abdicate that. This is glory pertaining to Him for the earth. At the same time He is and could not be other than the Son of David as viewed here below; as it was said, He was

born King of the Jews {Matt. 2:2}.

Looking at Him as connected with the earth, this is in part what belonged to Him -- to reign where He suffered. The proper color to express this dignity is the covering of the brazen altar. He is more than king, but still He is King, and thus connected with all the earth.

The difference between the brass and the gold in various vessels seems to be this, that, while both show divine righteousness, the one rather looks at man responsible on the earth, the other at God in all His grace who is approached in heaven. Such is the difference. They are both true, both alone found in Christ: nevertheless the one means God’s righteousness to whom we draw near; the other means God’s righteousness that displays what He is in dealing with man as a responsible creature here below. God can afford to forgive him, but it is simply forgiveness. This takes account, we see, of his responsibility, which concludes by his failure, though divine mercy steps in with plenary pardon on faith. But it is another thing to draw near to God as He is revealed by Christ. This is found in the ark or in the other vessels of the sanctuary, if we did not even look at the highest form.

This was then what the Kohathites had to carry. Accordingly we find the completing of the numbering of the Levites -- not merely of the children of Israel. But we have now the same sons of Gershon brought distinctly before us, not mixed up with the warlike houses of Israel; but when their service has been distinctly defined, they too are connected with the work, and summed up together.
the innermost shrine no doubt to the blessed Lord, then the middle or holy place to His people, and lastly the outer court to the place of meeting or fellowship for the Lord and them. Having already however explained, in speaking of Exodus, what I believe to be the true bearing of the sanctuary vessels, there is no need of repeating it here. I would only point out the different order in this place, as well as the omission of some: both due to the fact that we are here in presence of God's display of His life in Christ (and consequently in the Christian) on the earth, whether in the days of His flesh or as anticipating His appearing in the kingdom. The golden altar follows the golden table and chandelier, as it again is followed by the altar of burnt offering. The laver is not mentioned anywhere. It is the difference of design which governs and accounts for all -- a striking testimony to inspiration.

In Num. 5 we enter on another view, on which I must be brief. Defilement, or suspected defilement, is here dealt with; but the principle is always according to the character of the book. It is not now priests, but the camp of Jehovah. He deigns to be with the people, and is there in the very midst of their encampment. They must carefully avoid what was unsuitable for the presence of God. He was dwelling there: it was not merely man's drawing near to Him. This, no doubt, did concern the Israelites, and we find it in the preceding book; but He was dwelling with them, and accordingly this becomes the standard of judgment. So we find the various forms of uncleanness which would be unfit for a camp where God dwells. This is the first thought.

In the next place, supposing persons committed any sin, trespassing against Jehovah, and were guilty, the great point insisted on is confession (but more than this, reparation, if possible, by the guilty party); in every case, however, to God Himself. Undoubtedly Christianity in no way weakens this, but rather strengthens it. The grace of God, which has brought in unlimited forgiveness, would be rather a calamity if it did not enforce confession. Can one conceive a thing more dreadful morally, than a real weakening of the sense of sin in those brought nigh to God? It may seem so where there is only a superficial acquaintance with God. Where the truth has been hastily gathered and learned on the surface, it is quite possible to pervert the gospel to an enfeebling of the immutable principles of God, ignoring His detestation of sin, and our own necessary abhorrence of it as born of God. Whatever produces such an effect is the deepest wrong to Him, and the greatest loss to us. This is guarded against here.

But there is another case where there was not a trespass, but a suspicion of evil, and this too in the nearest relationship -- the husband about his wife. Now Jehovah had his eye on this. He would not have one hardened. What is more dreadful than to be carrying suspicions? We ought to watch against it. Still there may be circumstances that bring a sense of evil, and yet we can hardly give an account of it. We may struggle, fearing that we are wrong as to the person; still, somehow or another, there is the sense of something wrong against Jehovah. What, then, is to be done? In this we see Jehovah making a special provision for it. He ordered that there should be the administration of what is called here the waters of jealousy [see Num. 5:12-31].

The wife was to be brought to the priest; everything was to be done in a holy way. It was not human feeling, but connection with God Himself, and a judgment of that which was unsuitable for His presence.

Then shall the man bring his wife unto the priest, and he shall bring her offering for her, the tenth part of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil upon it, nor put frankincense thereon; for it is an offering of jealousy, an offering of memorial, bringing iniquity to remembrance. And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before Jehovah. And the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel; and of the dust that is in the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and put it into the water: and the priest shall set the woman before the Lord, and uncover the woman's head, and put the offering of memorial in her hands, which is the jealousy offering: and the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that causeth the curse {Num. 5:15-18}.

Then the charge is given to the woman, after which he says, Jehovah make thee a curse and an oath among thy people, when Jehovah doth make thy thigh to rot {Num. 5:21, 22}, and so on. The priest was to write the curses in a book, and blot them out with the bitter water, and cause the woman to drink the water. The effect of this would be that, supposing the woman was innocent, all would go on so much the better in the family. She would have the manifestation of God’s blessing on her.

This I do not doubt to be a type, whether of Israel or of Christendom; but for moral profit individually it is all-important. It may be very painful for us to be suspected, but when we are, let us never resent it in the pride of our hearts. Alas! evil is possible, and it is a good thing to evince by the very patience of whatever may be that which is laid to our charge that we are above it. It is always a sign of weakness at the least, very often of guilt, when there is a restless desire to extenuate and deny; and the fiercer the denial, the more certain the guilt as a rule. But there may be weakness which sometimes gives an appearance of wrong where it does not really exist. Where flesh is not thoroughly judged, there will be a tendency to resent the smallest imputation. Now here it is where we have this bringing in of the water of death. What is there which so admirably meets everything as the taking the place of death to all that is here below? It is very evident a dead man does not resent an injury. It is the bringing in the practical power of death into the soul which enables one then to bear it. Whatever it may be, let it take its course -- let us humble ourselves to have, as it were, bitter water administered to us; and most assuredly where the heart, instead of refusing or in a fleshly way merely repelling an insinuation out of the pride of our nature, is willing that all should be thoroughly tested in the presence of God, the result is that the Lord espouses the cause of the one causelessly suspected, and makes all to flourish as never before. Whereas, on the other hand, if there is a trifling with God, with His name, with His nature, then indeed bitter is the curse which falls on such a
one. Thus we see it was an invaluable thing, and it is as true now in principle as ever it was in outward type. I do not hesitate to say it is true in a deeper and better sense now than it was then; only it needs faith. It needs self-judgment however; nothing less will carry us through. For although there may be the most genuine faith, still if there is not the willingness to be nothing the willingness to take the bitter draught, the waters of separation or waters of jealousy, it is because there is a power of flesh hindering us -- a want of faith to take the place of death. Where we are upright, yet hesitate to say it is true in a deeper and better sense now than now in principle as ever it was in outward type. I do not deny the claims of nature, never weakens the sense of its beauty, fallen as man may be, and the world ruined by him -- yes, ruined not by God, but by him who yielded to Satan's wiles.

Yet that same blessed Savior in gracious separateness foregoes all enjoyment of what was found here below -- severing Himself in special vindication of God from it all. The creature was good. How could it be otherwise, coming from the hands of such a God? He knew better than any the state into which it had fallen, but He did not forget whose wisdom and goodness made it all. At the same time He is separate to Jehovah; He preserved His Nazariteship. Israel understood not, but the godly remnant followed His steps. By the grace of God they took the place of confessing the defilement for the dead. This seems to be the very thing illustrated at Pentecost. Those who received the word took the place of repentance. Christ abode separate to God always. The repentant Jews in living faith acknowledged what their hands had done -- what they themselves had been -- what their fathers as well as themselves and their children. They bowed to God, and owned the ruin and death that had come into the world through sin. This is the only way of deliverance from it. They were set on a new ground of Nazariteship unto God from that very moment. They had begun as the outward people of God, separate from the nations, but their standing had been all spoilt and lost by defilement. The death of the Messiah brought out their defilement to the uttermost; but that very death which was their greatest sin became in grace the sole means by which they could renew their Nazariteship on a ground that could not give way. And there we follow. More than that, the door is left open for the remnant in the latter day. They will be Nazarites too. They will not refuse to own their sinfulness, and look from every other hope to the dead and risen Savior; and they will close their proper place of separation to God in the joy and liberty of the millennial kingdom, when the Nazarite may drink wine.

But a few words more as to the Nazarite may be acceptable here. It was not merely that there was the refusal of the best of what God gives (for natural joy here below was represented, I suppose, by the wine); but further, all the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head {Num. 6:5}.

It is plain that this was not the ordinary condition of a man. Long hair did not become him, though it is in character with the woman. Long hair is the sign of subjection to another; subjection is not God's order for the man, who is meant to be the image and glory of God. But in the Nazarite the rule was altogether special. There was a giving up of man's natural rights, of the place of dignity which God gave him in nature. Further, there was the refusal to make himself unclean for his father, or mother, or brother, or sister, when they died, because the consecration of his God was upon his head {Num. 6:7}:

Nothing was more imperative than to beware of defilement by death. It has been already referred to. This is only found in the new creation, we having been sinful men, who turned back to God in repentance and faith; and always excepting the Lord
Jesus who stood, but stood alone, in His own intrinsic purity. Nazariteship is only for a time. This is stamped upon it. All the days of his separation, it is said, he is holy unto Jehovah {Num. 6:8}.

And then we find, either, if the Nazarite law were broken, how he had to begin afresh, or, if the days were complete, how it terminated. For this too was carefully noted in offerings of joy, and gladness, and communion. This is what is found here.

And he shall offer his offering unto Jehovah, one he-lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt-offering, and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin-offering, and one ram without blemish for peace-offerings, and a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, and wafers of unleavened bread anointed with oil, and their meat-offering, and their drink-offerings {Num. 6:14, 15}.

All these were to be brought; and the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace-offerings. And the priest shall take the sodden shoulder of a ram, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them upon the hands of the Nazarite, after the hair of his separation is shaven; and the priest shall wave them for a wave-offering before Jehovah {Num. 6:18-20}; and so on.

Again, Nazariteship is never supposed to be permanent, but an institution for the wilderness. It comes in by the way on earth, and is peculiar to Numbers.

Thus I apprehend that whatever might be the special separateness either of Israel in responsibility, of the church now, of the Christian by grace, or of Christ Himself, the only One absolutely and perfectly so,—whatever might be even these various applications, they all terminate in joy and glory. To watch in self-renunciation will not always be called for. There is a day coming when the Nazarite drinks wine—a time of gladness and ease; and thanks be to God for the hope of it! Then all will be changed; no longer must we go forward with girt loins because of passing through a world where not only evil is, but the best may be a defiling snare. The day comes when all things in heaven and earth shall be only for God's glory, all regulated and used according to the mind and heart of Christ. In that day Nazariteship shall be no more; even he who drinks wine then. We shall dwell at ease; we shall rest from sorrow and Satan; we shall all be glad in the joy of the Lord. Then too it will not be merely heavenly worship and praise, but the earthly ones shall rejoice for ever and ever.

Am I wrong in taking it that this is the reason why the blessing of the high priest is brought in immediately after? It is in strict connection with the conclusion of the Nazarite's vow. Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee: Jehovah make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: Jehovah lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them {Num. 6:23-27}.

Such will be really and literally the fact when the Nazarite's term shall have come in every sense; and it will end in the joy and gladness without bound of the millennial reign.

On Num. 8 a very few words will suffice. We have here the gifts of love and free-will, of hearty devotedness, which the chiefs of the people offer for the service of the sanctuary. The one point to which attention need now be drawn is an offering, particularly for the service of the Levites; but remarkably enough these offerings did not affect the Kohathites. The Kohathites, whatever others might receive, carry the vessels entrusted to them upon their own shoulders. The sons of Merari and the sons of Gershon are presented with oxen and chariots; the Kohathites receive none. There is no such principle as that of God balancing matters, and keeping men in good temper by giving all the same portion. If it were, there would be an end of practical grace. On the contrary, what puts faith and love to the test is, that God arranges every one of us in a different place according to His wise and sovereign will. There is no such thing as two alike. The consequence is that this, which becomes an awful danger for flesh, is the sweetest exercise of grace where we are looking to the Lord. What gracious man would feel sore with another because he was unlike himself? On the contrary, he would take an honest and hearty joy in that which he saw of Christ in another, which he did not himself possess. Now this is what seems to me is called into exercise by the provision for the carrying out of the service of the Levites. The least of them had the most oxen and the most chariots. At the same time, those who had the highest and the most precious charge of all had to bear the vessels on their shoulders. They had much less noise and appearance among men, but the best place giving rise to the highest exercises of faith. The Lord make us rejoice, not only in what He has given to us, but in what He has withheld from us and entrusted to others!

In Num. 8 (where again I must be very brief) we have some final words, after the order about lights is announced, in a very particular way, namely, that the priesthood alone keeps up the lights. It is not Levite service, but the link with Christ in the sanctuary in the presence of God on which they depend. This really, though in secret, keeps up the true light of testimony.

In the next place we find another fact. Although the Levites were separate to the priesthood, and were particularly excepted from the numbering of the people as belonging to the services of the sanctuary, none the less were they connected in the most interesting way with every Israelite. In short, at the consecration of the Levites, the Israelites laid their hands on the heads of the Levites. Jehovah had clearly shown before
that He was the One to whom the Levites belonged; but it would have been a sad loss indeed, if the people had not felt so much the deeper interest because they were Jehovah’s servants. Thus, we see, Jehovah maintained His own place and appointment and sovereign disposal of the Levites. If we are His people, let us not forget that the people of Israel signified their acquiescence and joy; took their part in it too by thus identifying themselves with the Levites that were then set apart for Jehovah. How happy, when on the one hand we thoroughly recognize the rights of the Lord, and on the other find our own portion so much the better. We find ourselves not impoverished because it is the Lord’s, but so much the richer, because His things are ours.

Then comes in Numbers 9 a special provision in case of any impurity by passing through the wilderness which might hinder the passover to be taken at the right season. It is the resource of grace, and is only found here. It might be acted on, as in fact it was at a later day. The principle of it may be seen in the historical books, but it was a province growing out of the condition by the way. We see Jehovah would not lower His end or His ways. On the one hand the passover must be kept -- the remembrance of the death of Christ is necessary everywhere. There is no pathway out of the world without the death of Christ which was kept in Egypt. Nor could they have left Egypt without the passover. They could not have been delivered across the Red Sea without the blood of the Lamb first. The death of Christ is the necessary and only possible foundation for any blessing from God; but besides, when they are in the wilderness, the death of Christ is just as necessary. Where indeed is it not necessary? When we enter Canaan, there we find the passover meets us in the foreground (Josh. 5). Everywhere the death of Christ is essential -- as for God’s glory, so for man’s blessing. On the other hand, supposing they were not in a fit condition through defilement, Jehovah here makes a special provision for it. He would not lower the passover by dispensing with its absolute obligation; but at the same time He would pitifully consider the circumstances of the way which might hinder its practicability.

The end of the chapter brings before us another provision of goodness -- the people’s call to unlimited dependence on the Lord’s guidance. This was represented first of all by the cloud, their guide by day, as the pillar of fire was by night. And mark this: no circumstances, no times, no difficulties, lessen the necessity for Jehovah’s guidance. Supposing night comes with its darkness: what then? The guidance of God is only so much the more conspicuous. Can we doubt that the light was rather brighter by night than by day? I speak not of it intrinsically, but in the eyes of man. Whatever may be the trial, the Lord will be with us, if we really look to Him; and the greater the need, so much the more manifest will be His guidance. All we want is that the heart be really simple in dependence on Him. At His command therefore they rest; at His command they journey. If it stopped but for a little while, so did they; if it abode longer, so they rested; but they were ever to be at Jehovah’s commandment. They were privileged to expect His bidding continually. Blessed dependence! May it be ours!

There is but one other topic we may fittingly refer to before coming to a proper halt in this book of journeys. Following the directing cloud, we find the prescribed use of the trumpets (Num. 10:1-10). This clearly is a character of testimony of rather more marked features, more loudly dealing with the people than the simple indication of the cloud or the pillar of fire. There are different ways in which Jehovah signified His will. It might not always be with the same emphasis which the trumpets naturally imply. There were two trumpets of silver, and they were to be blown by the priests, as we are told here. The sons of Aaron had this as their task according to certain distinct principles explained to us.

In the first case of direction the people looked to the manifest sign of God’s presence; in the latter, as just seen, the signal was given by those who had intimacy of communion with God, for this is clearly what was represented by the priests. Now the Lord does guide in various ways. There may be times, and there are things, in which we have no means which suppose such intimacy as could be represented by the priestly trumpets of silver. But Jehovah is always adequate to guide His people, no matter what the means or the circumstances may be. Even were one alone, Jehovah is superior to all difficulties. On the other hand, surely it is wise and well to avail ourselves of what spiritual help we can procure, of available testimony where the case admits of it; above all, of God’s own word to deal with ourselves as well as our difficulties.

So accordingly we find here that on various occasions the trumpets had to sound. The most general use was to assemble Israel together. But the trumpet was not so much a question of the journey; this had to do more particularly with the cloud. But the blowing of the silver trumpets was to assemble the people at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. They were called thus to draw near to the presence of God. Again, supposing the enemy at hand, there was an alarm blown.

When ye blow an alarm, then the camps that lie on the east parts shall go forward. When ye blow an alarm the second time {Num. 10:5, 6},

then the rest were to move. All is carefully ordered of God.

But when the congregation is to be gathered together, ye shall blow, but ye shall not sound an alarm {Num. 10:7}.

Thus, it is seen, that there were in particular these two cases. The trumpets were blown for gathering to the joy of communion; and there was also the alarm trumpet sounded by God’s own testimony in the presence of the enemy. The effect was to be this: the people would be comforted with the thought that, when the silver trumpets blew an alarm, it was God after all that dwelt in the camp. He who directed heard the sound. Not merely were they reminded that God was there, but that He would act for and in them against all adversaries. The trumpets of the sanctuary blown by the priest called them against the enemy. Might they not boldly say, The Lord is our helper: why fear? what can man do?
Lectures on the Pentateuch

Lecture 9

Numbers 10:11–21

The previous portion of the Book of Numbers, viewed as a history, has evidently a prefatory character, however important and divinely wise. It is in a great measure preparatory for that which we have now to look at, -- the proper journeying of the children of Israel and the instruction which Jehovah gives founded on their path through the wilderness. We have had the numbering of the people, and the ordinances in view of service, special defilement and special devotedness, and other provisions of grace, for heart and conscience, for eye and ear, marked for the journey through the wilderness.

From Num. 10:11 the history of the actual journey begins, and a very remarkable fact is at once brought before us, and one that must strike every rational mind, though it ought not so much to surprise the child of God. It may seem somewhat embarrassing that, after having laid down the place of the ark in the center of the house of Israel (and we can all understand how becoming it was that Jehovah should thus be in the midst of His people whether encamped or marching), now when they go forth there should be a change. 60 What drew out the difference was that Moses counted on the kindly help of his father-in-law. Man fails as always: God is invariably true to His word. Nevertheless He does not bind Himself that He shall not go beyond His stipulation. To my own mind this is admirably according to the perfection of God; for it is not a question this of God forgetting what was due to His own name. The ordinance that He had laid down at the beginning shows the affection that He bore to His people, the place that was suitable to His majesty, as having been pleased to come down and be in their midst; but the want of His people, the anxiety of His servants, the failure of what had been reckoned upon to meet the difficulties of the way, at once drew out His grace -- I will not say with the cords of a man, but according to that infinite goodness which bends to the necessities of the way, and which feels for every perplexity, great or small, in the hearts of His servants.

It is this which accounts for the difference. Jehovah felt for Moses and felt for the people too. And so the ark, which according to the strict rule was entitled to the place of chiefest honor in the midst of the host that moves forward, now deigns to do the work of a courier, if I may so say, for the people, not only finding the way for them, but acting as an advanced guard to the host. How characteristically this displays the unchanging goodness of God! On the one hand, the ordinance marked what was due to God, on the other was seen in this the gracious consideration which surrendered ritual for love. What real consistency God maintains with Himself. There is always this where grace reigns. The word of God may seem to be wanting for a little, but God never departs in the smallest thing which has the character of an ordinance, but to bring out His character far more perfectly than if all had been rigidly carried out.

The unerring word of God gives us both facts, by the same scribe and in the same book. There was no forgetfulness of His mind, but a tender solicitude about His people -- a fine fruit of the same divine grace which all our hearts can well appreciate. Alas! it was very different with the people. If the need of the people drew out greater grace on God’s part, the people are found complaining with bitter ingratitude in the scene just after. Jehovah heard it: His fire burned amongst them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. The people cried out, but first of all to Moses. And so the ark, which was fixed in the midst of the host that moves forward, now deigns to do the work of a courier, if I may so say, for the people, only finding the way for them, but acting as an advanced guard to the host. How characteristically this displays the unchanging goodness of God! On the one hand, the ordinance marked what was due to God, on the other was seen in this the gracious consideration which surrendered ritual for love. What real consistency God maintains with Himself. There is always this where grace reigns. The word of God may seem to be wanting for a little, but God never departs in the smallest thing which has the character of an ordinance, but to bring out His character far more perfectly than if all had been rigidly carried out.

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Who shall give us flesh to eat? {Num. 11:4}. This was worse than the complaining just before. It was contempt

60. Let me here cite one of those coincidences which are so natural in a writer who was himself an eye-witness, but wholly improbable for a mere compiler, however upright, to think of at a later day; for the more minute, the less is the likelihood that such details would be noticed. “In the second chapter of the book of Numbers the writer describes the divisions of the twelve tribes into four camps, the number of each tribe, and the total number in each camp. He fixes the positions each was to take round the tabernacle, and the order of their march; and he directs that the tabernacle, with the camp of the Levites, should not set forward between the second and third camps. But in the tenth chapter occurs what seems at first a direct contradiction to this; for it is said that after the first camp had set forward, then the tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon, and the sons of Merari, set forward, bearing the tabernacle; and afterwards the second camp, or standard, of the children of Reuben. But this apparent contradiction is reconciled a few verses after, when we find that though the less sacred parts of the tabernacle, the outside tent and its apparatus, set out between the first and second camp, yet the sanctuary, or holy of holies, with its furniture, the ark and the altar, did not set out till after the second camp; as the direction required. And the reason of the separation is assigned, that those who bore the outside tabernacle might set it up, and thus prepare for the reception of the sanctuary against it came. Would a forger or compiler who lived when these marches had wholly ceased, and the Israelites had fixed in the land of their inheritance, have thought of such a circumstance as this?” (Dean Graves’ Works, ii. p. 49.)
of signal grace. There was utter blindness to the goodness of God.

We remember,
said they,

the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely. But now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all, beside this manna. And when Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent, the anger of Jehovah was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased {Num. 11:5-10}.

This is followed by the remarkable passage between Jehovah and His servant. Moses himself is downcast through sorrow and distress of circumstances, and confesses that he is not able to bear with His people. Then Jehovah bids him gather to him seventy men of the elders of Israel. Was this really according to the full mind of the Lord? or did the Lord not take Moses at his word, and, as the result, share his singular honor with these elders? Jehovah came down, it is said, in a cloud and spake to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him and gave it unto the seventy elders; and it came to pass that when the Spirit was upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease. And this gave occasion also to the haste of Joshua, who was somewhat indignant for his master. Neither was this all. It was weakness in Moses that he could not trust Jehovah to care for His people; but it was yet more in Joshua to be over jealous for Moses’ sake. The singular distinction with which God had honored Moses ought to have raised Joshua above such feeling.

Enviest thou for my sake?
said Moses.

Would God that all Jehovah’s people were prophets, and that Jehovah would put his spirit upon them {Num. 11:29}.

Blessed anticipation of that which God was going to do another day -- the very day in which we are now brought to God, and in which He has gathered us together in one! Do we understand this day of ours? Are our hearts in the secret of it? Are we misled by Joshua’s feeling? or do we share the mind of Moses? Undoubtedly it is an hour of feebleness but withal of blessedness, of infinite peace and joy in the Lord. But we find even more.

Jehovah then listened to the complaint of His people in despising the bread that came down from heaven, and gave them what they sought after. How grave a consideration for our souls! Not only a believing prayer may have its answer from God, but an unbelieving one; and a miserable thing where the heart is not humble, and does not betake itself at once to God. Happy would it have been for Israel had they checked their murmuring, and rebuked their own souls before God! Surely, if the answer had brought them on their knees, and into the dust before God, it would have been better with Israel; but they were practically far from God. They chose to be their own purveyors, and distrusted Him who loved them. We shall soon find that this spread still farther.

And is it not a serious thought, my brethren, that we are reading but the starting-point of the journey, according to this book, the very object of which is to show the journeyings of the people of God? Yet, on the one hand, we have seen the incomparable grace of the Lord that has always streamed out to meet the wants of His people, that knows how to exceed, who never gives less, and never will bind Himself not to give more. Such is God. On the other hand, the people were only constant in rebelliousness of heart. It begins too with those who ought to have known better, but too soon fell under the enticements of the strangers who could not appreciate the goodness of their God. Thus, when a descent or fall comes, it is invariably that which is most carnal which carries the day. It was not that the mixed multitude slipped unperceived into the thoughts of Israel, but that Israel sank down to their lowest desires and contempt of what came from Jehovah.

Alas! we find failure everywhere -- with the very lawgiver himself. But the fault of his too eager servant recalled him to the grace he felt. He delighted in the goodness of God, even though it might seem to involve somewhat taken away from himself; but he did not think of self but of God. It was right assuredly, when the people greedily fell under the degrading wishes of the mixed multitude of Egypt, that Jehovah should then rise up in His displeasure and smite them at the time when they flattered themselves with His answer to their cry. But His was an answer of grief; it was an answer that brought its own deep penalty along with it -- not only leanness into their souls, but an indignant rebuke from God Himself. And it is said, His wrath was kindled against them before the flesh was chewed, and Jehovah smote the people with a very great plague {Num. 11:33}.

But we have not yet done with the painful phases of unbelief. It must be proved everywhere. What is man?

And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses.

And for what? Avowedly because of the type of still richer counsels which their hearts never appreciated --

Because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said, Hath Jehovah indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And Jehovah heard it. (Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth) {Num. 12:1-3}.

So much the worse for them. Had Moses defended his own cause, I am persuaded God had not so dealt with Aaron and Miriam. Supposing a person were ever so much in the right, still the want of faith which fights for self always thwarts the activity of grace.

Here therefore as everywhere, when the thing is simply committed to Him, the Lord takes it up; and nothing is more serious for the adversary.

Jehovah spake suddenly unto Moses; for now it was an incomparably graver thing than the complaints and murmurs and lustings of the mixed multitude, or even Israel. In proportion to the blessings that grace has given is the grievousness of that which is contrary to God, and therefore does He speak suddenly unto Moses and to Aaron and to Miriam,
Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the
congregation.

They do His bidding:

And Jehovah came down in the pillar of the cloud, and
stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron
and Miriam {Num. 12:4, 5}.

It was in the presence of Moses; but Jehovah had to do with
them. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living
God.

And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a
prophet among you, I Jehovah will make myself
known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him
in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is
faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak
mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark
speeches: and the similitude of the Lord shall he
behold; wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak
against my servant Moses? And the anger of Jehovah
was kindled against them; and he departed
{Num. 12:6-9}.

But not without the mark of His hand, not without the
judgment that dealt in the way most painful to her who
evidently was the chief in this stroke of insubjection. For,

behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and
Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was
leprous. And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord,
I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we
have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. Let
her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half
consumed when he cometh out of his mother’s womb.
And Moses cried unto Jehovah {Num. 12:10-13}

– how blessed the place of intercession?

Moses cried unto Jehovah, saying, Heal her now, O
God, I beseech thee. And Jehovah said unto Moses, If
her father had but spit in her face, should she not be
ashamed seven days? let her be shut out from the
camp seven days, and after that let her be received in
again. And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven
days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was
brought in again {Num. 12:13-15}.

Then comes another incident. It was not merely the
working of a spirit of repining and distrust of Jehovah which
infected the whole people even to those that were nearest to
Moses; but we have grave unbelief as to the land to which
they were journeying. Here however it is clear that Jehovah
allowed the wish to be carried out:

Send thou men {Num. 13:2}.

We know from elsewhere how this originated -- that it was not
in faith, but unbelief. Nevertheless Jehovah, as we have seen,
lets them prove the principle. That is, not only does He lay
down what is according to His own mind, not only may He in
gracious care and consideration for His people go beyond it;
but, further, He may allow that to be carried out which was
not originally of Himself, and yet everywhere secure His own
glory. So here spies are sanctioned; and we shall see the result
of it.

Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and
said unto them, Get you up this way southward

{Num. 13:17}.

And so they did, and came back with one cluster of grapes so
large that they bore the branch between two on a staff. They
brought also pomegranates and figs. And they returned from
searching the land after forty days. And this was the report.

We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and
surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the
fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell
in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great:
and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. The
Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the
Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in
the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea,
and by the coast of Jordan {Num. 13:27-29}.

Unbelief itself could not deny the goodness of the land,
nor ignore the magnificent specimen they carried between
them. But they thought of the men that dwelt there, and not of
God. And what had God brought them out of the land of
Egypt for? Had He said that there were no children of Anak
there? Had He represented the land to be a desert region
where the sons of men did not dwell? Never. Jehovah had
fully stated who were to be there hundreds of years before. It
was a plain forgetfulness of their distinctive glory and
blessedness. Is this a strange thing? Let us remember that we
too are in the place of our trial. Let us never forget that we
have a better salvation, founded on a better redemption,
and with better hopes. Nor have we a less dangerous wilderness
than Israel had to pass through; but for us it is not external
power, nor the governmental goodness of Jehovah, but our
God and Father, yea, as Jesus knew Him; not only in all the
love that rested on Him when here below, but in all the
faithfulness to which He binds Himself now to us in virtue of
redemption itself.

And how is it that we treat Him -- how trust Him? Let us
read the book at any rate as the true picture of that which we
are apt to be. To believe that we are in danger is the very way
to be preserved from it. To believe that He is caring for us in
love is the surest way to enjoy all through the faithfulness and
the strength of His love. It was not so with these spies.
Nevertheless there is always a witness for God; there is a
remnant even among the spies.

And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said,
Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well
able to overcome it. But the men that went up with
him said, We be not able to go up against the people;
for they are stronger than we {Num. 13:30, 31}.

All their thoughts were -- “God is not.” That which is so
sadly true of the unbeliever was evidently yielded to by His
own people.

They are stronger than we.

And where then was God? They brought up an evil report of
the land. This was an advance in evil; and the allowance of
evil always brings in a worse.

They brought up an evil report of the land which they
had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The
land through which we have gone to search it is a land
that eateth up the inhabitants thereof, and all the

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people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants, and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight {Num. 13:32, 33}.

And what did this matter, if God was for them? Alas! the congregation lifted up their voice again and cried, and the people wept that night {Num. 14:1}.

But they were tears of unbelief, not of sorrow.

And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses, and against Aaron, and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God that we had died in this wilderness! {Num. 14:2}.

They were just as unbelieving about the glory that was before them, the land of Canaan as the type of it, as they were about Egypt which they had left, and about the wilderness through which they were passing.

The consequence was judgment; and no wonder. For they say,

Let us make a captain, and let us return unto Egypt {Num. 14:4}.

This is the sure result. The heart that refuses to go on with God goes back to Egypt in its desires.

Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb, the two who had brought the good report, rent their clothes; and they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land which we passed through to search it is an exceeding good land.

Let us not forget this. We owe it to our God to give a good report of the land which lies before us.

If Jehovah delight in us, then he will bring us into this land and give it us -- a land, which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against Jehovah, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and Jehovah is with us. Fear them not. But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of Jehovah appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel {Num. 14:5-10}.

This was Israel -- Israel in the wilderness -- Israel in presence of the goodly land and of the earnest which had been set before their eyes.

The glory of Jehovah appears accordingly, and then He speaks to Moses.

How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it beseecheth they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed amongst them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they {Num. 14:11, 12}.

What is the effect now? How does Moses answer this offer? God was willing to begin again -- to make a fresh start. As with Abraham, so He would take Moses as a fresh stock to work from. He was willing to make him such a name as Moses otherwise could not hope for. The heart of Moses answered to the heart of God. He would not hear of it. The offer was to bring out the love that held to what God can afford to be to His people. What He might do for Moses he would not now think of. And Moses said unto Jehovah,

Then the Egyptians shall hear it.

How blessed to hear a man feeling for Jehovah’s name and glory! --

Then the Egyptians shall hear it (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them); and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou, Jehovah, art among this people, that thou, Jehovah, art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because Jehovah was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness. And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken (Num. 14:13-17).

Thus Moses could not bear Jehovah’s character to be compromised, and so he holds Him tenaciously, as it were, to His own word, saying,

Jehovah is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now {Num. 14:18, 19}.

He cleaves to the word of God and to His ways -- to the love that He had so often proved, even to the faithless people whom He knew so well from the first. If He had borne with them before, surely He would not turn from them now.

And Jehovah said, I have pardoned according to thy word: but as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Jehovah (Num. 14:20, 21).

Observe how at the same time that Jehovah pronounces judgment, He acts according to the very word to which Moses had tied Him in his faith. If his faith did not rise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their absolute and unconditional promises, it went back to the governmental pledge of Jehovah, and to this Jehovah adheres. Consequently that generation was dealt with and purged away, according to the terms of His own proclamation. He would surely hold fast His mercy, but He would by no means clear the guilty. Pardon there was, otherwise Israel had not gone into the land, but He would by no means clear the guilty {Num. 4:18}; and so that generation fell. Thus God preserved His character intact, and His hand made good what His mouth had uttered. Another day a deeper evil would make it necessary to fall back, not on what God had said in the wilderness, but what He had promised to the fathers. In the prophets we constantly find
that there is a going back in faith, not to what was brought out provisionally during the wilderness, but to what was promised at the beginning (i.e. to the fathers). Thus the end will be the accomplishment of the beginning. The law comes in by the by; and the governmental dealings that accompanied it, instructive then and for all times morally and typically, share in themselves its tentative character.

There is another thing to remark here. In this evil state of things Israel had taunted their children, or rather God about them, as if they were exposed to inevitable death. Unbelief had thus fastened on the little ones, as if it was vain to expect that such as they could pass through the desert safely, and enter the land in face of the enemy. The very people that yielded to such unbelieving doubt of Jehovah’s care did themselves reap the consequences; while the children, who, as they thought, could not possibly be preserved through the horrors of the wilderness, were the only ones brought in with the two men who vindicated God and held fast to His word, Caleb and Joshua. Alas! as we know, even Moses and Aaron passed away. There arose that which needed their removal as the discipline of Jehovah in their case. Caleb and Joshua, who gave God credit for a good land, and for a hand mighty enough to bring the weakest in, entered Canaan in due time; and so did the little ones, who, if their fathers were to be believed, must surely fall by the way. But God alone is worthy of trust; and we see how perfect He is in His ways, and how sure and good is the end. But we see too how dangerous it is to allow the complaints and murmurings of unbelief, lest the Lord hear and deal with us according to our folly.

If the latter part of the chapter sets before us a burst of courage, it was merely of the flesh, and received a rebuke from Jehovah. The people, heretofore so unwilling to go, are now too ready; but they went without Jehovah, and the Amalekites and Canaanites turned round on them, inflicting a severe defeat. They were discomfited even unto Hormah (Num. 14:40-45).

A chapter (Num. 15) follows which might seem extraordinary at first sight. It is a sample of that apparent disorder in the word of God which is only an example of a higher and divine order. God does not arrange things according to man. If we have only patience and faith to believe that He never sinks below His own glory, we shall prove this, and know Him better in due time. We need not wait for it till we get to heaven; we may count on seeing what is according to His will for us here. Impossible that the heart could truly desire from God what He would keep back from it. So, after all this miserable history, universal unbelief working among the people of God, and in presence of this calamitous defeat, to the shame of Israel, before their foes that hated them, Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying,

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them,
When ye be come into the land of your habitations,
which I give unto you, and will make an offering by fire unto Jehovah {Num. 15:1-3},
which was duly prescribed -- a fresh pledge of bringing them into Canaan. And this is exactly the force of it. So again it is repeated in the middle of the chapter.

Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land whither I will bring you {Num. 15:17, 18}.

This was His answer to the unbelief which thought that all must perish -- a double witness that God would surely bring them in. Unbelief along the way did not turn aside His love, nor unbelief about the end, for they despised the pleasant land. God holds calmly here to His purpose, though only He knew of the rebellion just about to break out and all that was to follow. He speaks of their future offerings of sweet savor with the drink-offerings of wine in the land of promise; and this for the stranger just as for the Israelite. For here the grace of God runs over, presumptuous sin alone being fatal, as we shall now see.

For as the next lesson we learn that God in no way bound Himself not to judge what was contrary to His glory by the way.

And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the seventh day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation {Num. 15:32, 33}.

And here comes out a very important principle -- what is to be done where we have not a distinct word of the Lord so far as we know. There is always one great safeguard, namely, to wait. Never be in a hurry in devising a remedy, or in exercising a discipline, without the word of the Lord. What is done cannot be undone. It is better to wait and take the place of ignorance, but at the same time of ignorance that is confident that the Lord hears and cares for us. This is exactly what they did. And they were right.

And Jehovah said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death. All the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp {Num. 15:35}.

Thus, whatever might be the solemnity of the sentence, the children of Israel had a fresh proof that God entered into their difficulties and took the greatest interest in what concerned them. Never can souls wait upon the Lord and be confounded.

But there is more than that. Jehovah speaks again unto Moses, saying,

Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue:
and it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: that ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God {Num. 15:38-40}.

It is not only that God graciously waits on the people that wait upon Him, and appears for them, and knows how to give them what they have never learnt before; but He deigns to use a means, and a very weighty means, of reminding them of His word. And what is this? The ribband of blue was a continual
means of reminiscence for the people of the Lord. And have we nothing to remind us? Indeed we have, and there is one grand means, I am persuaded, while we are in the wilderness, of putting us in mind of His will and the walk proper to us. There is nothing that better enables us to walk on earth than the consciousness that we are of heaven. Is not this the meaning of the riband of blue?

But after such comforting thoughts as these there comes out something still more tremendous than ever in Num. 16. It is not complaint now, nor murmuring; it is not merely unbelief because of the difficulties of the wilderness, nor is it the casting of a bad character on God’s gift and choice in the land which their unbelief was reluctant to go up and take in the name of Jehovah. There is a conspiracy under the fairest pretensions possible. This does not mend matters. The basest things sometimes put on the most pious guise. No man should be deceived by sound. The Christian is meant to judge things according to God. The men who did so were not by any means such as we should have thought most likely to have joined themselves rebelliously against Jehovah.

Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi

(the most honorable portion among those who had the direct service of the sanctuary),

and Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men.

That is, there were those who belonged to the ministering class, and those that were chief men in the congregation, generally representatives of what people would call in modern days leading men in church and state.

And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown. And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and Jehovah is among them. Wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of Jehovah? And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face {Num. 16:1-4}.

It is a good thing when the haughtiness that Satan knows so well how to excite brings out nothing but lowliness and humiliation of our souls before God. Haughtiness is apt to provoke haughtiness, and flesh to irritate flesh; but it was not so with Moses.

And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to-morrow Jehovah will show who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company; and put fire therein, and put incense in them before Jehovah tomorrow: and it shall be that the man whom Jehovah doth choose, he shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi. And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi: Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of Jehovah, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? {Num. 16:5-9}.

Unbelief shows itself constantly in this very form. If God puts an honor on a man, and he does not take it from Him, it is only a stepping stone for despising the God who gave it to him while grasping after that which He has never given. There is nothing that produces such dissatisfaction as the heart’s not estimating aright what God has allotted to us. Whatever is His will alone secures real joy and strength, and happy results to the glory of the Lord. Now in this case these men were not satisfied with their position either as princes of the congregation on the one hand, or as Levites on the other. They sought to be as Aaron and Moses.

What makes this so solemn a chapter is, that the Spirit of God distinctly applies it to the anticipated course of Christendom. We all need its warning. In the epistle of Jude the beginning, way, and end are perfectly brought before us.

The way of Cain {Jude 11} is the great departure at the beginning of this world’s moral history, where brother slew brother, jealous of his acceptance with God, as well as of the righteousness which rebuked his own want of it.

The error of Balaam {Jude 11} is the clerical evil of turning the name of God into a means of earthly honor and gain, not without hypocrisy. The last we have now before us, the gainsaying of Core {Jude 11}, and here those that depart from God perish. For this is not merely the selfish diversions of the truth to a means of aggrandizements according to the covetousness of the heart, bad as it was, but open, deliberate insurrection against the rights of Christ Himself. Moses was the apostle of the Jewish profession, as Aaron was his high priest. Christ is the apostle and the high priest of our profession; and the assertion and the exercise of a priesthood now for man is a direct invasion of that which can only be carried out exclusively by Jesus Christ at the right hand of God.

There never was a time when such pretensions were put forth more distinctly than at this present moment. Of old it was not exactly so. In earlier days the writings, for instance, of those that are commonly called “the fathers” show that it was rather an insensible slide; but the solemn fact confronts us now that it is on the part of men who have the Bible, and this circulated, read, proclaimed in the very streets -- an unexampled propagation of the word of God, and of that which is drawn from the word of God, and this even in what are called “Protestant lands.” Consequently it takes the shape of an apostasy, accompanied by hatred of the truth of God; and so much the more because there has been in past history the fatal experience of the effects that follow a slip into a human priesthood. But now there is a growing rejection of the truth of God, and despite done to the Spirit who witnesses the grace of Christ. The attempt once more is to return to naturalism from grace and truth, after both have been fairly
brought before the minds of men. No wonder therefore the Spirit of God says that they shall perish in the gainsaying of Korah.

But Jehovah acts in His most solemn vindication of His will against the adversaries, as described in this chapter. They perish too.

And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also. And there came out a fire from Jehovah, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense {Num. 16:32-35}.

And then was marked the choice of God and the value of the high priest that had been despised. For it is said,

Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up the censers out of the burning, and scatter thou the fire yonder; for they are hallowed. The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar: for they offered them before Jehovah, therefore they are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel. And Eleazar the priest took the brasen censers, wherewith they that were burnt had offered; and they were made broad plates for a covering of the altar: to be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before Jehovah; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as Jehovah said to him by the hand of Moses. But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of Jehovah. And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of Jehovah appeared. And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation. And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment. And they fell upon their faces. And Moses said unto Aaron, Take the censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from Jehovah; the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people {Num. 16:37-47}.

Thus God was not content with an immediate and final judgment executed on the leaders of the rebellion, but the people whose hearts went with it were judged by the plague. We find here Moses and Aaron yet more remarkable for their earnestness of purpose than for the activity of divine affection in the endeavor that the grace of the Lord should appear for the guilty people.

Moses stood, it is said, between the dead and the living, and the plague was stayed {Num. 16:48}.

Thus was proved doubly what God thought of the presumption of these Levites: -- on the one hand the judgment of the presumptuous Levite and his party, with the after-clap of the plague among the people; on the other hand the efficacy and grace of the priesthood whom pride and unbelief had sought to supplant under pretense of due honor to all the people of Jehovah.

But there is more than this in Num. 17. God would turn it to a practical and a permanent account; and this in a gracious way now, not to call up the remembrance of a sorrowful and humbling judgment. He tells them to speak to the children of Israel that each of them should take a rod according to the house of their fathers, and of all their princes according to the house of their fathers, twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod. And thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi {Num. 17:2, 3}.

And these were put in the tabernacle, before the testimony, where Jehovah met with Moses when He made manifest His mind. The answer was soon given.

And it came to pass that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds. And Moses brought out all the rods from before Jehovah unto the children of Israel; and they looked, and took every man his rod {Num. 17:8, 9}.

It was not only an indisputable sign of choice of the person, but a most significant token of the true place of priesthood, which was here in type founded on death and resurrection. Plainly there is no bearing of fruit except according to the priesthood which Jehovah chose for them. It was not merely to be the means of staying the plague in the presence of an evident divine judgment, but the habitual witness that real fruit-bearing fit for the sanctuary of God springs only from the priestly fruit of life imparted in the grace of God, and brings forth fruit for His sanctuary. Strange to say, the children of Israel are more alarmed, if possible, at the witness of the gracious power of God than at the plague which had devoured them just before.

We die, say they; we perish; we all perish {Num. 17:12}.

There is nothing so blind as unbelief. Daring in the presence of a pestilence, which in itself followed an unprecedented judgment, they are fearful even unto death in the presence of the sign of all-overcoming grace in life and fruit-bearing.

In Num. 18 we have the connection of Aaron with the tribe of Levi, which will not demand more than a few passing
words. It is of the utmost importance that the external service should never be severed from the priesthood which enters within. This is exactly what seems set forth here (Num. 18:2, 4). The tendency of ministry, when it does not presumptuously set up to priestly honor, is always to content itself with a place without, and thus to get severed from Christ on high. It never can be so without the deepest loss. Whenever ministry becomes a mere human institution, founded on education and chosen by man, instead of depending on the sovereign call of the Lord Jesus, who uses those called for His own glory, how deplorable the descent to the minister, how dishonoring to the Lord, and how ruinous the result to all concerned! The dependence of ministry then on Christ in the presence of God is what is taught, as it appears to me, by the Levite, the sign of him that is engaged in the service being given to Aaron. It was a remarkable arrangement, the force of which has not always been seen. God would thus keep up the connection of that which goes without with what passed within the vail.

The priests had all the offerings and sacrifices of which man might partake; the Levites had the tithes from all Israel: the one fed from within, the other from without; but both received from Jehovah, for He was their inheritance. Otherwise they were miserable: what else had they?

In Num. 19, which follows, we have another most instructive ordinance of God, peculiar to the book of Numbers.

This is the ordinance of the law which Jehovah hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke {Num. 19:2}.

What the great atonement-day is to the center of the book of Leviticus, the red heifer is to the book of Numbers. Each seems characteristic of the book wherein they are given, which shows how systematic are the order and contents of Scripture.

Thus we have here a provision distinctly for the defilements which are met with as we journey through this world. This is of vital moment in practice. There is many a soul disposed to make the atonement do, as it were, all the work. There is no truth more blessed than the atonement, unless it be His person who gives that work its divine value; but we must leave room for all that our God has given us. There is nothing which so tends to make a sect as to take truth out of its proportions, treating a part as if it were the whole mind of God. It cannot be too much insisted upon, that the Bible is the book which delivers from all petty exclusiveness. What does it matter to have good thoughts here and right ways there, if there be along with this the essential vice of settling down contented with a part of God’s mind to the rejection of the rest? Our place is carrying out the Lord’s will, nothing but His will, and all His will, as far as we know it. Less than this gives up the glory of Christ. It is impossible to be sectarian where His word governs all; and there is no way of being unsectarian without it. Our being in this position or that will never make us individually and really unsectarian. The seeds of error go along with wretched self, from which there is no deliverance except by walking in the power of Christ dead and risen. This too applies here, where we have not merely the wrong of sectarianism, but the evil of thus abusing the most precious truths of God. When used exclusively, they will before long turn into an excuse for sin, whatever the high assumptions of an earlier stage.

It will not do to confine the saint then even to Christ’s atoning work, which has for ever abolished our guilt before God; not even if we add to this that we know now that in Him risen we are placed in an entirely new position, a life where evil never enters. Both most true and precious; but are these the whole truth? Certainly not; and there is no course more dangerous than to construe them as the whole truth. They are as precious as they are needed for the soul; but there is really no part of truth which is not needed, and this largeness and openness to all truth is precisely what we have to insist on. Indeed I am persuaded that this is after all what is most peculiar -- to avoid peculiarities and pet subjects, welcoming all truth by the grace of God. Not that one can say much if the question be, How far have we made it our own? but it is truly of God to be in a position where all truth is open to us and we to it, and which does not exclude a single fragment of God’s mind and will. It will be impossible, I am assured, save on the ground of the assembly of God, to find a place which will not shut out truth, and perhaps much which is evidently most precious. It is well to guard sedulously another thing -- that we do not simply satisfy ourselves that we are on right ground according to God, but that our hearts earnestly desire to turn what He has given us always and only to the account of His glory.

The red heifer teaches the children of Israel on the surface of it that the work of the day of atonement had not so completely dealt with all sin that they might treat daily defilements as immaterial. It is impossible to exaggerate the value of the shedding of Christ’s blood for our sins. It does give no more conscience of sins. We are justified by His blood; yea more, with Christ we have died to sin; and we are alive to God in Him. But though this is all quite true (and was then set forth imperfectly as far as figure could, when we look at an Israelite), such grace is the strongest motive why we cannot tamper with what is defiled. The very fact that we are cleansed perfectly before God is a loud call to us not to endure a blot before men. It was to guard His people from soils by the way that God gave here a provision so remarkable.

A red heifer was to be brought without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke {Num. 19:2}, a striking picture of Christ, but of Christ in a way not often spoken of in Scripture. The requirement supposes not only the absence of such blemishes as was indispensable in every sacrifice; but here expressly also it must have never known the yoke, that is, the pressure of sin. How this speaks of the antitype! Christ was always perfectly acceptable unto God.

And ye shall give her to Eleazar the priest that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay...
The blood was taken and put seven times before the tabernacle. It was quite right that the connection should be kept up with the great truth of the blood that makes atonement, and that vindicates God wherever the thought of sin occurs. But its special use points to another feature. The sprinkling of the blood is the continual witness of the truth of sacrifice; but the characteristic want follows.

And one shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn. And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer {Num. 19:5. 6}.

Then we find the ashes of the heifer laid up in a clean place. And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation; it is a purification for sin {Num. 19:9}.

In what sense? Simply and solely with a view to communion, i.e. of restoring it when broken. It is not at all a question of establishing relationships (that was already done), but on the ground of the subsisting relation the Israelite must allow nothing by the way which would sully the holiness that suits the sanctuary of Jehovah. This was the point.

Such is the true standard as set forth in this type. It is not merely the law of Jehovah condemning this or that. This shadow of good things demanded separation from anything inconsistent with the sanctuary. The form which this ordinance took was in respect of traveling through the wilderness, where they were exposed constantly to the contact of death. It is death that is here brought in as defiling in various shapes and degrees. Supposing one touched the dead body of a man, he shall be unclean seven days. What was to be done?

He shall purify himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean: but if he purify not himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean {Num. 19:12}.

It was not permitted to purify one’s self on the first day. Am I wrong in thinking that à priori we might have thought this haste much the best course? Why not at once? It was ordered not for the first but the third day. When there is defilement on the spirit, when anything succeeds in interrupting communion with God, it is of deep moral importance that we should thoroughly realize our offence.

This seems the meaning of its being done on the third day. It was to be no mere sudden feeling that one had sinned, and there was an end of the matter. The Israelite was obliged to remain till the third day under a sense of his sin. This was a painful position. He had to reckon up the days, and remain till the third, when he has the water of separation first sprinkled on him.

In the mouth of two or three witnesses (the well-known provision in every case) every word shall be established {Matt. 18:16}.

Thus we see he who had come in contact with death must remain an adequate time to show the deliberate sense of it, and must take the place of one that was defiled before God. A hasty expression of sorrow does not prove genuine repentance for sin. We see something like this with children. There is many a one who has a child ready enough to ask for forgiveness, or even own its fault; but the child that feels it most is not always quick. A child who is far slower to own it may have, and commonly has, a deeper sense of what confession means. However I am not now speaking of the natural character; but I say that it is right and becoming (and this I believe to be the general meaning of the Lord’s ordinance here) that he who is defiled (that is, has his communion with God interrupted) should take that place seriously. Of course in Christianity it is not a question of days, but of that which corresponds to the meaning; which is that there should be time enough to prove a real sense of the evil of one’s defilement as dishonoring God and His sanctuary, and not the haste which really evinces an absence of right feeling. He who duly purified himself on the third day was in effect purified on the seventh day.

Thus first of all he has a sense of his sin in the presence of this grace that provides against it; then he has at last the precious realization of grace in the presence of sin. The two sprinklings are one the converse of the other. They set forth how sin had brought shame on grace, and how grace had triumphed over sin. This seems the meaning, and more particularly for the following reason. The ashes of the heifer express the effect of the consuming judgment of God on the Lord Jesus because of sin. It is not simply blood showing that I am guilty, and that God gives a sacrifice to put it away. The ashes attest the judicial dealing of God in the consumption, as it were, of that blessed offering which came under all the holy ordinance of God through our sins. The water (or Spirit by the word) gives us to realize Christ’s having suffered for that which we alas! are apt to feel so little if not to trifle with it.

There is another thing to notice in passing. The water of purification was not merely wanted when one touched a dead body, but in different modes and measures. That might be called a great case, but the institution shows that God takes notice of the least thing. So should we -- at least in ourselves.

This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean. And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days {Num. 19:14-16}.

The bone of a man might be a much lesser object, but whatever defiles comes into notice, and is provided for in Christ our Lord. Thus God would habituate us to the nicest discernment and the most thorough self-judgment. It is not only grave matters that defile, but little occasions, as men would say, which come between us and communion with our God and Father. At the same time He provides the unchanging remedy of grace for every defilement.
In Num. 20 connected truth appears when they are calling out for water.

There was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron [Num. 20:2].

It was really, as we would say, against the infinite grace of our Lord Jesus. This is what answers to it in the antitype. This might seem strong to say of Christians; but whenever we are tried and occupied with circumstances, are we not doing so? Do you think the Lord does not know what troubles us? Do you think the Lord does not send it for our good? It may be bad in another; but the chief point we have to look at is to see the good hand of the Lord, no matter what it is. We are not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good [Rom. 12:21].

The true way to do so is to count on the Lord Jesus regulating everything. All power is given to Him on earth and heaven; and why should we not be happy in His ways with us? He it is who deals with us, whatever may be the instrument and whatever the circumstances.

Here the people, having no water, began to chide with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before Jehovah!

There is nothing too base for one even belonging to God when God is not before his eyes.

And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink. And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of Jehovah appeared unto them. And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink [Num. 20:3-8].

And Moses did take the rod from before Jehovah as He commanded him; but when he with Aaron gathered the people, he said to them, Hear now, ye rebels!

Instead of speaking to the rock he speaks to them. He was not told to do so.

It was disobedience if Moses had done no more; but he goes farther than this, as we shall see. Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod [Num. 20:10, 11].

Alas! he brought another rod, his own; whereas Jehovah told him to bring

that is, the rod of Aaron. It was the rod of priestly grace, with which God wished him to speak to the rock; the rod that told how God could cause life to work where there had been death, and could produce fruit too according to His own marvelous grace; for He knows how to quicken, entirely beyond the thoughts of man or nature. Although Moses brings out the rod according to the word of Jehovah, he does not use it according to Him. He strikes with his own rod. What was its distinctive character? His was the rod of authority, and of judicial power. Of old he had used that rod aright (Ex. 17): it was a question of judgment falling on the rock -- then only. Just so Christ once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God [1 Pet. 3:18].

Now He ever lives to make intercession for us.

But here Moses, completely losing sight of the infinite grace of God in this wondrous transaction and provision for His people, and falling back on the principle of judgment, misrepresented the God that he had sought to magnify, and whose grace it was his greatest joy to reflect. It was not so now, and hence a grievous failure. It became sin unto death to Moses, for God most of all resents a grave misrepresentation of Himself on the part of one who ought to have known Him well. It was precisely because Moses and Aaron were so near to God, because they had entered (Moses particularly) into the grace of Jehovah, that now under these circumstances total failure on their part became the occasion for setting aside Moses as a vessel that had done its work. He was not fit to lead them into the land -- the goodly land. It was a sore trial; it was a deep pain, you may be sure, to Moses’s heart, though he never distrusted Jehovah after this, I am persuaded, but bowed with beautiful grace to His will, as we shall see in the history that follows. At the same time Moses felt and was meant to feel it all. But it is a sorrow that one who had conducted them so truly according to God, and who had stood so firm in circumstances yet more trying, should have failed, as it were, when close to the very brink of the land -- when drawing near to the point from which they were to enter on the Canaan of Jehovah’s choice. But so it was. Moses failed, departed from the rich grace of God, fell back on judgment; and judgment accordingly dealt with him. Moses did not act according to Jehovah. He lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice. Jehovah did not withhold the supply. The water came out abundantly; but this was to God’s own praise, and in nowise an endorsement of Moses’s failure.

And Jehovah spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them [Num. 20:12].

After this (Num. 20:14) we find Moses sending messengers, that they might pass through the land of Edom. Edom refuses; and Jehovah bids Aaron to go up. The time was come for him to pass away, and for Eleazar his son to take his place.
The endeavor to set Deut. 2:29 in opposition to Num. 20:14-21 is due either to perverse ill-will, or to mere inattention and rashness. Edom did refuse to let Israel pass through, yet they did pass through at last. The two occasions were quite distinct. The refusal of Edom recorded in the latter scripture occurred at a different time and place from that in which Israel effected the passage through their territory. The messengers were sent from Kadesh, not the district in general but the city, in their uttermost border, it would appear on the north-west; and this before the death of Aaron. But the passage was actually made some time after his death by the south of Edom by the way of the Red Sea, as indeed we may learn from Num. 21. So Num. 33:36 et seqq. shows Israel leaving Kadesh for Mount Hor, and Aaron goes up into the mountain and dies. From Hor we next hear of their encamping in Zalmonah, when they had turned the southern extremity of Edom, and were advancing northward on the east of the mountainous tract before reaching the border of Moab. Thus, if we compare the previous verses (Num. 33:30-35), we see that the children of Israel first came down from Mosereth in or near Mount Hor on the west of Edom to Ezion-gaber on the Red Sea; thence they went up the Arabah again to Mount Hor (Num. 33:36, 37), when Aaron’s death took place; and thence they came down by the same western side of Edom to Ezion-gaber on the Red Sea once more, thus compassing Mount Seir many days before they turned northward. No less than thirty-seven years elapsed from the days in which they came from Kadesh-barnea till they crossed the brook Zered (Deut. 2:14).

The object of that long stay there was in order that the old generation might gradually die off.

It may be added that Deut. 10:6, 7 entirely falls in with the routes already indicated, Deut. 10:6 showing us the latter part of their upward journey from Ezion-gaber to Mosera in Mount Hor, where Aaron died, as Deut. 10:7 traces the subsequent journey down again as far as Jotbath or Jotbatha. Num. 33 furnishes us details of this journey southward, but simply the broad facts that they departed from Mount Hor and encamped in Zalmonah on their final northward march by the eastern side of Mount Seir. Derangement in the order of the places named is only in the minds of hasty readers, not in the scriptures when patiently considered.

The only other point that I shall notice, as closing this part of my subject, is given in Num. 21; that is, we find Israel in the presence of the Canaanite king of Arad, who at first takes some prisoners. Israel vows to Jehovah that he will utterly destroy them, if he will deliver the people into his hand. Jehovah hearkens, and such destruction ensues that the place is thence called Hormah.

Soon after this, however, occurs a very serious scene of warning for our souls (Num. 21:4 et seqq.). It is no uncommon case: a time of victory has to be watched, lest it be a precursor of danger. A time of defeat, on the other hand, constantly prepares one for a fresh and greater blessing from God -- so rich is His grace. He knows how to lift up the fallen, but He makes those that are too light with their victory to feel their total weakness and the constant need of Himself. So it was with Israel. They became much discouraged immediately after their great victory, and they speak against God and against Moses.

And Jehovah sent fiery serpents among the people, and they hit the people; and much people of Israel died [Num. 21:6].

They at once fly to Moses, and ask him to pray to Jehovah for them; and Moses is directed by Jehovah to make a fiery serpent.

Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived [Num. 21:8, 9].

It is important, I think, for our souls to see this -- that, as connected with the wilderness and with the flesh, there is no life for man. Life is not for man in the flesh. Death is the Lord’s way of dealing with fallen humanity. How then is man to live?

I if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me [John 12:32], to quote another New Testament application of the truth now before our minds.

I if I be lifted up -- it is a Savior no longer on the earth, but lifted up from it: I do not say in heaven, but a Savior rejected and crucified. This is the means of divine attraction, when sin has been thus definitively judged. There can be no adequate blessing without the cross for man as he is; for thus only is God glorified as to sin. This is what in type comes before us here.

But why, it may be asked, the serpent of brass? Why after that figure? For another most solemn reason. It is not only that a crucified Savior is the means of salvation to man; but, besides, the figure intimates One made sin,

though in His own person He were the only One who knew no sin [2 Cor. 5:21].

Had He known sin, He could not have been a Savior according to divine holiness; had He not been made sin, we had never been really delivered from its judgment. He is, and He was made, exactly what God would have Him to be, and what we most needed Him to be. He is all this for us, and, mark, all for us now. We shall have all the glorious consequences in due time; but, even now, having Himself on the completion of His work, we have to faith all things in Him. So here Israel had all things by the way; they had life, as we see -- life won by victory over the power of sin and death.

Thus, as we hear just after this, God gives them joy by the way -- springs of joy and gladness, as we afterwards find -- the well in the desert which the princes dug. After all not much digging was required: with their staves was quite

61. Dr. Davidson’s Introd. O. T. i. 70.
enough. Such is the goodness of God to us even for the 
wilderness. The well was not made by dint of hard work on 
the part of those used to labor. The princes put to their hands 
with their staves; and they probably did not know much about 
toil. But it was enough. Overabounding grace thus gives 
abundant refreshment for the people as following that which 
God had before Him -- the beautiful type which Christ 
Himself applied to His own bearing the judgment of sin on the 
cross: once sin is judged, once life is given, what does God 
not give because of it and in unison with it?

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up 
for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give 
us all things {Rom. 8:32}.

The rest of the chapter shows us the triumphant progress 
of the people, with their victories (often alluded to in the law 
and the psalms) over Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king 
of Bashan. Two references are made in the account of this -- 
one to a book of that day, the book of the wars of Jehovah 
(Num. 21:14); the other to certain proverbial sayings or 
legends then in vogue (Num. 21:27-30). This does not, as the 
rationalists pretend, give the smallest support to the hypothesis 
that Moses composed the Pentateuch from a mass of previous 
material floating among the Israelites of his age and their 
Gentile neighbors. Written and oral, these foreign traditions 
are purposely cited with the exceptional end in view of 
proving from witnesses unimpeachable in the eyes of their 
most zealous adversaries that the land in debate, when Israel 
took it by conquest, did not belong to Ammon or Moab, but 
to the doomed races of Canaan and its vicinity. To the country 
of the former they had no just claim; that of the Amorite, &c., 
was given them up by God. The Amorite had taken it from 
Moab, and Israel from the Amorite, subsequently dwelling in 
all their cities, from Arnon to Jabbok, in Heshbon and all its 
villages. A Jewish record of its previous possessors and of 
their own victories might be disputed as interested by a foe; 
but a citation from their own current proverbial songs was 
conclusive; and the Spirit of God deigns to employ an extract 
to this end. In Judg. 11 we see precisely this ground of 
recognized fact taken by Jephthah in refuting the claims of the 
then king of Ammon, and his pretensions proved baseless by 
the incontrovertible evidence that the Amorite had the disputed 
territory when Israel made himself master of it, spite of Balak 
king of Moab and all other rivals. On a somewhat similar 
principle the apostle does not hesitate to cite heathen 
testimonies in the New Testament, as no mean confession on 
their part for the matter in hand (Acts 17:23, 28; 
1 Cor. 15:33; Titus 1:22).
Lectures on the Pentateuch
Lecture 10
Numbers 22–36

The successes given to the children of Israel alarmed some of their neighbors, more particularly Moab; and this gives occasion for a striking episode in the history which brought to issue as solemn a question as any raised in the book of Numbers. The sending for Balaam on the part of Balak was an altogether new element. We have had the grace of God and His provisions for the people; we have had the unbelief of the people, with chastenings and judgments, not without the renewed declarations on God’s part of His surely bringing even such a people into the goodly land. Grace alone could, but grace would do it.

But there was an enemy not yet fairly brought before our eyes -- the power of Satan. It did not appear at first, but before long it plays a most important part in the great transaction which now begins to open out in this chapter. Satan can take the place of an angel of light and righteousness: not invariably indeed, for he has other phases, but more especially with the people of God. On the other hand there was material for Satan to use, for the people had been notoriously faithless -- had dishonored God often and grievously. The question then was, Would God maintain a people guilty of the infraction of His own law? If so, would it not be a dishonor to Himself? What could He say? or how consistently could He meet Satan? Impossible that Satan should be in reality more careful of righteousness than God Himself. Nevertheless there was no small difficulty in appearances, and such a difficulty as human wit never can solve. How sorely it must have distressed one who loved the people!

But there is one simple and sure means of solving every difficulty. We know it in all its fulness; but even before it was fully explained, known, and brought out, the principle of it was always before faith. While unbelief invariably forgets and even shuts out God, faith invariably brings Him in; and whatever may be the difficulty of unbelief, it is evident there is none whatever to God. Thus then, although the heart may not understand how God is to reconcile His own character and express word and most solemn judgment of sin with the bringing of such a people into the land of promise, where His eye rests continually, it should not wait to understand but believe. In due season it surely will understand: only it has the comfort of the understanding being spiritual, not natural; the apprehension flowing from God, and not the pretension of man to think for God, and settle how things are to be done beforehand. It is infinitely more blessed to be as it were behind Him; to follow in His wake; to have Himself showing us every step of the way; to have Him allowing a difficulty to come out in its strength, that we may see how gloriously He settles all.

This is precisely what came out in the new trial which is to be brought before us. Balak sent not merely for Midian’s help, nor was it a question of the force of the world. He himself had the consciousness that there must be a power brought in superior to man; but he thought only of what he knew -- a power that for an adequate consideration would gratify man’s lust, and allow of man’s will. However the true God enters on the ground unexpectedly; for we must carefully remember that Balak had no real knowledge of God. He no more thought of Jehovah, whatever use he might make of the name of God, than king Saul honored Him when he consulted the witch of Endor. Besides the witch herself had no thought of the real spirit of Samuel; for I need not tell you, as no doubt you are all well aware that neither man nor devil has the smallest power over the spirits of those who are either righteous or unrighteous. As for the unrighteous, they are kept in prison till the day of judgment; as for the righteous, it need not be said they are with the Lord. I say then that neither man nor devil has power to produce them. But then we must remember there is a world of spiritual powers, and man is apt to confound with God beings with powers superior to his own. These are that hidden energy which has managed to usurp the place of God with bad consciences -- so much the more polluting above all other evils, for it calls itself religion, and has come between the true God and the soul. Such is the source and character of all idolatry. This is its real nature before God. The outward forms are but the blind. The real power is demonical; it deceives and destroys.

Now these demons constantly personate whom they please. They may pretend to be the spirit of this person or that, but they are nothing of the sort; being not more than demons and nothing less. They deceive men by gratifying their distrust, lusts, and passions, and among the rest their fancy about friends and relatives, or all the while, it may be, assuming also to be God, angels, and so forth. This is what was from time to time going on then, as it had since the flood. It is no new thing, though becoming more familiar no doubt to men in these days of Christendom’s decrepitude -- alas! days that are preparing the way for a still more awful power of Satan here below at the end of this age.

But God did not leave it to be a question of demons and deceits; for when Balak presumed to bring in that power above man to blight the prospects of His people, this at once called forth the true God. Balaam in his hypocritical way talks about consulting Jehovah. This too has always been. Those who
have least to do with God often talk most flippantly about Him; and so it was of old as it is now.

God,
it is written,
came unto Balaam, and said, What men are these with thee? {Num. 22:9}.  

He was not alarmed, being accustomed to an evil spirit. He did not know but that the power which came to him was the old familiar spirit. God caught the crafty in his own net. This is just where the mighty power of God shows what He is in the face of every adversary that dared to oppose His people. So when He asked the prophet what men these were, Balaam answers,

Balaam then, partly with the cunning which seeks to make the face of every adversary that dared to oppose His people! God, the instrument for sealing, as far as it could be done by man, the blessing of God upon His people!

And Balak rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land; for Jehovah refus eth to give me leave to go with you {Num. 22:13}.

So the princes returned, and told Balak that Balaam refused to come. Balak, judging according to what man so well knows, according to his own heart and experience, sends princes more honorable than the others who came to Balaam, and they said to him,

Thus saith Balak the son of Zip por, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me; for I will promote thee unto very great honor, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people {Num. 22:16, 17}.

Balaam then, partly with the cunning which seeks to make the best terms, partly also held contrary to his own thoughts by God’s hand, says,

If Balaam would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of Jehovah my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what Jehovah will say unto me more {Num. 22:18,19}.

But even here Balaam proves that all his talk about God was a mere pretence, and that there could be no reality of faith, or he would never have consulted again. Faith knows that God does not change. He is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent.

Ignorant of God, Balaam thus detains the messengers; for his heart dearly loved the proffered honor and emolument. He bids them wait that he might consult Jehovah again. Here again he falls into the trap of his own covetousness; for God came to Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them {Num. 22:20}.

Not that this was the course of His holy will; it was God dealing with the froward according to his frowardness. This He does if there is not faith in his mind, and along with it a single eye; He permits that a man shall follow his own blind devices. This is righteous; and God accordingly so deals with Balaam. Where He sees integrity, He graciously meets the trembling heart and the hesitating mind. But it was no question of hesitation with Balaam. There was self-will, and this too in the face of the glorious expression of God’s will. At bottom he makes nothing of God or His word. He had been distinctly told that he was not to curse the people, but to bless them; yet he waits with no other object than, if it were possible, to curse those whom God bade him bless. There was not a particle of faith, nor of the fear of God. Accordingly God now gives him up to his own devices. If he will join an idol, let him alone, as he would not be warned. That this is the true moral is made most plain; because it is said that, when Balaam rises in the morning, and saddles his ass, and goes with the princes of Moab,

God’s anger was kindled {Num. 22:22}.

Clearly therefore, though God had told the man that was ignorant to be ignorant, and the man that was self-willed to go and do his own will, there was an expressed and solemn warning to the prophet that he was flying in the face of God.

(Compare Num. 12:12 and 22.)

Then follows that incident of which the New Testament takes notice in 2 Pet. 2, which I trust no one here will ever allow the smallest breath of suspicion to sully. In truth the means employed were, as always, exactly suited in divine wisdom to the case. I grant you it is not a usual thing for God to make a dumb ass speak; but were these circumstances usual? Was there not something awfully humiliating in such a brute being the rebuker of the guilty prophet? But this very fact was most significant -- that it was an ass which rebuked a man not wanting in natural intelligence, and soon the vessel of the most beautiful declarations on God’s part, but not before the brute that he rode warned him of his folly and sin. On this I need not dilate.

The prophet then was permitted to know in the fullest possible manner, from the angel of Jehovah himself, wherefore it was that all these obstructions were put in his way. How gracious of God thus to make a man who was hurrying on to destruction pause and think, if anything could rouse him! But no, he was committed to wicked ways. Lawlessness must pursue its miserable course to an end no less miserable.

However he goes and he meets with Balak, who takes him to Kirjath-Huzoth.

And Balak offered oxen and sheep, and sent to Balaam, and to the princes that were with him. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost part of the people
And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams. And Balak did as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered on every altar a bullock and a ram. And Balaam said unto Balak, Stand by thy burnt-offering, and I will go: peradventure Jehovah will come to meet me: and whatsoever He showeth me I will tell thee. And he went to an high place (Num. 23:1-3).

And there again Elohim 62 meets Balaam, when he says,

I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram. And Jehovah put a word in Balaam’s mouth, and said, Return unto Balak, and thus thou shalt speak (Num. 23:4, 5).

And wonderful is the word that was spoken.

Come, curse me Jacob.

When he takes up his parable he says,

Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel {Num. 23:7}.

This was the word of Balak to him. He replied,

How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom Jehovah hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his! {Num. 23:8-10}

That is, he states in the most explicit manner the great and certainly fundamental privilege of Israel -- that they were a nation called out to be alone with and for Jehovah. This is the basis of all their blessing. They were unlike all the rest of the world in this, that they were set apart to be with Jehovah, the true Elohim.

Afterwards comes another message; for this is comparatively abstract, and the further demand of Balak brings out successively with ever-increasing clearness the special blessedness of the people, as far as God was pleased to make it known. 63 He does not say whom he is to meet; and it seems to me that the true force of the verse is best reached by leaving it in the vague mystery which such an elliptical phrase conveys. Balaam knew well whom he was used to meet. At the least he could not but have suspicions, for there never is a person who honors a demon as the true God that has peaceful confidence of heart. Is it possible to confide in a demon? There may be perhaps a hazy dim idea which people do not like thoroughly to grasp or understand. That is in substance what natural religion or superstition amounts to. They leave souls always at a distance from God, with a sort of striving and searching after God, but in fact under some delusion of the adversary. In Balaam’s case there was even more than this, because he was tampering continually with secret power in order to gain influence over others, but as deliberately against God’s people as for himself. Where was anything of God? -- anything that could satisfy an upright conscience? However Jehovah does meet Balaam. Doubtless that was the reason why our translators put in “Jehovah.” They judged that because Jehovah met him, he must have gone to meet Jehovah; whereas he only used the words to meet {Num. 23:15},

perhaps unwilling to tell out his wonted source of help. But Jehovah gives him a new word, and a word that goes far beyond the first.

Rise up, Balaak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: Elohim is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? {Num. 23:18, 19}.

The language is in the finest style of Hebrew poetry.

Now we have the people of God the object of distinct communications from God. It is not only that they have Elohim as the One to whom they belong, and to whom they are severed apart from all other nations; but now He speaks to them, He communicates, He opens His mind and heart to them; and what is its purport?

Behold,

I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: Jehovah his Elohim is with him, and the shout of a King is among them. Elohim brought them out of Egypt {Num. 23:20-22}.

The bold figures that are used and the allusions are all in the strictest connection with the fresh blessing. It is not merely separative grace, but distinct justification set forth.

It is only on the ground of the grace which justifies that God could call them according to that which was not, seeing them even now what He would make them to be through the Savior. This is what is before His mind. It is plain that justification is altogether impossible for sinners, unless there be the blotting out of what they are, and the bringing in what they are not. How can these things be? It is through another alone that there can be justification. Thus only God

hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob.

It is not that He denies it; nor that there was no iniquity on their part, for indeed there was.

Neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel.

It is a question of what He looks at.

Jehovah his Elohim is with him, and the shout of a King is among them.

Of course the time was not yet come to develope how this

62. The use of Elohim and Jehovah here is very notable, as absurd on the document hypothesis as instructive to the believer in the unity of the book and in the divine inspiration of its writer. This is immensely confirmed by Balaam’s use of Elion (Most High) and Shaddai (Almighty) in his last two prophecies (Num. 24) when he did not seek enchantments. Are we to fall back on the clumsy device of one, two, or more writers to account for these divine titles, instead of seeking their motive in internal considerations?

63. We must carefully remember that the word “Jehovah,” printed in italics, has no right to a place in Num. 23:15. “And he said unto Balak, Stand here by thy burnt-offering while I meet yonder.”
could be. Not till long after was the mighty work done by which alone it is possible; but we have the bold announcement, as far as it would have been proper to have expressed it by the lips of one that was an utter stranger to all in race as in heart; and we have it so much the more gloriously expressed, because it is simply given in its great principle by one who could see the ineffable blessedness of it without knowing in the least the experience of its comfort for his own soul. In God’s wisdom he was just the man to declare even to the enemy that it is entirely a question of what He has wrought, not in any way of Israel’s doings or deserts.

Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel; according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought! Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion; he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain {Num. 23:24}.

(Compare Num. 24:9.)

Balak was incensed; nevertheless he resolves to try another time.

And when Balaam saw that it pleased Jehovah, we are told in the beginning of Num 24,

he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments.

This again entirely confirms the remark that was made in the previous chapter as to what he went to meet.

He went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him {Num. 24:1, 2}.

Thus when we have any object completely cleared before God from all question of sin, it is not His way to rest there. As we know, for the Christian there follows freedom, entirely apart from what he was, to enter into positive enjoyment both of the place of blessing in which he stands, and of God Himself now truly known in Christ. Justification is always a taking account of what we were, though a bringing us out of it; but when that is seen in its completeness, then we can go out into all the ways of God’s grace. And so it is here. The new word of Jehovah has another character, and is introduced therefore in a manner such as to mark its entire distinctness from the previous words given to the prophet.

And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are opened hath said: he hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! {Num. 24:3-5}

It is the manifest preciousness of the place of Israel which drew out from his mouth at any rate (I do not say from his heart) the expression of the beauteous and goodly estate of the people.

As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river’s side, as the trees of lign-aloes which Jehovah hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt {Num. 24:6-8}.

In both cases, you will observe, whether it is the comparatively negative side of justification, or the positive side of rich and joyous blessing with which the people are endowed of God, we have their bringing out of Egypt.

Another thought is striking. Balaam does not refer to what they were to be made in Canaan, but what God saw them to be -- nay, what he himself was permitted to see them to be while they were in the wilderness. It is a wonderfully lovely picture therefore of what grace does for the Christian and the church now. For in virtue of redemption and Christ’s entrance into heavenly glory, and of the Holy Ghost sent down, in spite of all that is in this world, in spite of what has been justly designated the ruined state of the church here below, we are entitled always to take delight in the real beauty of God’s children and assembly even now. No doubt it is a vision only for faith; but it is a vision not for eyes shut, but for eyes open, as it is said here. Certainly, it is no illusion, no heated human imagination of what they are going to be. It is what God sees, and delights to give us to see by faith, in His people here below. Of course it was Israel, but the same principle is just as true, I need not say, and really with yet greater force, in the case of the Christian.

The still stronger terms, in the earlier vision of Num. 24, which Balaam uses in speaking of the power with which God would invest them, bring Balak’s anger to a head; and he smites his hands together, and says,

I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times {Num. 24:10}.

We must remember that in all this Balaam was no more able to resist the power of God which wrought on and by him than Balaam’s ass could hold its peace before. We must not suppose that there was the smallest measure of real sympathy with what God was doing. The whole transaction was one of God’s power, in spite of all that could be done against His people, and this because God would confound the enemy which resorted to Satan’s power in order to bring a curse on Israel. This it was to which God in sovereign grace responded in so grand an expression of their blessedness, and from a quarter so unlooked for.

But one supreme effort remains as far as cursing is concerned. Accordingly Balak tells Balaam now to begone, taunting him with the honor and wealth he had meant to give, from which Jehovah, he adds, had kept him back. But the prophet seems neither won by desire for his bribes, nor afraid of the king’s power.

If Balak, says he,

would give me his house full of silver and gold, I
cannot go beyond the commandment of Jehovah, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what Jehovah saith, that will I speak. And now, behold, I go unto my people: come therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days [Num. 24:13, 14].

It really embraces the end of this age.

Thus in the face of the king’s threats, of what might have seemed to be his own interests, Balaam after all was compelled to give another and a conclusive word from Jehovah, and this without going to meet . . . or Jehovah’s meeting him. It is what He said and commanded. Here there is not only the title of Shaddai (Almighty), as in the former prophecy, but of Elion (the Most High), who would dispose of the world as He pleased in view of His purposed judgment of the earth of and for His people; and here the prophet speaks unmasked of the king. It is Jehovah all through, though care is taken to show that He is Elohim, and in suited connection Shaddai and Elion.

And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: he hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh [Num. 24:15-17].

Solemn words these which pronounce the man’s own condemnation of his own soul. How little it was a question of will or heart!

I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city [Num. 24:17-19].

Even when he looks at Amalek too, he goes farther and pronounces the sure doom of those that had assailed the people in the wilderness.

Amalek was the first of the nations, but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever [Num. 24:20].

Then, looking on the Kenites, he says,

Strong is thy dwelling-place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock. Nevertheless the Kenite shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive {Num. 24:21, 22}.

But what about victorious Asshur?

And he took up his parable, and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this! And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur.

Thus it does not matter whether it be western powers or eastern, whether the adversaries be many or few, with what resources nor from what quarter. Amalek may be the first of nations, and Asshur bid fair to be last; yet affliction comes to Asshur and Eber;

and he also shall perish for ever {Num. 24:23, 24}.

It is the day of Immanuel, not of David or the Maccabees. Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day.

Thus the intended curse of Balaam was turned into the most magnificent utterance of blessing ever pronounced on the people of God, stretching down to the latter days when Israel shall be exalted under the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth.

Who would not trust such a God, and such revelations of His mind and will? Who would not have confidence in the One who turns the bitterest and most subtle of enemies only the more powerfully to prove what God’s people are to Himself, and how vain the efforts of their worst foes?

In Num. 25 we see a very different state of things among men, but the same God over all. Snares are set by Moab under Balaam’s counsel, yet all their subtlety could not turn God from Israel. Balaam (as we know, although it be not explained here but elsewhere) gives the enemy his cunning advice, and all at first goes on successfully. If he could not turn God from Israel, could he not turn Israel from God? Midianitish women become the instrument of seduction. This sorrowful occasion brings out now, not God causing an enemy to manifest what He is for His people, but Phinehas the priest roused with holy indignation, and executing judgment on the guilty pair in the face of a plague which fell on the people in these very circumstances. Phinehas accordingly has the covenant of an everlasting priesthood secured to him and to his seed because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.

There is after this (Num. 26) a fresh numbering of the men of Israel in view of going to war. They were now on the borders of the holy land; and the same grace of God which took account of every one of His people when they entered the wilderness gives evidence that His love was unabated, and His personal interest the same to the end. There was all that could have turned Him aside, had it been possible. Without this there would have been merely the taking in the people as a whole; but here He gives this witness of what they were, every one of them, to Himself; for He loves to convince His people of His unwavering love, spite of failure on their part.

There is only one remark that I need make now on the persons that are enumerated here, but it is one of great interest, as it appears to me. The most solemn judgment recorded in the book of Numbers was that of Korah with his company in the awful scene where Jehovah created a new thing, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up alive. The children of Dathan, Abiram, and the rest, were all swallowed up; but, wonderful to say, there was an exemption. Where was it? some particularly faithful person, who had the unhappiness to be nearly associated with them? Not at all. The exception of grace was in the household of the very worst of them. The people who deserved least of all, as man would have thought, to be exempted from destruction were precisely
those for whom God did reserve this special grace -- the sons of Korah! -- of Korah the leader and organizer of the apostasy, from his position as well as in his conduct, above all others most guilty! The sons of Korah were the objects of a most singular deliverance. Is not this the true grace of God? It is the same God whom we now know, the same God from first to last. Grace is no new thing with Him; but where can you find a finer sample of its power and superiority to all circumstances than in the distinguishing grace that saved from destruction the children of gainsaying Korah, the most infamous of those who had conspired against the types of Christ’s royalty and priesthood; namely, Moses and Aaron? Nothing can be more explicit than the information here:

The earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, what time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men: and they became a sign. Notwithstanding the children of Korah died not [Num. 26:10, 11].

Further, this is, I think, an important key to the book of Psalms. Every attentive reader will have noticed that the second of the five divisions of the Psalms gives us at its beginning psalms entitled,

For the sons of Korah (Psa. 42–49). 64

These mean the descendants of the men in question. And who were so fit to have such psalms and songs as the sons of Korah? What state does the second book of Psalms suppose? Assuredly as a whole days of future apostasy and the sorest trouble that the Jews will ever pass through. It is the last and greatest tribulation. It is the time when the mass of the nation will have completely cast off the true God and rejected His grace -- will have abandoned His truth, and lost themselves in losing it. To this fiery trial it is that these psalms apply. And no doubt what was at the beginning of their history will be re-enacted, and more, at the end. In the midst of a condition guilty indeed, and in the nearest connection with those most guilty, God will reserve a remnant -- not more surely the children of Korah in the wilderness than a band not unworthy of the name, and witnesses of no less grace from God in the last crisis. These psalms will be suited for those morally in similar circumstances, and delivered by the very same grace of God. Thus, we see, whether it be law or psalms or prophets, whether it be the gospel or the kingdom then, it is with the God of all grace that we have to do.

To the end of this chapter the account is given of the numbering.

In the next chapter (Num. 27) there is an incident of considerable interest which illustrates the tender thoughtfulness of God.

Then came the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hophera, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph: and these are the names of his daughters; Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah.

And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against Jehovah in the company of Korah; but died in his own sin, and had no sons. Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? [Num. 27:1-4].

There was no son left. This was a case which had not yet arisen; but as we see the daughters of Zelophehad counted on God, and not in vain. It is impossible for God to be like poor man, who says, “You expect more good than I am prepared to bestow.” God could not make such an answer. He always gives more. Whatever may be the petition of faith, the answer of grace never fails to go beyond it. And so the daughters of Zelophehad have their place secured to them in the goodness of God, though outside the usual routine of law.

Further, Jehovah after this intimates to Moses to ascend Mount Abarim and see the land, and he is to be gathered to his people. This leads also to the appointment of another. There is this to be noticed in the appointment of Joshua, that he no less than Moses is a type of Christ, but with a distinct difference between the two. Joshua sets forth the Captain of Salvation, and this answers to Christ; but it is no longer Christ after the flesh: He is not viewed as a Jewish Messiah, blessed as this may be. For Christ is a great deal more than Messiah. After His rejection on the earth, when it was no longer a question of presentation to Israel as their King, Christ then acts in the power of the Holy Ghost, being no more present in a bodily manner. Joshua represents this. It is Christ, no doubt, but Christ acting in the power of the Spirit, not Christ in flesh connected with the promises and the hopes of Israel. This type is what we see here; it is developed in detail elsewhere. But even one feature should not be passed by. When Moses was leading the people, he acted alone; but when Joshua leads them, it is said,

He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before Jehovah [Num. 27:21].

How does this apply to Christ? It might seem a difficulty, but in reality it confirms the application which has just been made; because we know that, while the people are led to take possession of the holy land, their privilege now is to cross the Jordan, and enter into those blessings with which they are blessed in heavenly places. Observe then here is the connection of Christ acting thus by the Spirit with His position as Priest. At the very same time that we are entering into our heavenly blessings by the power of the Spirit, we also have Christ as Priest in the presence of God. With Moses we find no such state of things. He was never told to stand before the priest. Aaron might speak rather than Moses, for he could speak well. Other duties he discharged, but nothing at all answering to this: so admirably does God watch over and shape and fashion all these types to impress the full truth on our souls. In Christ’s case, of course He was Himself head of the church, to work by the Spirit of God in us; but besides He

64. Some few follow in book 3 (Psa. 84–88).
is the great High Priest. He unites the two functions. They must necessarily be two different individuals in the type, but the great Antitype combines them.

In Num. 28 and 29 we have a somewhat difficult and certainly a very different exposé of the feasts and sacrifices from that which we found elsewhere. But all is easy to those who bear in mind the distinctive theme of the book. It is not merely, as was noticed, pilgrimage through the wilderness. This it is, but it comprises the earth also. In short the earth is the scene; and to us the wilderness. But the earth will not be always the wilderness. This is an important remark to make in order to understand Numbers. For there is a time coming when that which is now a wilderness will no doubt still be the earth for the people of God on it, but it will be no longer the chequered place of trial and sorrow which it is now. If we hold fast this fact, the application of these two chapters will be rendered more easy.

First of all we have the general offering. There is the sweet savor of Christ arising continually, in which God regards his people on the earth. It is the Lamb of God who invests all that are His with His own acceptance before God. This is what was meant by the daily lambs, but there is much more than this. It is said,

And on the sabbath-day two lambs of the first year without spot, and two-tenth deals of flour for a meat-offering {Num. 28:9}.

This clearly goes on to the rest of God, of which the sabbath is always the well-known figure. When it comes, the only difference will be that the testimony to the value of Christ will be more widely spread and fuller. God will never fail in causing the testimony to Christ’s sweet savor to rise before Him. Christianity has brought it out in its very depths; but then it is a thing only known to the believer on the one hand, and to God on the other. But when the sabbath dawns on the earth, the true sabbath of Jehovah in all its meaning, there will be a public witness of it all over the world that cannot be mistaken. This seems referred to in the doubling of the lamb. It is the idea of the rest of God contrasted with the time of working which precedes the rest (as, e.g., in the present time).

There remaineth therefore a rest (or a sabbath-keeping) for the people of God {Heb. 4:9}.

The time of the true rest is not yet come. Observe, it does not mean the rest we have got for our souls by faith. We must always guard against that common misapprehension. It is quite true that we have rest now in Christ for the conscience and the heart; but this is not the meaning of Heb. 4. It is rather the rest of glory for the people of God and for the world, when there will be this diffused testimony.

Then comes

the beginnings of your months {Num. 28:11}.

This is peculiar to Numbers, being found in no other book of the Pentateuch. The reason seems to be that it is essentially bound up with the wilderness types of Israel -- their experiences and changes as a people on earth.

In the beginnings of your months, that is, at the new moon, when there was the shining forth again of that which had waned away. Such a type in no way suits the church which is called during Israel’s darkness after the light waned and before it shines again.

And in the beginnings of your months ye shall offer a burnt-offering unto Jehovah; two young bullocks, and one ram, seven lambs of the first year without spot {Num. 28:11},

with their appropriate meat-offerings and drink-offerings. There is represented here the largest form of setting forth Christ offered to God in the bullock, with the idea of energy of devotedness to God, and this too in that adequacy of testimony which

two represents. The sheep or the lower forms indicate, I suppose, Christ appreciated after a less measure. The bullock is the fullest appreciation of Christ. Those that had so long despised Him will now acknowledge Him with so much the greater fervor because of their former slight. The Lord graciously takes notice of this. The ram is a type of Christ as an offering of consecration to God; here it is but a feeble testimony -- one ram.

The

seven lambs

mean the completeness of Christ’s sweet savor before God. There is also, as we know, the necessary sin-offering.

But now we come to the feasts. On the fourteenth day of the first month the passover is noticed, where we have, as it is said, two young bullocks, just the same provision as was laid down for the beginning of months, the new moons. Further, in the case of the feast of weeks,

in the day of the first-fruits, when ye bring a new meat-offering unto Jehovah (the Pentecostal offering), there is a similar type.

After your weeks be out, ye shall have a holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work: but ye shall offer the burnt-offering for a sweet savor unto Jehovah; two young bullocks, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year {Num. 28:26, 27}.

What brings out the truth more distinctly is the change we find in coming down to the seventh month. This is the acknowledged type of what distinctively concerns Israel -- Israel summoned and brought into the blessing of God. Here we see the difference very marked; for there is claimed but one young bullock -- not the two found in the previous case. So again the atonement-day has just the same figure:

Ye shall have on the tenth day of this seventh month
an holy convocation; and ye shall afflict your souls; ye shall not do any work therein: but ye shall offer a burnt-offering unto the Lord for a sweet savor; one young bullock, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year {Num. 29:7, 8}.

But after a few days there is a very different type brought before us.

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work, and ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: and ye shall offer a burnt-offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savor unto Jehovah; thirteen young bullocks {Num. 29:12, 13}.

Now surely this is very noticeable. Why such a change? There is nothing like it before. It is only when we come to the feast of tabernacles that this sudden change appears. Before this we hear in certain circumstances of two bullocks or one bullock: here there are thirteen. Why thirteen? Was this not intended to exercise our spiritual thought as to the truth of God? Are we not to infer that it is the all but fullest expression of Christ known on the earth? It is no longer the preparatory dealings. The first and the tenth days of the month mean the preparatory ways of God to bring the Jewish people back to their position of witnessing to the glory of Christ in the millennium. But now they are in that position -- not in the preliminary processes, so to speak, with God gradually leading them on. Hence now we read,

Ye shall offer a burnt-offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savor unto Jehovah; thirteen young bullocks, two rams; and fourteen lambs of the first year {Num. 29:13}.

The thirteen seems to signify that it is all but complete, and the fullest form of expressing this; for clearly two sevens would be the fullest expression of it. Thirteen is only short of this; the figure approaches completeness to the utmost. Such is the type of the millennium among the feasts. The millennium may not be perfection, but it will be indefinitely near it.

This feast gives us a true notion of that great day. It is false that there will be no sin in the coming age. At the same time sin will be quite exceptional. There will be a large effect produced in honor of the work of the Lord Jesus. The reconciliation of all things according to Christ and by His cross will be displayed in a manner only not complete. This is what is represented by the feast here.

But in the details of this feast there is evidence given of another striking fact. It would appear that there is not preserved adequately the sense of the Lord’s grace throughout the millennium. Alas! that age will exhibit symptoms of decline, as we know from elsewhere that at the end of it there will be a vast outburst of rebellion when Satan is let loose for a space. There has been but one faithful witness. Even in the millennium, when Satan no longer tempts, the solemn fact will be found that there is no sustainment of the power of testimony with which they began. Hence, as we find, this feast represents the whole scene of the millennial day. It is said that on the next day, the second day,

Ye shall offer twelve young bullocks {Num. 29:17}; and again on the third day eleven bullocks; and again on the fourth day ten bullocks; and on the fifth day nine bullocks, and so decreasing. Surely all this not only has meaning, but the meaning points to the fact that there will not be the sustainment of the same devotedness as at the first. Nevertheless the purpose of God never fails. Hence therefore we find that on the eighth day

Ye shall offer a burnt-offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savor unto Jehovah, one bullock, one ram, and seven lambs {Num. 29:36}.

The eighth day brings us here no more than a single witness, indicating what was outside the earth. It might seem extraordinary at first sight that the eighth day should be less than the seven days. During the seven days the number never came down so low as to one bullock. But the reason seems to be this, that in Numbers we have the testimony and service of Christ on earth, and consequently no more than a witness to what is outside and above the earth. It points to another and heavenly scene, which was not properly the subject of the book. It is therefore but a solitary witness to heavenly things, not their introduction in power.

In Num. 30 there is another and a very different exhibition of the truth of God. It is a question of divers relationships. Here we meet with a very blessed principle. The order of relationship depends on the one to whom we are related. It is He that governs. It is not God’s arrangement in these matters to rest the weight on the weaker one, who is in the place of responsibility, but on the higher, who is expected to have strength and wisdom.

The first case of which we read in the chapter is,

If a man vow a vow unto Jehovah, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth {Num. 30:2}.

Do we not know who this is? We know the One who never needs to recall a word: indeed, there is none other. His word stands; we can trust it without fear.

But it is not so with the woman, the weaker vessel.

If a woman also vow a vow unto Jehovah, and bind herself by a bond, being in her father’s house in her youth; and her father hear her vow, and her bond wherewith she hath bound her soul, and her father shall hold his peace at her: then all her vows shall stand; and every bond wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand {Num. 30:3, 4}.

The man was Jehovah-Messiah, no doubt, in its full import. But it was Jehovah that spoke, and His words stood; Jehovah-Messiah was the unfailing One of Israel. Many a rash word they said; many a foolish vow they made. How did He treat all? In two ways. He acted in the power of His own grace, and therefore disallowed what was wrong, not binding the foolish vow on her who spoke so unadvisedly with her lips. He allowed her words to pass away, to be broken, to have no binding efficacy. How gracious is the Lord! On the other
hand, dealing in His governmental wisdom, He might allow the foolish to prove her own folly; and so He did. This too has been true of Israel. He has permitted that His people should feel the consequences of what they said in their pride. But assuredly the day is coming when He will act in the fulness of His grace, and all that is foolish will be as unheard, unregistered, and blotted out for ever.

The same thing is true, viewed in another relationship. Supposing it was not a father with a child, but a husband (Num. 30:6-8): in this case all depended on the husband. How perfectly this applies, whether you look at Israel or the church, need not be enlarged on. All our blessedness depends upon Him to whom we belong. At the same time in His government He may allow us to feel our own want of wisdom and of waiting upon Him.

On the other hand, where we hear of a widow or one divorced, plainly either is a person out of relationship, and there all stands (Num. 30:9). But this is not the relation of the Christian or of the church, if we believe the scriptures. Israel may be a widow, and may be viewed as divorced too, but never the church, the bride of Christ. For us we know the marriage is yet future; and such is the way in which scripture views it. Thus you see the power of full grace remains in the hands of our Bridegroom. We have the position of children, and our Father therefore acts in the fulness of His love. We have the place of being the bride, but not yet married. It rests in His hands to use in perfect grace. It is not so with Israel. Therefore, we find another case of twofold dealing on Jehovah’s part -- a severity on the one hand which does not forget their folly, but judges it; and on the other hand full mercy in remitting according to His own love. Jehovah, as He has executed the judges it; and on the other hand full mercy in remitting severity on the one hand which does not forget their folly, but judges it; and on the other hand full mercy in remitting according to His own love. Jehovah, as He has executed the judgment on the Midianites, and the tribes would share it between them equally. Anything that would tend to bring in Israel as a whole would defeat this identification with His name by giving prominence to them, even if it did not wear the look of national feeling or personal vengeance. Neither must be now; all must be done holily in His name. It must be Jehovah’s vengeance. Accordingly therefore it is ordered after a sacred fashion, as well as with a select band from each tribe.

So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand of every tribe, twelve thousand armed for war
- a small body comparatively to deal with a formidable people.

And Moses sent them to the war, a thousand of every tribe, them and
- whom? A captain? some chosen captain? -- Joshua? No; Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war, with the holy instruments, and the trumpets to blow in his hand {Num. 31:5, 6}.

The leader must be holy, and with no lack of holy instruments. The trumpets must be there for Jehovah’s ears as well as Israel’s. The result could not be doubted; and at once the issue of the fight is brought before us.

Further, we see that Jehovah lays down most wholesome principles as to the division of the spoil. A certain reserve is made. The principle is this, that nothing could be used by Israel which did not go through the fire. All for them must pass through the scrutinizing judgment of God. Besides, the people who had not fought were to have their share as well as those who had. It was reserved for David to decide that they must all share alike. This ordinance awaited another day. But here it was not according to the full grace of that day. It was a season of goodness, and nothing more.

From the next chapter (Num. 32) it would seem that this very victory suggested a hasty thought to the heads of some tribes of Israel. They liked uncommonly the land that was conquered, and desired to remain on the wrong side of the Jordan. Moses was grieved at this. Nevertheless, after consulting, he yields to them; only he insists that they must help their brethren. Meanwhile whatever may be the allotment that they had chosen for themselves (and certainly they must prove how unwise it is to choose thus, instead of accepting Jehovah’s choice), they must none the less share the conflicts of the people in Canaan.

Chapter Num. 33 testifies to another and beautiful truth, Jehovah’s remembrance of all the past, of all our journeyings, of all the scenes of difficulty through our weakness, and even
worse occasionally too, of solemn judgments. And here we have it rehearsed. It was good to think of His ways with them, -- good for those who were about to enter on a new scene to look back on every step of the journey. It is thus far from being an unimportant chapter, or, as it might seem to the superficial, a mere dry list of names. There is no part of scripture which has not a divine as well as moral purpose in it.

The next chapter (Num. 34) presents the persons that were to divide the inheritance. This introduces in Num. 35 the singular institution of Levitical cities, some of which were reserved for such as might have been guilty of shedding blood. If done with malice prepense, there could be no shelter for the perpetrator in such an asylum. They could serve only as a prison whence he must be taken and judged in due time. But there were many cases in which death might ensue where there was no malice. On the one hand God would not make light of the bloodshed; on the other He would not merge the guiltless in the class of murderers.

The chapter then sets forth in a vivid manner what was ever before God’s own eyes -- the coming act of blood-guiltiness, and the divine dealings with Israel in respect of it. I need not say many words as to this. Israel have stained themselves with blood, and stand charged before God with the slaying of their own Messiah. The grace of God acts, and the judgment of God also. Both are true, and both true of Israel. As there were those that have slain Him willingly, so they have borne their judgment and will yet more. But there were those for whom grace pleaded, and assuredly not without an answer; for the very One whose blood was shed cried to God from the cross in intercession for them:

Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do {Luke 23:34}.

How mighty and how wondrous the reckoning of grace! To this the Spirit of God answered when He led Peter to say,

I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers {Acts 3:17}.

And thus were those who found not only shelter, but having found it are there kept of God. Nay, more: in a certain providential sense it applies even to those not brought out of the place of the Jew into that of the Christian, which last does not appear here; for He would not have the membership of Christ’s body thus anticipated.

But we have an important type of the Jew’s place on earth. The man who was sheltered in the city of refuge, because of the stain of blood, who instead of being put to death for it found a temporary sojourn there, looked forward to the time when he might return. This limitation to his stay is given here. It only occurs in the book of Numbers. The slayer (it is said) shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil. But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled; and the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood: because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest; but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession.

This remains for Israel. That people is the slayer of blood now in the city of refuge. As long as Christ is exercising His priesthood according to the type here spoken of, as long as He is the anointed Priest who ever liveth to make intercession {Heb. 7:25} in the presence of God, so long the slayer must remain out of the land of his possession. The Jew will never return as accredited of God while Christ carries on His priesthood as now within the rent vail on high. But we know well that our Lord Jesus is coming back again. We know therefore that He is going to terminate the form 65 in which He now exercises His priesthood, which is typically represented by the death of the high priest that was anointed with oil. The death of the actual high priest of that day typifies the close of that character of priesthood in which our Lord now acts.

Thus it is that, when the Lord will no longer be fulfilling the type of Aaron within the vail, when He will come forth as the great Melchisedek, there will be not a new ground but a new form and character of His priesthood, no longer as now intercession founded on blood only, but what corresponds with the bringing forth of bread and wine, as the priest of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth (the millennial name of God). When that day comes, the slayer will then no longer require to be protected in the city of refuge, but return to the land of his inheritance.

In Num. 36 we have a further point which winds up the account of the daughters of Zelophehad. As the former notice honored their faith, so this acts as a guard, and stamps order on the matter, securing the glory of God but avoiding confusion among men; for the tribes of Israel must be duly kept. On the one hand it was according to God’s goodness that the daughters should inherit if there were no son; on the other hand it could not be permitted that the inheritance should pass out of the tribe of their fathers. This was provided against here as the other was before. Thus the whole book abounds from first to last with the reiterated, continual, and perfect proof of God’s loving care for His people on the earth.

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65. Heb. 7:24 might seem to clash with this; but it is not so really; for as no one questions that Christ continues for ever, so the apostle asserts that His priesthood cannot be transferred, like the Aaronical one, from father to son. He has the priesthood intransmissible (διαπαραβέβλητον). It is a denial of successional transfer, not of change of form according to His grace and wisdom in the age to come.
Lectures on the Pentateuch

Lecture 11

Deuteronomy 1–16

In examining Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, we have found what may be called an abstract typical system. That is, we see in them a number of institutions laid down by Jehovah, the pattern of which was shown in the mount. These figures Moses was inspired to give as a whole to the people, entirely apart from the question whether they were or could be carried out according to the letter while passing through the wilderness. I have called it therefore an abstract typical system; for the value of it does not at all depend on the fidelity of the people to it. It is very possible that not a single institution during that time may have been strictly enforced or obeyed among the people.

Thus we know for certain that the most fundamental requirement of all, the Levitical ritual, was not practiced; and if they did not prove faithful in that which was most urgent as well as least difficult in point of means for executing it, we can hardly suppose that they carried out their obedience in what was surrounded with immense if not insuperable obstacles. Even before the law from Abraham’s days there certainly was no injunction more solemn or more obligatory than the circumcision of every male child; yet we are assured that no male was circumcised during Israel’s wandering for forty years through the wilderness. This fact appears to be of some importance, because notoriously difficulties have been raised, on the score of practicability, as to the various ordinances requiring sacrifices and offerings where the means did not appear. We hear of sin and trespass-offerings, peace and burnt-offerings, meat-offerings and drink-offerings, not to speak of the daily lambs and occasional victims. Men have reasoned with great detail, especially in recent years, enquiring how all this could be done in the desert by a people who found it hard enough to pass unscathed themselves, though they had Jehovah their God with them to feed them with angels’ bread, and water if need were from the rock. But God, in fact, is always left out of the calculations of unbelief. For although there were flocks and herds led into the wilderness with the children of Israel at the command of Jehovah, and they may have added more from enemies they conquered, the fact just now referred to meets and removes a host of objections raised about it, and proves that the nature of these ordinances has not been understood.

The fact is that, no matter what might be the measure of carrying them out in the wilderness, God was setting forth by them the shadows of good things to come. This was their real object. It is not therefore a question of how far the offerings, &c. were then offered, but of a vast body of systematically-ordered teaching by types. What God was displaying by them has now found its meaning, since Christ was revealed and the mighty work of redemption effected. It is a different thing however with the book of Deuteronomy; and this was my reason for remarking it at this point.

Deuteronomy is an eminently practical book. Types are but sparsely presented over the great bulk of the instruction which crowds its pages. We are far from being then on the ground of a mere rehearsal of what has been shown in the previous books. Deuteronomy, spite of its Septuagintal title, is no such repetition; but the Spirit of God by Moses has given us, along with special moral exhortation, such types as bear on the position of the people on the very edge of the promised land. They had marched round to the eastern side of the Jordan; they were now on that border of the land, after God’s long-continued process of dealing with them in the wilderness had come to its full measure. And this book, while it does not want allusions to what God had said in all the other books, has, no less than the rest of them, its own peculiar character. It is not then a grouping of types, whatever might be the particular scope and aim of those employed, such as we have seen in distinct forms throughout the books of Exodus, Leviticus, or Numbers; but here all that the Spirit is using, whether it be direct moral application which forms much the larger part of the book, or whether it be a selection of such shadows as fall in with its practical object, seems to be from first to last an enforcement of obedience, grounded on the relationship between Jehovah their God and Israel, whom He was just bringing as His people into His land. Accordingly the very large introduction is an address to the people for the purpose of enforcing these claims.

There is another peculiarity in the book of Deuteronomy which it is well to present briefly before we descend to particulars; it supposes the failure of the people. It was after the golden calf, nay more than this; it was after the whole disciplinary dealings of Jehovah had now come to an end. They had had many a sight of their own hearts, and they had had ample experience of God’s ways in patient and gracious government. All this was now closed. This therefore gives its tone to the book. The lawgiver, about to be taken from them, looks back on all the past; but he looks forward also to the land they were about to enter. Hence there is a tone of exceeding seriousness, as well as of chastened affection; there is a solemnity founded on the grand dealings of a God whose faithful and holy hand was now ushering them into His land. Above all the prime object is to press obedience on the people...
of God, but the obedience of a people who had already found what it was to have utterly broken down on their own assumed responsibility. That generation had passed away no doubt. The question was, did the present generation about to be brought into the holy land profit by the past? The aged lawgiver in these last words was led of the Holy Ghost to speak home to their souls.

This too explains why the book of Deuteronomy is made use of in the New Testament in so very striking a manner, and in circumstances so eminently critical. It is the book which our Lord quotes in His temptations with Satan. He cites from none other. In all the three occasions the Lord Jesus draws His answers from the book of Deuteronomy. Surely this is highly significant. He could have cited from any other, had any other been in all respects so suitable to the occasion. It was not necessarily, I conceive, because there were no words elsewhere admirably adapted to meet the case. May I not venture to think that other considerations entered, and that His citation of Deuteronomy only is in no way meant to disparage fitting words found elsewhere? It is not to be doubted that the words cited from Deuteronomy were the very best -- that they were chosen according to divine perfection. But also it would appear that the deepest wisdom lay in citing from that book, as well as its most applicable words. The book from which they were selected had itself a special appropriateness to the occasion, as we shall see: can it be doubted that the blessed Lord knew this infinitely well when He was pleased to use it?

Now wherein lay this fitness not only in the words that were cited, but in the particular book from which they were extracted? Wherein lay the superior propriety of Deuteronomy to furnish answers at that juncture for Christ, as compared with any other book of scripture? I have no hesitation in subscribing the opinion that our Lord Jesus chose them not only because they were in themselves exactly such as met and confronted Satan’s temptations perfectly, but because there was a moral suitability in the fact that they were the words addressed to the people when ruin had already come in -- when nothing but the grace of God was afresh appealing to them before they were brought into the holy land. The Lord, by the simple fact that He quotes Deuteronomy, gives evidence that He had before His eyes the condition of the people of God, whatever might be their own insensibility. Not only did the Lord say the right thing, but the ground, the line, and the spirit of the book whence He chose His answers were such as took the becoming place under such circumstances before God. The less that Israel felt they had failed, the more Jesus felt it for them. If they betook themselves to rites and ceremonies as a means of pleasing God, Jesus gave Himself up to unreserved obedience -- was Himself the constant pattern of One who never sought His own will. Indeed He found His moral glory in this very fact, that He alone of all men that ever lived never in a single particular swerved from that which after all is the sweetest, loveliest, highest thing in man here below -- absolute devotedness to another, doing the will of His God and Father. Such was the uniform walk of Jesus.

Now Israel had totally failed in their place. The book of Deuteronomy acknowledges this failure, and takes its stand not only on the fact that it was impossible to deny it, but on the duty of confessing it. At the same time there is the gracious bringing in of God, and of what was suited to the people of God, when ruin was there. This supposes a heart that knows God; and certainly so it is with Moses. We know well that, if God made known His acts unto Israel, He made His ways known unto Moses. But Jesus knew God Himself as Moses never did, and by His use of it put honor on the book that makes plain how in a state of ruin the one saving principle is obedience. We shall find more than that before we have done with the book of Deuteronomy, though we may in this lecture not look fully at a special character of it which is presented in the latter part of the book, where it will be proved that the New Testament also uses it in a very striking manner. But inasmuch as the Lord’s three answers are taken from the early portion of Deuteronomy, which comes before us on this occasion, I have at once referred to this patent fact. We never can duly understand the Old Testament unless in the light of the New; and if there is anyone who is personally and emphatically need it be said that it is Jesus? This men forget. No wonder therefore that Deuteronomy in general has been but little understood, even by the children of God; that the thoughts of expositors are comparatively vague in explaining it; and that men are apt to read it with so little insight into its bearing that the loss might seem comparatively trifling if it were not read at all. In short how could it be respected as it deserves, if regarded as an almost garrulous repetition of the law? Now, apart from the irreverence of so treating an inspired book, such an impression is as far as possible from the fact. Deuteronomy has a character of its own totally distinct from that of its predecessors, as has been already pointed out and will appear more fully.

Let us now look at the details as far as it can be done in so brief a glance as we can afford to give it at present.

The first thing introduced here is the fact that Jehovah had spoken to them in Horeb, saying,

Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount. Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh therunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates. Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which Jehovah sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them. And I spake unto you at that time, saying, I am not able to bear you myself alone: Jehovah your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude {Deut. 1:6-10}.

Moses reminds them how he had shared the burden of care for them with others.

Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you {Deut. 1:13}. 

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So it was done; but it is added that, when they did depart from Horeb and went through the wilderness,
which ye saw by the way of the mountain of the Amorites, I said unto you, Ye are come unto the
mountain of the Amorites, which Jehovah our God doth give unto us. Behold, Jehovah thy God hath set
the land before thee: go up and possess it, as Jehovah God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not,
neither be discouraged {Deut. 1:19-21}.

Then comes (Deut. 1:21 et seqq.) the relation of the inner motives for the sending of the spies. 66 This it is well to note,
as we should not have discovered it from the Book of Numbers. What we have here is not a repetition; it leads us
into things secret -- what wrought in the people and hindered their blessing. The chief point to observe is that there was not
a spirit of obedience in the people, and this they lacked because there was no faith in God. This is clearly shown.
Consequently it is not an isolated fact that they wished spies, or that Jehovah acceded to their desire to have them (this we
have already seen), but here --

Ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We

66 Dr. Davidson (Intro. O. T. i. p. 235) ventures to set portions of this chapter in juxtaposition with two from elsewhere, in order to show that God's speaking to the inspired writer was simply his own mind and conscience enlightened from on high. He and other sacred authors are to be regarded as nothing more than representatives of the intelligence of their age in relation to the Deity. "The Deuteronomist, writing at a later period of the same arrangement [the mission of the spies in Numbers], represents the people proposing the measure to Moses, who on consideration resolved to execute it, because it approved itself to his heart and conscience: 'Ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land; and the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of
you, one of a tribe' (Deut. 1:22, 23). In the same manner an important social arrangement is declared to have been made by Moses at the suggestion of Jethro his father-in-law, who says in prophesying, 'If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able,' &c. (Ex. 18:23). But in Deut. 1:19, &c., Moses speaks of the same institution as his own without any reference to Jethro, or the divine command of which Jethro spoke." Such is the sanguinary effort to lower the character and credit of scripture. But the believer sees wisdom and grace in comparing the first historical statement with the solemn use the legislator makes to the generation about to enter the land, and the added information is of grave import.

Num. 13 gives the fact when God warranted Moses to send the spies; Deuteronomy supplies the motives which wrought in the people to desire them. For he had himself told them to go up into the land, but they begged spies to search it first. The wish emanated neither from God nor His servant but from the people, though Moses, at God's command, did send them to the ruin of that generation, as it turned out. And it has been well remarked on the one hand, that he gratuitously omits to repeat God's offer to make himself a fresh stock after their destruction but for his intercession; while on the other he confesses how he, no less than their fathers, had grieved Jehovah, so that he was not to lead them into the land any more than they, but to give that place of honor to Joshua. Conceive the state of mind which could say that "in Deuteronomy Moses repeatedly lays the blame of his expulsion on the people (Deut. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21); but according to Num. 20:12 God punished him thus for not believing Him; while in Num. 27:14 his punishment was occasioned, by the legislator's own disobedience"? (Dr. D.'s Intro. O. T. i. 367.)

Again, what can be more simple and appropriate than that Moses at the close should omit the name and counsel of Jethro, and bring the people into greater prominence than himself in the choice of rulers? This he had fully shown in the history. Now he dwells chiefly on their part in the matter, confessing his own inability to cope with their great increase, which he touchingly entreats God to swell a thousand times, but withal urges on the rulers to judge rightly.

Moses mentions how the saying pleased him: here things are stated exactly as they were. He may not at all have understood at the moment what was working in the people; but all is told out

The saying pleased me well, and I took twelve men of
you, one of a tribe: and they turned and went up into the
mountain, and came unto the valley of Eschol, and searched it out. And they took of the fruit of the land in
their hands, and brought it down unto us, and brought us word again, and said, It is a good land which Jehovah our God doth give us. Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of Jehovah your God: and ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because Jehovah hated us.

Was this their trust?

Because Jehovah hated us, he hath brought us forth out of Egypt.

Was it not the pettishness of disobedient children, if ever there were such?

Because Jehovah hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we {Deut. 1:23-28}.

Such was the genuine result of sending the spies.

The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there. Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them. Jehovah your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes; and in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that Jehovah thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place. Yet in this thing ye did not believe Jehovah your God, who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to show you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day.

Then the bitter consequences came.

Jehovah heard the voice of your words and was wroth, and sware saying, Surely there shall not one of these
men of this evil generation see that good land which I swore to give unto your fathers {Deut. 1:28-35}.

These were solemn words to bring before the minds of Israel just about to enter into the good land. We may without difficulty see the admirable appropriateness of such an introduction. They were about to enter it by special grace; for it is of importance to bear in mind that it was not by the covenant which was made at Horeb that the children of Israel entered the land at all. If God had held to the terms of that covenant, never could the people have found their way into Canaan; but God was pleased to bring in fresh terms by a way which will be shown before we have done with this sketch of
Deuteronomy; and it was simply and solely because of those fresh terms of mercy which God Himself brought in of His own grace that Israel entered there. At the same time Moses, though well aware of this, reminds them of the real source of their misery, and of the judgment that had fallen on them from God.

It is evident therefore, that this book has the most sensible difference from all that preceded it. Its moral turns on this -- the only possible way of maintaining relationship with God, namely, obedience; what the nature of that obedience is, and how it is modified; how God graciously takes into account the weakness of those brought into this relationship, and how He provides for His own glory in it. At all events, whatever may be His grace, whatever His ways with His people, obedience is that with which He cannot dispense. Hence therefore we see why it is that the first circumstance in their history brought before them was that God told them not to go up to the mountain of the Amorites; but they would go up in self-will and self-confidence, and utterly failed before their enemies. The land was straight before them, and they might, as far as that was concerned, have gone in and taken possession of it at once. Why did they not? The book of Deuteronomy discloses it. Because they had not a particle of confidence in God. Therefore it was that, when God told them to go up, they refused and suffered the consequence of their disobedience.

This then is the crucial test, so to speak, which Moses applies throughout; this is the homily; for indeed Deuteronomy we may call a book of divine homilies in this respect. It consists of moral addresses, and appeals in a tone quite unexampled in all the five books of Moses. Need one point out how suited all this is for the last words of one who was just about to depart? They possess that inimitable solemnity which cannot be so much uttered in words as felt in the general bearing of the book. Moses himself had the deepest sense of the situation, but in no way as one who distrusted Jehovah, for he had well learned to count on His love. He knew fully that Jehovah was doing nothing but what was for His own glory; how could His servant then find fault? There were reasons due to God’s character why Moses should not bring the people into the land. He had compromised Him at a critical occasion, and could not but feel that so it was. Not that this made the smallest cloud between Master and servant. As God loved Moses, so Moses confided in God. Nevertheless the circumstance that he too had failed to sanctify Jehovah their God in His heart as he ought -- that even he had misrepresented Him when it was above all due to God that His grace should be clearly seen, all this added gravity to the appeals and style of the departing man of God.

Thus then the circumstances of Moses, as well as of the people, were precisely those suited to impress the lesson of obedience. For a people in relationship with God such is the only possible way, either of pleasing Him, or of tasting that joy of the Lord which is the strength of His people.

Obedience is the real spring of blessing, as disobedience is the sure pathway of ruin. Such is the fertile topic which we find throughout the book.

Hence the story of the Amorites, as we saw, is given. Hence, while he fails not to show that Jehovah was with himself, and how Joshua was to displace him, he does not hesitate to set before all the story of his own shame, so to speak. What love there was in this, if by any means he might impress obedience on the people that were just going into the land! How good are the ways and the words of God! So it is that the New Testament gives us the failure of the apostle Peter, not merely at the beginning but in the very midst of his career. So it is that it does not withhold from us the over-heatedness of a Paul, as well as the weakness of a Barnabas; that it tells out the stumbling both of Thomas and of Mark: all is openly communicated for our instruction. The prime duty for every creature, whether Jew or Christian, is obedience. This then is the leading truth of Deuteronomy. So, after it has been brought before us from the first, we find their failure to trust Jehovah leads to a fresh command. They are no longer to go up and take possession of the land, but to turn back and take their journey into the wilderness. With this they did not at all like to comply; and thus the same spirit which declined to go up in obedience to Jehovah refuses to go back in submission to Him.

Then ye answered and said unto me, We have sinned -- we have sinned against Jehovah: we will go up and fight {Deut. 1:41}.

Ah! it is an easy thing to say,

We have sinned;

but how often we have to learn that it is not the quick abrupt confession of sin which affords evidence that sin is felt! It is rather a proof of hardness of heart. The conscience feels that a certain act of confessing the sin is necessary, but perhaps there is hardly anything which more hardens the heart than the habit of confessing sin without feeling it. This, I believe, is one of the great snares of Christendom from of old and now -- that is, the stereotyped acknowledgment of sin, the mere habit of hurrying through a formula of confession to God. I dare say we have almost all done so, without referring to any particular mode; for alas! there is formality enough, and without having written forms, the heart may frame forms of its own, as we may have observed, if not known it in our own experience, without finding fault with other people. For notoriously, in a legal state of mind people are apt to get through the acknowledgment of sin in what they know has grieved the Lord; but even then there is a want of bowing to His will. Here then we have all laid bare. The Israelites thought to settle the whole matter with God by saying,

We have sinned;

but then they proved that there was nothing settled, nothing right; because what really pleases God is this -- the acceptance of His good will, whatever it be. Faith leads to obedience: first of all the acceptance of His word brings and secures blessing by faith for our souls; and then, having received it, we surrender ourselves to His will. For what are we here but to please God? The Israelites realized nothing of the kind. The spring of obedience was wanting. This is what Moses is enforcing by every possible kind of declaration and motive; by his own example and by theirs, as well as the example of their fathers. All this is made to converge on the children. He
wanted to leave them his blessing -- nay, he wanted them to have the best blessing that God could give them. Next to having Christ Himself is the following in His steps. What better blessing after all can be on earth, except Christ Himself, if indeed it be not a part of Christ, than that life of Christ which walks in obedience?

This is then what he was pressing. But their fathers would not obey at that time. They would not go up when Jehovah bid them, and when He commanded them to turn back, they wished to go forward. They said,

We have sinned against Jehovah: we will go up and fight according to all that Jehovah our God commanded us {Deut. 1:41}.

This is a solemn lesson -- that there may be a thorough spirit of disobedience at the very time that people talk of doing whatever God is pleased to command. And it is obvious, beloved friends, obedience depends on this -- that we really do what God commands us now -- that we are doing what is suitable to our present position and state. What God lays on one He does not necessarily enjoin on another. For instance, it is not everybody that is called to serve God in a public way; nor is everyone called to take a particular step or course which might involve him in trouble and persecution. We have to consider whether we are undertaking it out of some human desire of heroism. How many one has known who would have liked much to be martyrs! I do not regard this as evincing the spirit of obedience, but rather a spice of self-confidence. When such a death is really before one in service, then perhaps the difficulties would be incomparably more felt; for the Lord does not call to such a course or end to gratify human nature, or to give an opportunity for glorifying man, but always for His own glory. In such a case there is no room for will, nor sparing of the heart. Every step in really obeying God puts the man morally to the test, and is more or less attended with severe trial. Where the world or the flesh governs, the trial is not felt. The man who said,

Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest {Matt. 8:19},

had no faith at all. The other whom Jesus called thought about his father and mother; he would like to see them first. So it habitually is where the faith is real; but nature is not yet judged root and branch. The heart may be made up to follow the Lord, but the difficulties are still felt keenly; whereas the man who only theorises is ready in his own conceit, in word at least, to do anything; but there is no seriousness of spirit: he does not know himself yet. No matter what it may cost, he assumes that he will at once go through with the will of the Lord. It is exactly so here.

Such then is the early and remarkably striking introduction to the book.

Next we see what was the fact when they did go up spite of the warning of God to fight the Amorites.

Jehovah said unto me, Say unto them, Go not up, neither fight; for I am not among you; lest ye be smitten before your enemies. So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of Jehovah, and went presumptuously up into the hill. And the Amorites, which dwell in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do,

- there was a most ignominious flight --
- and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah. And ye returned and wept before Jehovah; but Jehovah would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you. So ye abode in Kadesh many days, according unto the days that ye abode there {Deut. 1:42-46}.

I am afraid there was not much more in the weeping than in the acknowledgment of the sin.

Then in Deut. 2 the law-giver reminds them how they took their weary journey. But what wonderful grace! Jehovah went along with them; and of course the faithful turned back just as much as the unfaithful. How good is the Lord! This is now developed. Moses says,

We turned,

not “Ye,” merely.

We turned, and took our journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea, as Jehovah spake unto me; and we compassed Mount Seir many days. And Jehovah spake unto me, saying, Ye have compassed this mountain long enough: turn you northward. And command thou the people, saying, Ye are to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir; and they shall be afraid of you: take ye good heed unto yourselves therefore: meddle not with them; for I will not give you of their land; no, not so much as a foot breadth; because I have given Mount Seir unto Esau for a possession {Deut. 2:1-5}.

Thus Jehovah from the very first was teaching them that they were not called out on an errand of indiscriminate conquest. It was not in His mind to offer men His law or the sword. They could take possession of no lands whatever of their own will. Jehovah gave them no such license as the right to slay, burn, or plunder others as they liked. It was simply a question of subjection to God and obeying Him, who had from the first a plan for the nations round Israel as their center.

When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel {Deut. 32:8}.

It is the same principle here again as elsewhere. Man must not presume to choose. Israel was called in everything to confide in Jehovah and obey. Is there anything so wholesome? I am persuaded that above all the Christian, who has a still nearer relationship with God, is the very last person who ought to exercise a choice in self-will. How great the blessing of one who walks, as Christ walked, in dependence on God, not consulting Him only if constrained, but of a ready mind, and assured that by His Spirit, through the written word, He deigns to guide every step of your way where self is judged, and to give you to take the right path with a simplicity incomparably better than all the wisdom the world could
muster, if one sought in independence to choose for oneself! This seems to me put to the test in the question of the land of Edom. There was no doubt whatever that Esau had behaved so ill that the children of Israel were not likely to forget it. We know how these traditions linger among men, particularly in the East. But no, God would not have them to meddle.

I will not give you of their land. Jehovah was most careful exactly where He had least sympathy. The fact of Esau’s pride and contempt of Israel gave them no license to take their land.

I have given Mount Seir unto Esau for a possession. God always holds to His own principles, and He teaches us to respect them in others.

Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and ye shall also buy water of them for money, that ye may drink. For Jehovah thy God blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years Jehovah thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing. Why should they covet? They must learn not to seek what God would not give them. That is the point -- to do God’s will. Jehovah had blessed Israel, and would have them content and thankful instead of coveting their neighbor’s goods. He too it was who had given the Mount to Esau: that was enough. And Israel bow to the will of their God.

And when we passed by from our brethren the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, through the way of the plain from Elath, and from Ezion-gaber, we turned and passed by the way of the wilderness of Moab. Why should they covet? They must learn not to seek what God would not give them. That is the point -- to do God’s will. Jehovah had blessed Israel, and would have them content and thankful instead of coveting their neighbor’s goods. He too it was who had given the Mount to Esau: that was enough. And Israel bow to the will of their God.

Then comes out another instance. Were they to lay hands on the Moabites who were not so near of kin as the Edomites? Not so. Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle: for I will not give thee of their land for a possession; because I have given Ar unto the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, through the way of the plain from Elath, and from Ezion-gaber, we turned and passed by the way of the wilderness of Moab. Thus was kept up a thorough sense of discipline in the Israelites. We know from the context that the Moabites were not the first people the Israelites encountered in their journey, but Jehovah wanted to make sure they understood the principles of not coveting others’ possessions.

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Thus, we see, the second exhortation contains a lesson about other people, as the first was the danger of disobedience on their own part. What we find here is a warning not to yield to the sight of their eyes or the violence of their hands, guarding against a covetous spirit which pays slight regard to that which God had assigned to others. It is ever the same duty of submission to God’s will. The first chapter takes cognizance of themselves; the second chapter puts them to the test in the presence of other people. It did not alter their duty, if the antecedent history of Moab and Ammon, just as much as that of Esau, was far from good. We know the proflanity of Esau; we know the solemn circumstances of Moab and Ammon from their very origin; but for all that God would not permit His people to indulge in what did not become Himself as represented however feebly in and by Israel. This is the plain gist of the book. It is the due conduct of a people in relationship with Jehovah; no longer the bringing out of typical institutions, but the development of the moral ways which become the people with whom Jehovah had a present connection and intercourse on earth. The grand duty and safeguard is evermore to heed His word, and the consulting Him not only for their own path but in respect to others. The same principle is steadily pursued on all sides.

They were tried after this by another case of forbearance, So it came to pass when all the men of war were consumed from among the people, that Jehovah spake unto me, saying, Thou art to pass over through Ar, the coast of Moab, this day: and when thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not, nor meddle with them. But the same duty abides for them. We see from this that it is mere ignorance to suppose that there is not a divine system in the book; and this is more remarkable, I think, in Deuteronomy, if possible, than in the preceding books. We can all understand an orderly arrangement where there are types all arranged in a consecutive manner; but here in these moral exhortations it is, though in another way, just as sensible. In this case too we have the fact that there had been a great deal of fighting in previous days. The children of Moab had had their wars. Was there any reason in this why the children of Israel should have wars with them now? And as for the children of Ammon, they too had passed through similar experience. Giants had dwelt there in times past, and the Ammonites called them Zamzummims. They were a people great, and many, and tall, as the Anakims; but Jehovah destroyed them before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead. But this was no reason why they were to expect Jehovah to destroy the Ammonites now. Both were powerful motives not to dread the Canaanite races, who were destined to extirpation.

Thus was kept up a thorough sense of discipline in the people, and above all dependence on and confidence in Jehovah. They were to be guided simply not by what Jehovah had done in providence by Ammon, Moab, or Esau, but by His will as to themselves. This was a lesson for Israel of prime moment. May we not forget it ourselves! Covenant favor would surely do as much for Israel as providence had done for Moab and Ammon! All this then precedes another lesson. It is well to remark here that Deut. 2:24 is exactly parallel with Deut. 2:13; that it is not Moses in verse 13, but Jehovah who commands to rise up, &c., in both; and that verses Deut. 2:10-12 are a parenthesis of instructive past history for moral profit like Deut. 2:20-23. Rise ye up, take your journey, and pass over the river Arnon. Now comes another promise: Behold, says He,

I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite {Deut. 2:24}. www.presenttruthpublishers.com
Here then they are called to action. It will be observed that first of all in this chapter, it was not activity but subjection. It might be, and no doubt was, trying enough for Israel to take quietly the unfriendliness of the Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites; but no matter what the provocation given, no matter how they might be insulted by them (and they were), a hand of Israel must not be lifted up against their brethren; for Jehovah reminds them of the connection, and gives those races the closest name possible -- their brethren. Edomites or Moabites or Ammonites, -- unfeeling and disposed to injure Israel, still God would educate His people in remembering whatever bond of nature there was; if blows came, God would not forget the delinquent. Meanwhile they were not to meddle with their kindred, even though jealous and unkind.

But Israel is called to action.

Rise ye up, take your journey, and pass over the river Arnon: behold, I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land: begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle. This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee. And I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemoth unto Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace {Deut. 2:24-26}.

Is not this very notable? What a difference between God’s conduct of His people, and man’s corruption of it! When we compare, for instance, the way in which Moses, under the direction of God, was to lead on the Israelites, and the way in which Mahomet perverted the word into a fable for ambitious ends, and allowance of human lusts and passions, who cannot see the difference? In the one case there was the thorough sifting and scrutiny of God -- with whom most? With the enemies? Not at all, but His own people. In His dealings with them He applied a higher standard, and far more severity. There was incomparably greater strictness of judgment with the children of Israel than with all their enemies put together. Mark the very fact here set before us: not a single man of the congregation of Jehovah that left Egypt passed into the holy land save two individuals, who identified themselves by faith from the very first with the glory of Jehovah. Where else can be found such jealous care as this? It is granted that they did not all perish in the same way, but they all fell in the wilderness. Whatever then the blows which fell on Sihon, or on Og, or on any of the others; whatever the ways of God with Moab and Ammon afterwards, or even with Egypt, there never was seen such unsparing strictness as with Israel.

When man builds up a society, when he founds a religion or any other scheme, how wholly different his course! What gentle censures, if any, what palatable favoritism towards his own party, where they most deserve reproof and rebuke or perhaps still more stringent measures! On the other hand, there is no mercy but ruthless severity always served out to those who refuse to fraternise, not to speak of ceaseless enmity to those who condemn and oppose. But in Israel’s case God enforced a far more thorough and searching discipline in all their ways. No compulsion was used to the nations outside. In special instances judgment to the full took its course. Was anything like this the rule where man even took up the Bible for his own ends? It was otherwise with Mahomet. He might not grant such a liberal concession to others as he left to himself. I do not dwell on this. We all know that it is natural to wretched, wilful man. But there never was a system that more thoroughly pandered to the evil heart of man, and gratified it in its violence against others, and in its corrupt lusts for itself, than that frightful imposture. Whereas, even in God’s dealings with a nation after the flesh (and such is the truth as to Israel here), there was an admirable check on man and witness of divine government, though the law made nothing perfect. It was not yet Christ manifested, but man under trial of the law and its ordinances and restraints, dealt with as living in the world, and instructed in view of this present life. Yet for all that, even though it was but the governmental display of God with a nation (not fully as with Christ, but provisionally by Moses), there is not a fragment of it that does not, when candidly examined, prove the goodness and the holiness of God, as much as it illustrates also on the other side the rebelliousness of man, chosen man, even the people of God.

In this case let us see the principles of Jehovah’s discipline. Did He warrant Israel to coerce Sihon with threats of vengeance or win by cajolery? Did He offer him the book of the law with the one hand or the sword with the other? Nothing of the sort. Look at the way in which Jehovah treated even these enemies of Israel.

Let me pass through thy land: I will go along by the highway, I will neither turn unto the right hand nor to the left. Thou shalt sell me meat for money, that I may eat; and give me water for money, that I may drink: only I will pass through on my feet {Deut. 2:27, 28}.

But Sihon, it is said, king of Heshbon, would not let us pass by him: for Jehovah thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day. And Jehovah said unto me, Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land before thee: begin to possess that thou mayest inherit his land. Then Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, to fight at Jahaz. And Jehovah our God delivered him before us; and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people {Deut. 2:30-33}.

Israel kept the path of right and courtesy. Sihon rushed on them to his own ruin; and only so did Israel smite and dispossess the king of Heshbon.

In Deut. 3 it is substantially similar with Bashan. Og the king came out, and as with Heshbon, so with Bashan.

Jehovah said unto me, Fear not: for I will deliver him, and all his people, and his land, into thy hand; and thou shalt do unto him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon. So Jehovah our God delivered into our hands Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people {Deut. 3:2, 3}.  

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All this is brought out to Israel as the fruit of obeying Jehovah.

Deut. 1 lets us see the end of disobedience; Deut. 2 and 3 give us to know as clearly the result of obedience. Nothing can be more manifest than the moral groundwork which Moses is preparing for all the rest of the book that follows.

In Deut. 4 we find another line of things. The law-giver sets before them the manner in which the law dealt with themselves, in one feature particularly, which he presses on them.

Now therefore hearken, O Israel.

It appears to be a fresh discourse to a certain extent.

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Jehovah God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you [Deut. 4:1, 2].

Surely this again makes it too plain to call for many words of ours to demonstrate what Moses, or rather God Himself, has in view in all these chapters. It is obedience.

Your eyes have seen what Jehovah did because of Baal-peor: for all the men that followed Baal-peor, Jehovah thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto Jehovah your God are alive every one of you this day [Deut. 4:3, 4].

So this fact also is used. Jehovah had cut down the former generation for their disobedience.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as Jehovah my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it, Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people

{Deut. 4:5, 6}. Next, he presses their singular privilege in His presence with them. What nation had such a wonder as God Himself in their midst -- God Himself near the least of them?

For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as Jehovah our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day [Deut. 4:7, 8].

It was not merely a sight of God, but One who deigned to take the liveliest and most intimate interest in His people Israel.

Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons [Deut. 4:9].

The point urged here is, that when they came and stood, as far as any then could stand, in the presence of God, they had seen no similitude of Jehovah. What a guard this was against the misuse of outward forms! God Himself did not disclose Himself by an external creature-shape. Jehovah their God did not make Himself visible to them by a similitude. Consequently there is here a heavy blow struck at the tendency towards idolatry. For when severed from Christ then those ordinances only became a snare to men. Still more since Christ: misused ordinances are practically the same thing in principle, as Gal. 4 teaches. This was guarded against from the first by the fact that no similitude of God was vouchsafed.

Ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire in the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. And Jehovah spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words

-- because they were called to obey --

but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone [Deut. 4:11-13].

And then comes the exhortation to beware of corrupting themselves by idolatries, by the likeness of any creature. This is pursued to the end of the chapter, with the institution of the cities where the manslayer might find refuge.

In Deut. 5, we come to still closer quarters.

And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statues and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep and do them.

Obedience is the claim.

Jehovah our God made a covenant with us at Horeb.

We shall find a fresh one made in the land of Moab, but first of all they are reminded of the Sinaic covenant.

Jehovah made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day. Jehovah talked with you face to face in the Mount out of the midst of the fire. (I stood between Jehovah and you at that time, to show you the word of Jehovah: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the Mount [Deut. 5:1-5].)

Then is laid down the memorial that Jehovah, who gave them His law, was the same who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They were a people brought into relationship with God, and the object of His words was to guard them from practical inconsistency with that relationship.

It is remarkable that, even though in this connection Moses gives them what are called the ten commandments, there is nevertheless an express and manifest difference in the form as compared with Exodus; so little is Deuteronomy a mere rehearsal of the earlier books. It is a familiar point to

67. It is distressing that any man bearing the Christian name should write as does Dr. Davidson (Introd. O. T. i. pp. 226-228). "On comparing the decalogue as recorded in Ex. 20:2-17 and Deut. 5:6-21, it will be observed -- "1. That it is said of both, 'God spake all these words.' (Ex. 20:1; Deut. 5:22.)

(continued...)
many, but may claim a brief notice here, especially as all do not see its bearing in by no means the least striking of the ten words; I speak of the law of the sabbath. Some wonder why it should be joined with the other commandments; but the sabbath is so much the more important here, because it is not strictly a moral command. This makes the principle at stake to be felt the more. The Sabbath law rests entirely on the word of God Himself. It was a question of His authority, not of that which a man might intrinsically discern. What is meant by a moral law is that which one can pronounce on from within even without a prescription from God. For instance, a man knows perfectly well that he has no right to steal. If a person takes what does not belong to him, every man, even a heathen, can judge it. There may be lands where everything morally is at the lowest point, and where therefore a wrong is less severely estimated than elsewhere. But where is the savage even who does not know the wrongness of stealing? For although he may allow himself a dispensation to take from others, let a man steal from him, and it will soon be seen whether he does not condemn the wrong. Plainly then the savage knows quite well that it is unjustifiable to steal. But nobody knows about the sabbath-day unless Jehovah command it. Yet He joins its observance with prohibitions of evil which man could himself judge. It is therefore the strongest assertion of His authority.

This is constantly forgotten when men talk about the moral law. One of the most weighty duties is not properly a moral question at all, but depends simply on the commandment of God. Not that I doubt the sabbath-day to be of the deepest possible moment, and so lasting in its claims that, when the millennium comes, that day of rest will be in full force again. It is not correct therefore that the sabbath-day is done with: many people in Christendom think so; but I take the liberty of having a stronger view about the sabbath than even those who think themselves strongest. Many count it buried in Christ’s grave, but it is not. Far from being done with, we know from the word of God that He will maintain the sabbatical rest strictly, and enforce it in the days of the kingdom; so that, if a man does not bow to His authority, he will assuredly come under divine judgment: so much does Jehovah make of it in itself, and so much will He make of it for the obedience of others in the day that is coming.

We however are not under law but grace. The law of the sabbath is not given to Christians. Grace has brought us out of the condition of a nation in the flesh or of men in the earth. The Christian is not a mere man, nor, is he a Jew. If one were simply a man, one must have to do with the place and state of Adam fallen. For a Jew no doubt there is the law of Moses. But for the Christian a very essential feature of his standing is that he is delivered from the status of man or Israel, and called to Christ and heavenly things. His death to the law is not therefore to weaken the authority of the law, but because of the principles of divine grace which are now brought out in Christ risen from the dead, founded on His death, manifested in His resurrection, and maintained by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Such is the reason why a Christian even now on earth passes into a new state of things altogether. Consequently, when Christianity began, the first day of the week was made the distinguishing mark, the Lord’s-day, and not the sabbath. For we must remember that the sabbath does not mean a seventh day, as some persons (I am sorry to say) equivocate; but the seventh day and no other. This is so decided that in the millenial age there will be a strict maintenance of that day with all the authority of God Himself, vested in and exercised by the Messiah governing Israel and the earth.
Let me just refer to this for a moment longer, lest there should be any mistake about what appears to me to be the truth about it. In the commandment to keep it Jehovah the God of Israel speaks to this effect:

Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of Jehovah thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work {Ex. 20:9, 10}.

But the motive here is not because God rested upon that day, but because they were to remember that they were servants in the land of Egypt, and that Jehovah had brought them out through a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm:

Therefore Jehovah thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath-day {Deut. 5:15}.

Surely this is very significant, and points out a manifest difference in the character and scope and design of the book of Deuteronomy as compared with Exodus. In the one case there was a remembrance of creation; in this case, of symbolic redemption, the bringing out of Egypt. The fact is that redemption, even in type, is a stronger motive to obedience than creation itself. This seems the reason why it is brought in here, as the time was long past; whereas all was fresh in Exodus, which is the main display of that truth. If we have seen the object of all this part of Deuteronomy to be the enforcement of obedience, there is nothing which maintains obedience so much as redemption; and if that were the case when it was only an outward deliverance, how much more when it is eternal?

It is freely allowed that the ten words have a specific character of the deepest moment for man on earth, as distinguished from what was judicial and ceremonial. Hence Moses says,

These words Jehovah spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me {Deut. 5:22}.

Next follows the account of their fear before God’s solemn words, their promise to obey, and the mediatorial place which the people desired and God sanctioned for Moses.

In Deut. 6 we find the first of those texts which our Lord quotes. Hence, I need not say, there is peculiar solemnity in its character. The passage insists on the unity of the true God. This was a truth which Israel was most prone to disregard. The very point of faith, for which we are especially responsible, is what we are in most danger of forgetting under pressure or carelessness. Whatever we are called out for is what Satan endeavours to destroy. By whom? Our adversaries? No, not merely so, but by ourselves. To apply what now occupies us here, give me the chief, fundamental, and most salient points of Christianity, and I will show you that these are the very truths that Christians are most in danger of forgetting. What is it that characterizes Christianity? Redemption accomplished; Christ the head of the church above; the Holy Ghost sent down here below; and all this borne witness to in the worship and in the ways of Christians and the church. Is this what you feel? Is this what you read?

Is this what you hear? Nothing less. The hardest thing to find now in a Christian is real intelligence about Christianity. Commonly indeed we see that Christians understand a great deal better what the Jews ought to have done, than what they themselves ought to be doing. In short, whatever it be to which God summons us is precisely what the devil endeavours to obscure, and so to hinder our testimony.

The point then for the Jew was the one true God.

Jehovah God that hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt {see Deut. 6:12}

– He was the only God. To what were they always inclined? Setting up other gods in the wilderness. Accordingly this is the solemn and, central truth that is brought in here.

Hear, O Israel.

They were about to go into the land to enjoy it; but

Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one. And thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children {Deut. 6:4-7};

and they were to bind them for a sign; they were to make much of them at all points -- outside the house and inside, and always. And this is enforced in the very words which our Savior employed.

Thou shalt fear Jehovah thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name {Deut. 6:13}.

It was to be a real fealty: it was not merely a dogma pure and simple, but to be known as a fact. It was revealed as the great operative truth, continually impressed on Israel -- their one true God.

It seems needless to say that this is altogether short of Christianity; and as we have referred to the difference of a Jew and a Christian as to the sabbath-day and the first day of the week, so as to this. The essential revelation of God to us is the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost -- the Father displayed by the Son, and made known by the Spirit. This is just as characteristic a truth for us as the one Jehovah was for a Jew. Now notoriously as a dogma it is acknowledged everywhere in Christendom except by heretics; but the moment it is appropriated as a practical fact, people stand back and begin to qualify and mutilate. “Is He then indeed, your Father?” “Can you call Him Father?” “Oh, this might be dangerous, and that were presumptuous;” and so men talk on -- that is, the moment it becomes a real living truth, and not words on paper. The acknowledgment in a creed is all well; but when it comes to be the truth for one’s own soul, stamping its value on our communion and also on our ways, men at once retreat back into some “dim religious light,” where it is all forgotten and lost, merely owned verbally, but without power for the heart and life.

Before we pass to the next chapter, it would be well to observe for a moment the second answer of our Lord --

Ye shall not tempt Jehovah your God {Deut. 6:16}.

What was meant by this? Not any ordinary fleshly sin on our
part, as many suppose. Tempting God was to doubt Him, as many, all of us, are apt to do. Satan took advantage of the scripture that said that He should not dash His foot against a stone; He quotes accordingly Psa. 91, intimating to Jesus that, if He were the Son of God, all He had to do was to throw Himself from the pinnacle of the temple; and all must endorse His claims. Was not this a positive promise? God would give his angels charge concerning him {Matt. 4:6}; and what a fine proof it would be that He was the true Messiah, if He threw Himself down from such a height, and withal the angels preserved Him! But Satan as usual tampered with the plain written word, alike with its letter and its spirit; for after to keep thee he omitted in all thy ways {Psa. 91:11}. This he tried to conceal from One, all whose ways were obedience, venturing to insinuate what a noble demonstration of His Messiahship it would be. And what was the Lord’s answer? Thou shalt not tempt Jehovah thy God {Matt. 4:7; see Deut. 6:16}. The true Israelite does not require to put God to the test. If you suspect a rogue is in your employment, you may test him by marking a piece of money to see whether he steals or not: am I then going to mark something for God to see whether He will keep His word or not? I know God will do it; I do not require to put Him to the proof. This is the meaning of it, and such is precisely the path of duty. He that believes may calmly confide in God under all circumstances. His Father will take care of him. Is not this in wonderful harmony with the rest, following on the confession of the one true God of Israel?

Deut. 7 one may sum up in a very few words. We have the consecration of the people to God. This is the grand pith of the chapter as it appears to me. It is the people repudiating the ways of the heathen, and consecrated to God. And this characterizes the book of Deuteronomy. It is not at all a people or a class kept at a distance by intervening priests. Of course it is a fact that the priests are there; but one of the peculiar features of this book is that, although sacerdotalism existed, the priests are designedly swamped with the Levites, as the whole of the people are gathered round Jehovah. Thus it is not a book which defines strict canonical usage in these matters. The object is quite different. The other had its place when God was giving the book of Leviticus. There He assigned this as the portion of the high priest and his sons, that of the Levites, this again of the people. But in Deuteronomy the point is to centralize them all around Jehovah Himself. The consequence is that, though all have their place, these distinctions may here seem small indeed. If it is a question of access to God in His sanctuary, priests are definitely brought out, and the proper book for this is Leviticus; but there is a larger truth than this -- that God has a people whom He puts in a place of consecration to Himself. Such is the point here in the Deuteronomy 7. We shall find how thoroughly this applies all through the book to the perplexity of poor proud rationalism, but in itself a simple yet very important truth indeed. So difficult is it to unbelief that some take the ground of making Deuteronomy belong to an older age when the distinction of priests from Levites was not yet brought in. Still more take the opposite hypothesis and contend that its legislation is of a later character than that of the preceding book. The truth is that the difference is due to moral development of Israel according to Jehovah’s wisdom on the eve of introducing His people into the land, and the more settled and social habits He would have them cultivate there. But the tone, mind, and heart of Moses are nowhere more characteristically apparent than in these his last words to the people of Jehovah whom he loved.

In Deut. 8 we have quite a different character. It is not the people’s consecration to God, but their discipline, the trial of heart, and exercise by the way to which Jehovah subjected the people; and a most instructive section it is in this point of view.

And this is another chapter from which our Lord quotes when tempted, to which we may refer in passing.

And thou shalt remember all the way which Jehovah thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no {Deut. 8:2}.

We see that what has been remarked is just what is expressed in this verse:

And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, (what exercise of faith was there in that?) but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live {Deut. 8:3}.

This is precisely what does put man to the proof morally. The word of God tests whether he submits to it, whether he lives on it, whether he delights in it, whether his meat is to do the will of God as the Lord Jesus proved His meat was.

It was by this Scripture that the Lord, as we know, repelled the first temptation of the adversary. None ever honored God’s word as Christ did.

We need not dilate on the beautiful detail but at the same time simple truth of this chapter. Clearly it traces the discipline of Jehovah by the way.

In Deut. 9 another topic is prominent. It is not the Jewish people in the school of Jehovah to manifest what was in their

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68. Nothing can be weaker than the harping on the phrase “the priests the Levites,” as in the writings of Davidson and Colenso (following the superficial scepticism of foreign authors, who themselves followed the old Deists of our own country). The broader character of the book, with its aim of bringing forward the people, and consequently the tribal divisions, rather than particular families, fully accounts for this. Had the phrase been inverted to “the Levites the priests” (which never occurs), there would have been some force in the argument: as it is, there is none. The priests were Levites. It is the design of the book which governs the description in each case.
heart, and what He was towards them; but the people strengthened by Jehovah in presence of a power mightier than their own. It was because of this very truth: Jehovah was with them. What did it matter about all others? They might be greater, stronger, wiser, more than the Israelites; but what of Jehovah? This was their boast. Could they match with Him? Certainly they could not; this Jehovah spreads in the most forcible manner before His people for their cheer and stay.

But we must not overlook another part of the chapter -- not the Lord strengthening the people against the mightiest of adversaries, but Israel reminded of their rebellious heart even under such circumstances against Jehovah.

In Deut. 10 we find the provision of Jehovah’s goodness is stated in a very striking way. Thus when the story of their rebellion is mentioned, it leads Moses to go back and to trace how this spirit betrayed itself even so early as at Horeb; for when it is a question of rebellion, we must go to the root of it. We are also shown the astonishing patience of Jehovah, and with that which might be difficult to understand if we did not look to the moral scope of the book -- the destruction of the first tables, the writing out of fresh ones, and the place in which they were to be kept. At the same time we are told how the tribe of Levi was separated, after having brought in (in an episodical way) an allusion to Aaron’s death. It seems just a parenthesis, and not a question of chronology.

A fair question arises for those who honor the divine word, why events so long severed in time are thus introduced seemingly together. No doubt the malicious mind of the sceptic takes occasion from it to turn what he does not seek to understand to the disparagement of inspiration. But there is no discrepancy whatever, nor confusion of Aaron’s death in the last year of the wilderness sojourn with the separation of Levi some thirty-eight years before. The truth is that the solemn circumstances appear to recall to the mind of Moses the awful lapse of Israel when

they made the calf which Aaron made {Ex. 32:35},

and Levi, of old perfidious to the stranger for a sister’s sake, consecrated themselves to Jehovah in the blood of their idolatrous brethren; and Moses hews at Jehovah’s command tables of stone like the first, and put them, written as before, idolatrous brethren; and Moses hews at Jehovah’s command

Consecrated themselves to Jehovah in the blood of their

and the others, instead of perishing as a whole at once, lived to take their journey from a land of wells (Beeroth) to Mosera where Aaron died at Mount Hor, and thence to Gudgodah, and to Jotbath.

A land of rivers of waters {Deut. 10:7}:

such was the patient goodness of God to both, as the long interval made the more marked.

In Deut. 11 is given the summing up of the whole matter, the practical conclusion which the lawgiver keeps before their eyes. They were to remember what rebellion must end in. Hence it is that he alludes to the fate of Dathan and Abiram whom the earth swallowed up in consequence of their flagrant apostasy and fighting against God.

Your eyes have seen all the great acts of Jehovah which he did. Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land whither ye go to possess it; and that ye may prolong your days in the land which Jehovah sware unto your fathers to give unto them and to their seed, a land that floweth with milk and honey (Deut. 11:7-9).

To the end of the chapter follow the most earnest warnings, as well as bright promises: disobedience or obedience would be the turning point in the land. The mount of blessing and the mount of curse were there on the other side Jordan.

This closes the first part of Deuteronomy. A few words on the next few chapters will suffice for the present.

In Deut. 12 we have statutes and judgments. Thus we come to what might be called the direct charges, having done with all the introductory part. All the previous part prepares the way. Now we find what would test their obedience.

These are the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which Jehovah God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth {Deut. 12:1}.

In the very first place is laid down utter destruction of the high places. The reason is obvious. The first of all rights, and the highest of our duties, is that God should have His rights. With this then most fittingly He begins. It is no use talking about Israel: the first object is God. If therefore God was dishonored by the high places, they must all come down. Besides, if these high places had been dedicated to heathen gods, Israel must not dare to consecrate them to the true God. Such conversion does not suit God, who must have His own.

God must and does choose for Himself -- a simple yet most important consideration (Deut. 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26).

Will-worship is intolerable. It ought most of all to shock the Christian. If it were merely a question of man, nobody would think of choosing for another. Nobody likes this. If people like to choose for themselves, as mere men, what an awful delusion it is to be choosing for God -- to be really governed by your own will in matters of religion! We can all see how very bad it was in Israel; but do we feel that it is still worse in the Christian? He has given no title to adopt doctrines, practices, ways, government, or any one thing that is not His expressed will for His children. Some there are, no doubt, who assume that God has not in these things expressed any

69. Dr. D. (Introd. O. T. p. 65) says: "From Deut. 10:8 it is plain that the Levites were not appointed at Sinai but later; whereas we learn from Num. 8 that their institution took place at Sinai." A disgraceful perverssion; for Deut. 10:6, 7 is manifestly a parenthesis. Bearing this in mind, any reader can see that "at that time" in verse 8 really coalesces with "at that time" in verses 1-5, and therefore is in perfect accord with Num. 8; and yet it is repeated in p. 336.

70. See Dr. Lightfoot’s Works, ii. p. 136 (Pitman’s Edition).
will of His own. I do not envy them the thought that God has not revealed His mind about what is nearest to Himself, and what most of all is bound up with His glory! It is making God less than a man; for if He could not be content without it, how much less the living God?

Here we see that God had a most deliberate choice in the smallest matters as well as in the greatest; but He begins with what most nearly touches His presence. He sets Himself against the high places; He will not have them. He chose to have a place where He would put His name. This becomes the center for all; and the book of Deuteronomy is founded on that fact, Israel being on the point of entering into the land. Consequently it is an anticipation of what was before them. It is not a book for the wilderness, except for their hearts to look back on while on the borders before they entered the land.

And the grand principle too we may just notice in passing: Jehovah reminds them by Moses that He had allowed much while they were in the wilderness which could not be tolerated now (Deut. 12:8). If they were going to possess the land, let them remember it was God’s land, not theirs. He might and would give it to them, but still He always kept His place. It was the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee (Deut. 12:10).

In fact He acted as the landlord. They were only tenants, and had to pay Him rent. This was the substantial meaning of the tithes and other requisitions (Deut. 12:11). They were the dues He demanded in virtue of His position as landlord of the people in the land. Therefore we can understand it as if He said, When you were in the strange country, when you left it in haste to wander here and there in the wilderness, there were great difficulties and many irregularities which cannot be allowed now. The greater the blessing of God, the more thoroughly you are put on the ground that God has given you, the more He insists on thorough and constant obedience. This is the point here, and thus we see the connection with all that has gone before.

Then in Deut. 13 there is a similar line, all these early injunctions being what we may call religious statutes. We shall meet with others before long, we shall come to civil ones, but we are not going beyond the religious charges at present. It is evident that they are somehow or another connected with God, and touch matters of religion, as men would say. Israel must not slight God’s claims in common things. For instance, as they must not trifle with blood, because it belonged to God (Deut. 12:16-25), the dreamer must be guarded against a dream (Deut. 13:1-5). It might belong to the true God; but Thou shalt not hearken {Deut. 13:3}

if there was the smallest risk of going after other gods. Power supernatural has not the smallest value, nay, is to be shunned rigorously, if it weakens consciences as to the true God. The same Spirit which has the power of miracle is the Spirit of truth and the Holy Spirit. If truth be abandoned, it indicates the power of Satan as the source, and not the true God. Such is the principle: no sparing friends, relatives, wife of thy bosom {Deut. 13:6},

could be tolerated.

There is then (Deut. 13:12-18) pointed out the way to deal with a city guilty of idolatry.

Then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you; thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword {Deut. 13:14, 15}, the small things as well as great. To have confidence in God is one of the important points here, to cherish full confidence that whatever He gives us is the very best thing for us. It is as true for us as for them, though not shown in the same legal way or outward manner.

Deut. 14 insists on what became the children of Jehovah their God in abstaining from unseemly maimings or disfigurements for the dead, as well as from any food which He, who knew better than they, pronounced abominable. They are then shown what may or may not be eaten, whether beasts, fishes, or fowls. A people holy to Jehovah must not eat anything that dies of itself, nor accustom itself to an uncomely act, were it with a dumb and dead kid and the milk of its dam.

But there is another point peculiar to this book. Beside the tithe of their increase truly rendered from corn, wine, oil, with the firstlings, which, if distant from the place Jehovah would choose for His center of worship, might be turned into money, and there spent before Him with a joyful household and the Levite not forsaken, there was to be a tithe at the end of three years, mentioned in Deut. 14:28, 29:

At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates

They were not compelled to take this to the one place that God had consecrated. It had more of the family character; but a beautiful feature is connected with it:

And the Levite (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee), and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that Jehovah thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.

Even in the very witness of domestic blessing there must be the largeness of heart that goes out to those who have no friends to care for them. How good is our God, and what a witness of His grace! We know well how the family is apt to trench on generous feeling, and how it is apt to shut itself up to no more or better than a refined selfishness. It is not so where God governs. There, even were it the family gathered in such a sort as this within their gates, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, all have their part. Why should they not rejoice? It was God who made the family rejoice, and they were to go out to those that were strangers to it. Is it not a beautiful indication of what the true God is, even in His least
institutions? 71

In Deut. 15 we find a similar principle as to the year of release. On this we need not particularly dwell, but they are reminded of their own place. They had been bondmen themselves; and if they had been delivered of God, they should cultivate the same spirit as He had shown. This was their point of imitating God.

In Deut. 16:1-17 (where I now stop) we have the winding up of all this part -- the termination of the statutes which had to do with religion. Let me ask, Why were there these three feasts, and these three only? For a reason given already. These feasts made an appeal to a male Israelite which none besides could make. Others might be optional, but these feasts were obligatory. It is a call to obedience. The book of Deuteronomy throughout pre-eminently brings in the authority of God over a people in relationship with Himself, displayed and proved in obedience. What did not so much manifest obedience is left out, though it might have an important spiritual meaning in its place; for certainly other feasts (as the feast of atonement, for instance) had. But it was not a question here of truth or its forms, but of obedience: this is ever in view. It is not the tabernacle, nor the priest, not the wilderness, but obeying God as His people in the land.

There is another remark to be made. The obedience spoken of in this chapter, which called every male of Israel up to remember Jehovah at these three feasts, gathered them to the place which Jehovah their God would choose. Then again we have what is always brought out in the book of Deuteronomy. It is Jehovah gathering the people round Himself. In the delight of His people He delights. He would have them happy in Himself, and enjoying all He had given them to enjoy. Consequently we have these three feasts, which set forth particularly Jehovah providing to fill the heart of His people with peace and joy to overflowing.

Yet at the first of these feasts Israel were not told to rejoice. In a certain sense it might be a season too good and deep for joy. The character of it was so solemn as scarce to admit of this. It represented that death which befell the Lamb, and arrested the judgment of God which had gone out against us because of sin. We may rejoice in the God that has so dealt with us, but is it becoming that Christ's death should be a call to transports? There are deeper feelings in the heart than joy. Times we know when the sense of what we have been, of what we are, and of God's putting all our evil away for ever by the death of His own Son, is too deep for joy if not for tears. I do not mean that there should not be the profoundest feeling of gratitude, and the fullest expression of thanksgiving to God. Still it is too solemn to admit of what is so buoyant, which has its own proper exercise. But God is very careful, in the face of the passover, that there should not be a forgetfulness of that escape which brought them out together then. Hence, in the first feast, we find they were to eat unleavened bread.

Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith, even the bread of affliction; for thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life {Deut. 16:3}.

Then they are told not to celebrate the feast indiscriminately where and as they please.

Thou mayest not sacrifice the passover in any of thy gates, which Jehovah thy God giveth thee: but at the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose to place his name in, there shalt thou sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt. And thou shalt roast and eat it in the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose; and thou shalt turn in the morning, and go unto thy tents {Deut. 16:5-7}.

But the second feast brings out joy in a very distinct and delightful manner.

Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn. And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto Jehovah thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto Jehovah thy God, according as Jehovah thy God hath blessed thee: and thou shalt rejoice before Jehovah thy God, thou, and thy son {Deut. 16:9-11}.

It is not the death of Christ with all its solemn, however blessed, issues. It is founded on the life of Christ in resurrection, when the Holy Ghost brings us into the power of enjoyment. It is pentecost. Consequently it is that great feast which finds its answer in Christianity more particularly (the passover being of course the foundation); but this is pre-eminently its character as a present fact. And mark this; that it is not only joy in the Lord, but calling others to joy (Deut. 16:11). Besides,

Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt: and thou shalt observe and do these statutes {Deut. 16:12}.

We were bondmen, and are not. We are to observe the statutes and to do them. Once more obedience is pre-eminently the matter, and this too as delivered men -- once bondslaves, but now free to obey.

There is a third feast, that of tabernacles. It is not the liberty of grace, which the feast of pentecost is, but rather the epoch in type when the liberty of glory shall arrive. Mark how very strikingly this is shown.

Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine {Deut. 16:13}.

Undoubtedly the gatherings in of the corn and the wine (that is, the harvest and the vintage) are the well known types of God's final dealings: the harvest when He separates the wheat from the chaff, or at any rate from that which is not wheat;
and the vintage when He executes unsparing judgment upon
the vine of the earth -- upon all religion that is vain and denies
heaven. There is no mercy shown in the vintage. In the
harvest there is the gathering in of the good and the extinction
of the evil; but the vintage knows nothing but vengeance from
God. It is after this will come the full time of joy for the earth.
Blessing for the world is after God has thus cleared the scene:
in the prospect of this the Christian is called to rejoice -- to
have the joy not only of liberty now but of the glory that is
about to displace the oppression, the sorrow, the
wretchedness, the sin, of this poor long-groaning earth, when
all shall be put under the only One who is competent to bear
the burden and to govern it to the glory of God. Hence the
language differs most sensibly even from the joyous scene of
blessing of which the feast of weeks was so redolent. It is not
merely

\[ \text{thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto Jehovah thy} \]
\[ \text{God with a tribute of free-will offering of thine hand,} \]
\[ \text{which thou shalt give, according as Jehovah thy God} \]
\[ \text{hath blessed thee {Deut. 16:10},} \]

but

\[ \text{seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto} \]
\[ \text{Jehovah thy God in the place which Jehovah shall} \]
\[ \text{choose: because Jehovah thy God shall bless thee in all} \]
\[ \text{thine increase, and in all the increase of thine hands;} \]
\[ \text{therefore thou shalt surely rejoice {Deut. 16:15}.} \]

May the Lord give us hearts to rejoice in all His grace
and truth and glory!
It is clear that a new division of the statutes and judgments of this book begins with the later verses just read from Deut. 16. What belonged to the religious life of Israel was closed with the three feasts which fill the previous part of the chapter.

Now we touch on the instruments and means which Jehovah established for the purpose of carrying out the life of the people in judicial matters. Judges and officers were to abound. They were to be made in all their gates, and with watchful care there is a guard against respect of persons and anything calculated to turn aside the sentence of righteousness. The land which Jehovah their God gave must have justice; loving-kindness, and mercy between man and man, and all pleasant affections among the people must not interfere in such questions. Along with all this we suddenly find what the spirit of man cannot understand -- the introduction of a fresh allusion to religious matters.

Thou shalt not plant a grove of any trees near unto the altar of Jehovah thy God, which thou shalt make thee. Neither shalt thou set thee up any image; which Jehovah thy God hateth. Thou shalt not sacrifice unto Jehovah thy God any bullock, or sheep, wherein is blemish, or any evil-favoredness: for that is an abomination unto Jehovah thy God

{Deut. 16:21–17:1}.

With this beginning of Deut. 17 there goes a strong warning as to any man or woman that had wrought wickedness in the sight of Jehovah in transgressing His covenant, going and serving other gods, more particularly worshiping the host of heaven. It appears to me that, so far from presenting the smallest real difficulty, so far from being an interruption of the great subject of the judicial life of Israel, we have to face here the important truth that what touches God, what falsifies Him as such, has the closest bearing on the daily life of His people, both in their households and also in matters of public judgment. If we are wrong in what we allow as to God Himself, if there is a tampering with that which sullies His glory, a dishonor allowed (for instance) as to His nature in admitting these false gods, or setting up creatures in the place of God Himself, all the lower part of the life will feel at once the destructive and corrupting consequences of it.

Hence the difficulty which divines have found, in what they supposed the going back to matters of religion, is in point of fact a mere mistake of their own from divorcing that which God has joined together. We have had fully the direct instruction as to what concerned His own glory, but now even when He is touching on that which bears on man’s life, He interweaves religious elements not at all as a repetition of the past, but as connecting it with the present subject. Further, we find that the subject is pursued to show the place of testimony. By the mouth of two witnesses or three it was ordained that he who was worthy of death should die. This was of great value in practice, and is made use of largely in the New Testament -- a principle which no man can ever neglect without loss.

At first sight it may seem singular that the Spirit of God should attach so much importance to the requirement of two or three witnesses; but let us remember that we are here learning the ways of God actively dealing with a people on earth, after He had brought them into relationship with Himself. Undoubtedly, if God took no active concern in man or his ways, there might be difficulties. Israel alone, of all the nations on the face of the earth, stood on such a ground as this; and on them God laid the necessity of demanding such testimony. But He is always wise, and besides He would teach His people to trust that He will always give whatever is necessary according to His own order.

So the New Testament uses the principle with us, who have to do with Him and who deals with us in a far more intimate way than He ever did with Israel. We have to do with One that has deigned to make us His dwelling-place by the Spirit. Hence where He has laid down His word with clearness, as for instance in such a matter as this, we may unqualifiedly count on Him. People may bring all kinds of objections, and say that we cannot always expect such an amount of testimony as this, -- that we must look at the circumstances, and, if it be impossible to produce evidence sufficient, we must act on what seems most probable. But this is neither more nor less than to abandon divine ground for what is human; and I am persuaded that a deeper injury by a long way would be done to the people of God by a single departure from His word and mind and way in such a matter as this, than by failure to convict in ten cases where there might be evil underneath. Our business is never to leave the plain word of God, but to cleave to it, and, whatever the pressure of circumstances, to wait on God. He is able to produce witnesses when we least see how or whence they come.

Thus we are kept in peace while trusting in His word; and what is the spirit of him who in such matters could bear to be hasty, or wish to condemn another before God has brought out the evidence? Thus the heart abides confiding and calm, knowing that He who beholds and knows all is able to bring forward whatever is necessary at the right moment. It may be His way to try the faith of His people and to humble by keeping them in ignorance for a time. Where there existed greater spiritual power, there might be a more ready use of the
means that God puts at our disposal; but whatever His ground for withholding anything they needed, our plain call is to cherish perfect confidence that He cares for us not only in what He gives, but in what He witholds. We therefore can stand to His word --

In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established [2 Cor. 13:1]; and where this is not vouchsafed, where the testimony fails, our duty is to wait on the Lord.

This brings us to another point. If there arose matters too hard for them, as it is said, they were to get up to the place which Jehovah their God should choose.

And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment: and thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which Jehovah shall choose shall show thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee {Deut. 17:9, 10}.

Here again the principle is good and valid for the present time; for we must remember particularly in this book of Deuteronomy that priests are used in a sensibly different way from what is found elsewhere, as was pointed out in the last lecture. It is not a question here so much of their service in standing between the people and God, as of their helping the people in what they owed to Him. In Leviticus it is the former, because there it is a question of drawing near to God, and the people could not go into the sanctuary, but the priests for them. In Deuteronomy, which supposes the people about to enter on the land, we have more the family order of the nation, with Jehovah their God; and the priests the Levites help this on, although of course in the sanctuary the priests would still retain their place. The two books are in no way inconsistent with each other. There is a difference made, which consists in this, that the priests are regarded more as a part of the people, not so much as an intervening class between God and them.

Accordingly we here find that in these matters of judgment which belong to the practical difficulties of daily life, where questions were too hard for ordinary men, appeal must be made to them, not so much in their sacrificial capacity, but as those who ought to have greater practical acquaintance with the word of God, and thereby their senses more exercised to discern good and evil. It is granted at once that nothing can be more ruinous in Christendom than the assertion of an earthly priesthood, based on the notion of some having an access to God more than others in point of title; it is in effect to deny the gospel.

At the same time all must feel the value of a spiritual man’s judgment where we fail. There is no one perhaps, unless of a singularly proud and independent spirit, who has not found the want of it; not a few have practically acted upon it, and proved its value when enjoyed. So the apostle James lets us know the value of a righteous man’s prayers. Surely this does not mean every believer. Although every Christian is justified by faith, and may be expected to display a just and good man’s ways practically; still it cannot be denied that there are wide differences of measure among real believers, and that we all have the consciousness that there are those among the people of God, to whom we could not happily open our difficulties, and some to whom one could most freely; some who have such a spiritual tone and ripe acquaintance with His mind, who therefore help their brethren, not in the least by assuming an authority over the consciences of others, not by claiming dominion over their faith (not even an apostle would do this), but who nevertheless help decidedly by spiritual capacity to give a judgment formed by habitual walking in fellowship with Him, so as to meet others in practical difficulties and trials here below. This seems to be the principle at any rate of what we have here.

But this leads to another step. Jehovah would raise up judges in an extraordinary way from time to time: a fact familiar to all in the Old Testament history. Further, there is the supposition even of a king being called for in due time. But in a most striking manner God guards against the very snares into which the king, though he were the wise son of David himself, fell away, and so brought shame on God and misery on His people. Alas! the king when raised up among them, though not a stranger but their brother (as it is said) did multiply wives to himself, as we all know, and his heart was turned away. Multiplying to himself silver and gold beyond all measure, the law of Jehovah had not its place in his soul. The consequence was that the closing days even of that wisest and richest King of Israel notoriously became fruitful in sorrow and vanity; which burst out publicly as soon as he was taken away.

In Deut. 18 we have the priests the Levites introduced in another way. It is said that they were to have no part nor inheritance with Israel; but they were to eat the offerings of Jehovah made by fire and his inheritance. Therefore shall they have no inheritance among their brethren. Jehovah is their inheritance, as he hath said unto them {Deut. 18:1, 2}.

God thus marks fresh their special place of having Himself for their portion, so that what went to Him fell to them. This gave a deep sense of identification with Jehovah; as also it will be found that, all through the book of Deuteronomy, this is sustained and applied beyond all the other books of Moses. We may see before we have done what was the ground of it. For the present I only call witnesses to the fact. Hence it was said,

And this shall be the priest’s due {Deut. 18:3},
– not only certain parts of the offerings, but also
the first-fruit of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep shalt thou give him. For Jehovah thy God hath chosen him out of all thy tribes to stand to minister in the name of Jehovah, him and his sons for ever {Deut. 18:4, 5}.

Then comes the Levite, his service, and his portion. 72
And if a Levite come from any of thy gates out of all Israel, where he sojourned, and come with all the desire of his mind unto the place which Jehovah shall choose; then he shall minister in the name of Jehovah his God, as all his brethren the Levites do, which stand there before Jehovah. They shall have like portions to eat, beside that which cometh of the sale of his patrimony [Deut. 18:6-8].

At the same time there is the sternest guard against all curious prying into the will of God that was not revealed, against tampering, as it follows here, with divination or observation of times, against enchantments or charms, against consulting familiar spirits, wizards, or necromancers.

For all that do these things are an abomination unto Jehovah: and because of these abominations Jehovah thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with Jehovah thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but Jehovah thy God hath not suffered thee so to do [Deut. 18:12-14].

Assuredly this principle is in no way weakened in the present day. I take this opportunity of solemnly warning every soul -- more particularly the young -- from levity in hankering after that which they do not understand, and very especially in the way of giving up their will to any one but the Lord Jesus. This is the essential point of danger. I do not raise the smallest doubt that there are powers in the natural world which lie quite beyond the explanation of men. It is not my wish therefore to excite a kind of hue and cry against that which may not be yet explained. Let us avoid the presumption of supposing that we can account for everything. But in our ignorance (which the wisest most feel and own) this wisdom at least ought to belong to the least of God’s children, that they know in whom they believe, that they have His word and His Spirit, and can count on infinite love and power as well as wisdom on their behalf. They can well afford therefore to leave what is beyond themselves or any others in the hands of God their Father. They with sorrow see others rush in who have nothing higher, who have no God to count on or look to.

But above all beware. Whenever any one asks you to give up your mind or will to another -- were it but for a moment -- there is the evident hand of the devil in it. This is no question of physical powers, or of what is naturally inexplicable. What is behind giving up yourself, your will, to any one but God, is plain enough in its character and consequences; it is too easy to understand it. The divine axiom is that the Lord and He alone has a right to you. Consequently such a demand proves that Satan is taking advantage, it may be of what is natural, but certainly of you. Hence under cover of occult laws, there is something deeper than what is natural behind the call. Do not therefore be deceived by the fact that there may be and are properties beyond our ken in the realm of nature. There is also the working of the enemy, which under new forms reveals the same principle of evil which has wrought since the flood. It has changed its name, but it is substantially the identical evil against which Jehovah was here warning His earthly people. Now we, if drawn aside, are far more guilty than they, from the very fact that God has spread out His word with incomparably greater fulness, and given us by the Holy Ghost since redemption the power of entering into His mind and will, far exceeding anything on which even a high priest could draw in times of old. Here no doubt a divine oracle was looked to, and an answer received in peculiar cases; but there is no possible case of difficulty, there is no point whatever that concerns God or man, for which there is not an answer in the written word, although we may have to wait on Him for profiting by it.

In due order then we find not merely all this curious dabbling with evil peremptorily set aside and superseded, not only now the introduction of priests, Levites, and judges, ordinary or extraordinary, but of the great prophet -- Christ Himself. It is one of those striking sketches which the Spirit of God intersperses throughout scripture. Here and there Christ more than usually shines. I admit that the Spirit of Christ (or allusion to Him) in one way or another is found everywhere; but here it is most manifest.

Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; according to all that thou desirdest of Jehovah thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of Jehovah my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And Jehovah said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him [Deut. 18:15-18].

Undoubtedly every word has acquired a force far beyond what could be looked for before this revelation, but each expression now is bright when we see its verification in the Lord Jesus. But not only is their fulness of truth made known by Jesus alone, but also the utmost danger of slighting Him, and thus losing all the more.

It shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die [Deut. 18:19, 20].

Thus plainly we have the true prophet put forward, Christ Himself. For its application to Him, in the face of all the unbelief of men, is affirmed by the Holy Ghost over and over, by Peter in Acts 3, and by Stephen in Acts 7; and in point of fact we do not even need these citations of the passage. The entire New Testament is itself the irrefragable demonstration that Christ is the prophet here referred to, and of the consequent folly and sin of listening to another. For He is come, and God made this fact to be so much the more manifest in a more glorious way still for chosen witnesses. His own voice set aside Moses and Elias, though the one might be the introducer of the law and the other its great restorer. For 72 (...continued)

verses 6-8 the Levite. There is no ground for the rationalist dream of another age and state from that contemplated in Exodus, Leviticus, or Numbers.
it was the Son that was now to be heard, and He alone is left, the others disappearing. Unquestionably this goes beyond the revelation that was given by Moses here, while it is the highest possible confirmation of it.

In Deut. 19 we have the order in detail for the three cities of refuge, and then for three more, as in the early part of the book we saw the first set apart on the other side of the Jordan; for God on the one hand would mark the seriousness of bloodshedding; on the other, He would not confound a death at unawares with that which was deliberate murder. In no case however would God have His people to forget that it was His land, and consequently if blood were shed there, that it was thereby defiled. It called for serious thought. Man that was made in the image of God had his blood shed there. God takes notice of it, but that which had a higher and a deeper reference requires not to be proved now. I have already dwelt upon it. Only take notice of the difference between the allusion here and in Numbers. There we saw it was applied especially to the blood-guilty while out of the land of their possession. Here is not a word said about the death of the priest that was anointed with the oil. The reason is manifest. The book of Deuteronomy applies to the people when they are just on the point of entering the land. Thus the insertions and omissions of the Spirit of God are as notable in the books of Moses as in the Gospels themselves. We may be more familiar with the idea and effect of design in the Gospels, but it is just as true here and everywhere else.

In Deut. 19:12-13 the greatest care is enjoined to hinder all abuse through the cities of refuge. No facility must be given thereby for a murderer to find permanent shelter there. If blood was shed intentionally and deliberately, the elders of his city were bound to send and fetch him thence, delivering him over to the avenger of blood that he might die. 73

Then we find further care taken as to witnesses, and this affirmed by the great law of just retribution; that is to say, that when a witness testified what was deliberately false, and of course therefore malicious, the punishment which would have been adjudged in case of its truth was ordered to fall on him that raised the evil report. All this is carefully seen to.

And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot {Deut. 19:21}.

Then in Deut. 20 comes in the law of battles. We have the utmost care taken that they should be in no way conformed to the Gentile license. The governing principle here, as elsewhere, is confidence in Jehovah, the God who had taken His people, brought them out of Egypt into relationship with Himself, and was now placing them in His own land. It would be beneath the honor of God that any should be forced to fight His battles. He would give His people in everything to think of Himself. It was not a question of soldiery or strategy, of force or skill or fraud, but of Jehovah their God. It is evident that no means could more thoroughly purge from those who were to engage in battle what was unworthy of such a God and of such a people. It is referred to now as being not the least striking of the peculiarities of Deuteronomy, and it is obvious how it suits the case in every way. The heavenly land is for us the scene of contest with the enemy. There are no such laws of war in the other books of Moses; they are here only. The wilderness is the scene of temptation. Canaan is the place where the enemy must be fought and beaten. But there is no power by which he can be overcome but that of God. Consequently faintheartedness would be intolerable; for it could only arise from this -- that the people were thinking not of Jehovah their God, but of themselves or their enemies. Impossible thus to win the battles of Jehovah. What secures victory is the certainty that our God calls to the fight, that it is His battle, not ours: where it is so, we are as sure of the end as of the beginning. We are calmly convinced that as He does not send us at our own charges, so further He who calls to fight will secure that the enemy shall be vanquished.

Hence it is that God lays down in the most minute manner His consideration for His people. In the case of a new house, or of one who had planted a vineyard or betrothed a wife, all is cared for: where fearfulness of heart prevailed, such are made to feel that they were unworthy to enter on the battles of Jehovah. Further, there is beautiful consideration on His part for the enemy; for when they came nigh the threatened city, they were first called to proclaim peace to it: a singular way of making war, but worthy of God. He took no pleasure in war, and would accustom His people to go forth, even were it to fight, remembering themselves

shod with the preparation of peace {see Eph. 6:15}, 
if I may so say.

And it shall be, if it [the city] make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but, will make war against thee, then shalt thou besiege it: and when Jehovah thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword {Deut. 20:11-13}.

There is just as serious a dealing with them, in proportion to the reality with which the offer of peace had been made before. God’s ways are not as ours.

Further,

Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee {Deut. 20:15}.

There was one exception: there must be no peace with the Canaanites; not because they were dreaded as rivals, but doomed to destruction because of their abominations and seductions. It is well known that some find a difficulty in this.

73 People must be hard set for a fault who can, like Dr. Davidson (Intro. O. T. 1. 96), array this chapter against Num. 35:14; because the latter, written before the former, speaks of six cities of refuge, three on either side of the Jordan, whereas the latter book speaks only of three at first, to which three were to be added after Moses’ death. It is a ridiculous inference that the same writer did not compose both books, or at least the passage respecting these cities. The second is the general law of the institutions, the second gives the more minute ordering of the details. And this is confirmed, not weakened, by Deut. 4:41-44 where it is said Moses set apart three on the east side, just as Num. 35 enjoined; while Num. 19 shows us not these only but three more, if Jehovah enlarged their coast as He had sworn to do. Only an evil eye could find want of order or harmony here.
Possibly it may interest others, if it do not relieve the first of their difficulty, to know that, typically considered, the Canaanites represent the emissaries of Satan, the spiritual wickedness in heavenly places, -- those rulers of the darkness of this world with whom we are called to wrestle now. They are specifically the powers of evil which continually turn every link of religion into a means of deliberate and ruinous dishonor of God. With such there can be, there ought to be, no terms, no compromise, no cessation of the fight at any time or under any possible circumstances. This is the typical force of what is referred to here.

I may just add the further remark, that of all the nations on the face of the earth, there was no such hotbed for every kind of corruption among men, and for all wickedness and abomination in the sight of God, as the Canaanites whom God devoted to destruction. It was therefore perfectly just, as far as righteousness was concerned, to hold up these Canaanites for a solemn warning to all the world and to all times. If national righteousness was sought, if there was to be the honor for a solemn warning to all the world and to all times. If Israel. In the last lecture we saw that, so far from passing over as righteousness was concerned, to hold up these Canaanites the race, sure above all to be the moral destroyers of Israel men complain justly of the doom that befell such corrupters of single fault of Moses which he  himself records, where can certainly, if God caused that all Israel should fall in the wilderness because of their sins, if He did not even spare the perished in the wilderness except the two spies who stood for the same strictness as with Israel. We saw that every soul of Israel perished in the wilderness except the two spies who stood for God, even against their fellows as well as the multitude; and certainly, if God caused that all Israel should fall in the wilderness because of their sins, if He did not even spare the single fault of Moses which he himself records, where can men complain justly of the doom that befell such corruptors of the race, sure above all to be the moral destroyers of Israel had they been spared? In fact the children of Israel had not the faith to destroy them as they ought; they had not therefore the fidelity according to God’s word to exterminate the Canaanites, and so much the worse for themselves; for they became the means of dragging Israel into abominations, and thus drew judgments down on them after no long time.

This then will suffice, I trust, to make plain the folly of His own people, God never dealt with any nation with the same strictness as with Israel. We saw that every soul of Israel perished in the wilderness except the two spies who stood for God, even against their fellows as well as the multitude; and certainly, if God caused that all Israel should fall in the wilderness because of their sins, if He did not even spare the single fault of Moses which he himself records, where can men complain justly of the doom that befell such corruptors of the race, sure above all to be the moral destroyers of Israel had they been spared? In fact the children of Israel had not the faith to destroy them as they ought; they had not therefore the fidelity according to God’s word to exterminate the Canaanites, and so much the worse for themselves; for they became the means of dragging Israel into abominations, and thus drew judgments down on them after no long time.

This then will suffice, I trust, to make plain the folly of distrustng scripture, and the wisdom of always setting to our seal that God is true, and that He is righteous. In short God is always good, true, wise, and right.

Remark another thing. When Israel did besiege a city, God showed His care, even if it were only for a tree good for human food, binding it with His own hand on His people in the midst of that which proved His face set against the enemies of His glory in the world. Nevertheless He would not allow them even there to act without consideration where was any food fit for the use of man.

The trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down {Deut. 20:20}; but in case of those that furnished food, it was absolutely forbidden. Such is God, acting in time as He counsels from eternity to eternity, but condescending to speak and to exercise the thoughts of His people about the smallest matters for this life.

In Deut. 21 we have some particulars of a remarkable nature, and peculiar to this book, on which a few words must be said.

If one be found slain in the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who hath slain him {Deut. 21:1}.

What was to be done?

Then thy elders and thy judges shall come forth, and they shall measure unto the cities which are round about him that is slain. All was to be done with great care.

And it shall be that the city which is next to the slain man -- God takes care even of that --

And it shall be that the city which is next unto the slain man, even the elders of that city shall take an heifer, which hath not been wrought with, and which hath not drawn in the yoke. And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer unto a rough valley, which is neither eared nor sown (a figure of this world),

and shall strike off the heifer’s neck there in the valley: and the priests the sons of Levi shall come near; for them Jehovah thy God hath chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of Jehovah; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried: and all the elders of that city, that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley: and they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. Be merciful, Jehovah, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel’s charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them [Deut. 21:2-8].

It is just so that Christ has been found slain in this world: God is willing to regard it so. He is found slain among them, among Israel themselves. This appears to be a gracious provision when God shall have cleared the godly remnant in the days that are coming, and these are about to be made the strong nation, and to enter on the land of their inheritance once more and for ever. It is the means by which God will wash them from the taint of blood in the land. He will not excuse them because their hands did not actually do the deed. It was of course done long before; still it was done there. Christ was found in the valley which was nearest to them. Hence, for Israel of that day, God will not pass by the fact. He will neither take excuses for it on the one hand, nor on the other will He judge them as irrevocably guilty. He will provide for them when grace has turned their heart, that the very sacrifice of Christ may serve in all its expiatory power to clear them of the guilt of shedding His precious blood. We must remember that the death of Christ has two aspects if closely looked at whether on man’s part or on God’s side. Humanly it was the worst possible guilt; in God’s grace it is what alone cleanses from guilt. The man who cannot discern between these two truths, or who sacrifices one or other, has a great deal to learn of scripture, and indeed of his own sin and God’s grace. Here we have the type. The very principle
disputed in a recent and painful controversy seems to me unanswerably decided by the Spirit in this shadow of good things to come.

Further: supposing there was the case of a wife, or the child of one that was beloved.

If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have borne him children, both the beloved and the hated, and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: but he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath {Deut. 21:15-17}.

Here too we have in God's ways another remarkable type; for having first chosen Israel, He afterwards (as we know, because of their sin) was pleased to take the Gentiles to Himself. The Jews refused the testimony; and as for the Gentiles, it is said that they will hear. Nevertheless here He gives a beautiful provision to show that He has not done with that which shall come forth as the firstborn son of the apparently hated one -- of her he had first. On the contrary this is the very one for whom the rights of the inheritance will be preserved when repentance will be wrought in their hearts. Thus it is evident that the godly remnant of the latter day will have its rights reserved, according to His own precious word in this chapter.

But another direction follows. There is the case of the stubborn and rebellious son. To whom does this apply? To the people of Israel in their obstinate selfwill and irreverence toward Jehovah their God. In all sorts of forms God sets it forth. Alas! when blessing is wrought, when the contrite heart of the remnant desires the Messiah, they will not all turn to God. Contrariwise the great mass of the nation will be more than ever rebellious and apostate. The end of this age will not see united hearts among the Jews, but a people severed and broken -- a people with the widest possible breaches among them: some whose hearts are truly touched by grace, as we have seen, who are destined to the place of the firstborn on the earth; most, on the other hand, who will fight to the last against God, and reject to their own perdition His testimony. This is the stubborn son; and as to him it is said,

Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place: and they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard.

And such has Israel been.

And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear {Deut. 21:19-21}.

But the chapter does not even close with this. There is another scene, and a deeper one than all.

And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which Jehovah thy God giveth thee for an inheritance {Deut. 21:22, 23}.

This may not call for lengthened remark, but assuredly for solemn reflection and profound thankfulness at the grace in which God turns the deepest shame and suffering which man heaped on Jesus to the purposes of redeeming love; for who knows not that Jesus took this place of the curse on the cross, to bear our judgment in the sight of God? He too knew what it was to be hanged on a tree -- knew what it was to be made a curse for us. Our souls have already entered into the blessing. But all shows how thoroughly Jesus is the object of the Holy Ghost; for a chapter, which looked somewhat obscure at first sight, is rendered plain and luminous and full of instruction the moment we bring Jesus in and see Him in relationship with His ancient people. Its substance and its spirit of course are equally true of the Christian, and in a higher way. It is entirely a question of whether we use the true light, or overlay the word of God with our own darkness. Unbelief not merely fails to see, but excludes and denies the only light of men.

In Deut. 22 we have a group of different institutions as to questions of righteousness, care, love, tenderness -- the smallest matters as well as the greatest -- but they are so numerous, in themselves purposely the minutest as well as the most momentous, that to dwell on them one by one would occupy much too long for the present design. All can understand however how the great object here is that God would form the heart of His people in this relationship and measure according to His own affections. God would give them not bare righteous but holy thoughts, and not this only, but mingled with tenderness when called for. This will be found true if the contents of the chapter be duly weighed.

But there is another consideration. In Deut. 23 He would teach us differences in our judgments and thoughts of others, and consequently in our conduct towards them. There are few things that men so much dislike in general as to be taunted with partiality -- specially those who may have a sense of righteousness according to God. Yet we must distinguish (though without partiality, which is always wrong); but if we are wise, we shall not be driven out of the painstaking and conscientious appraisal of all the circumstances which require to be taken into account; and we shall weigh also what God may give us to judge of each particular case and person, -- for He makes differences, though no respecter of persons. Where it is a question of His grace, difference there is none, but a dead level. On the one hand sin is a great leveller in presence of His eternal judgment; on the other hand grace is no less so in an opposite way, but there it is a question of the value of Christ and His work for bringing souls into His presence in favor and in peace. Alike lost in sins, we are alike saved from them by the faith of Jesus. But then in saying this we have said all here, and come into a host of differences on either side. This seems to me most clearly shown in our chapter.

For instance, see how this applies to those forbidden to enter into the congregation of Jehovah. And here note that it is His congregation; for this is the great subject-matter of the
book: all finds its center and its spring in Him. It is not merely the congregation of Israel; and this is an important thing to bear in mind as a matter of practical dealing. One will never act right in the church, if he looks at it merely as the church of saints, though in itself perfectly true. It is the church of God; and although we know many shrunk from this as high ground, it is just so much the better. If it be the truth, can it be too high? We want all that can lift us above our own littleness and our own lowness. We are apt to get low enough without abandoning the only leverage calculated and adequate to give us the elevation we need. We want and have God; but giving up the place and relationship His grace has conferred on us through redemption is not the way to make us lowly. On the contrary the very fact that we bear in mind that it is God’s church is the best and divine mode of making us most sensible of our shortcomings. If we regard it as merely an assembly of the saints, well we know that saints are poor creatures for the matter of that; so that we easily slip from poor thoughts into an excusing of sin; just as, on the other side, the flesh professing the highest theory will the sooner make itself manifest. If it be God’s church, it becomes a serious matter how we act and how we speak.

In this case then we find that Jehovah lays down certain things as irreconcilable with their place and relationship to Him. They must carry themselves in a way suitable to His congregation; and amongst the rest

An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of Jehovah; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of Jehovah for ever; because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt {Deut. 23:3, 4}.

Jehovah does not forget where it is a matter of government. He does forget (and it is precisely what He does) when it is a question of grace. Further He says,

Thou shalt not seek their peace, nor their prosperity all thy days for ever {Deut. 23:6}.

But it is remarkable too that when speaking about the Edomite -- and I am not aware that it is ever said that He hated either of them as He hated Esau; but when speaking of the Edomite -- He says,

He is thy brother.

So with those that once opposed them,

Thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian, because thou wast a stranger in his land {Deut. 23:7}.

Thus, we see, it is not a question of hatred on our part, but of subjection to God, of taking the direction of our thoughts from His word, and of forming our judgments and our conduct according to it. I have no doubt at all that, when we weigh scripture, we shall in due time see the wisdom of it all. But it is not a question of how far we can appreciate the wisdom of God. Our business is to believe and obey Him; and there is the way in which He cares for the least of us. The simplest child of God may follow and be subject to His word.

Very probably the wisest have a difficulty in entering into all His wisdom -- nay, I am sure that they have. It is only a matter of very gradually growing up into His truth and infinite mind; but still it is open to us in the written word. We are invited to read and understand; for He has revealed what was wholly beyond man to His children by the Spirit, and the Spirit searches all things, yea the deep things of God. It is our privilege to say “we know:” who can then put limits to the gracious power of God in giving us really to understand His ways? But understand or not, the word of God is imperative in its authority, and there is the greatest comfort too when we have done a thing simply because it is the will of our God. Then we begin to learn how blessed it is, how good and wise. This is far better than slowly coming to a judgment of our own and then acting. If we gave up faith for such guidance, how deep and irreparable the loss! In the first instance if we accept His word with simplicity, the wisdom given is a fruit of His grace instead of being ground gained to our credit. In the one case we glorify ourselves because we count it wise for reasons we think good; in the other case we are subject to God because it is His own will in His word. There is nothing so good as this, nothing so holy and humble as the wisdom of faith.

In the chapter before us various regulations of this kind are laid down. There is also the prohibition of anything that was uncomely and unbefitting for the camp. What camp? The camp of Israel? Of course, but much more. It was natural that there should be infirmity in the camp of men. This is not the question, but whether it be not the camp of Jehovah. Whatever the allowance when we remember that we are men, God would have His people trained up in the feeling that they have Him in their midst, and that all must be decided by what suits His presence.

So again in Deut. 24 the question of divorce is treated, where we must say that a certain allowance was made them for the willfulness of man in this respect. This is no matter of opinion; for our Lord Jesus Christ has ruled in this. Nobody can understand the law aright, or the Scriptures of the Old Testament in general, unless he bear in mind that in it God is dealing with man as such. Consequently, though there is wisdom and goodness and righteousness, it is man in the flesh under trial, and hence it is not yet the perfection of the divine mind displayed. This last is only found when Christ comes. The first Adam is not the Second; and it was with the first man that God was then at work. No part of the law lacks the wisdom of God; but, Christ not being yet revealed, He did not as a fact go beyond man as he then was. To have brought in what was suitable for the Second man could not have applied to Israel in their then condition.

And God, it seems to me, has distinctly marked this in Scripture even in an outward fashion, inasmuch as He has not been pleased to give us His word even in the same tongue. The standing witness against the folly of confounding the two Testaments finds its reproof in the patent fact that the Old Testament is in one language, the New Testament in another. So plain a difference on its very face one might have thought it impossible to overlook; but even believers accept shortsightedness in divine things, and just so far as tradition influences them; for people scarcely think about Scripture, and thus they do not know how to apply the clearest and surest facts, as well as God’s words, before all eyes.
But there is much more than the use of different languages -- there is the difference between the first man fallen into sin and the Second man who first descended into the lower parts of the earth, and then ascended above the heavens after accomplishing the mighty work of redemption. Assuredly this is all the difference possible, and it is just what reigns between the Old and the New Testament, not in the hearts of saints, but as a state of things. Consequently the relationship is altogether of another sort. Hence the provisions that were suitable and appropriate, when God had as an object before Him the first man, could not apply to the Second, under whose revelation and redemption we find ourselves. This must be borne in mind if we would judge rightly about these types, or the law in general which made nothing perfect.

Again we find in the rest of Deut. 24 as well as in Deut. 25 a number of precepts of mercy and goodness as to the people even in the most ordinary matters of household life -- not the wife only but one’s fellows, servants too, strangers, harvests and vineyards, down to the care of the cattle. The poor man who was in fault and got beaten was not forgotten. There must be no over-passing a certain measure, nor be anything that would make one’s brother vile. Stripes may be due and needful; but there must be nothing to destroy respect. Jehovah finds His own interest in all the belongings of His people, and He would train up in His own nurture and admonition -- an important point for us to consider betimes.

Further, we find that anything like an advantage taken where feelings were raised against another is rebuked in the sternest manner. A righteous and equal measure is insisted on, But Amalek must not slip out of mind.

Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when Jehovah thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it {Deut. 25:17-19}.

Now, who will dare to say that this was wrong? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do and say what is righteous?

And this gives me occasion to press a few words from the New Testament, often forgotten in its spirit when its words may be remembered. It is the part of a Christian to abhor evil as much as to love what is good. Beware of the smallest sympathy with him who counts it good to be indifferent, lukewarm, not zealous, who likes no doubt what is pleasant and kindly in itself, but without detestation of that which dishonors God. There is a total defect in the Christian character which (to speak typically) has not the badger’s skin as well as the covering of blue. Our Lord Jesus felt strongly against evil. He alone is perfection, and has shown this for our profit and example. Here we see the same principle inculcated in Amalek’s case.

The truth is quite contrary to the spirit of the age, entirely different from what people call a sweet tone, or the spirit of Christ. They know little of Christ who talk thus. The fact is that had they heard Jesus denounce religious forms and men who walked not in faith, had they or their friends fallen under the censure which filled His soul -- say in Matt. 23 -- it is to be feared that a similar strain of thought and feeling would have condemned the Son of God. This is of the more importance for those who, like us Christians, have to walk in communion with Christ and His cross at the same time that the power of evil reigns in the world. We cannot escape trial of a serious kind, and to take it in grace -- such exactly is Christianity in practice. The millennium will be the overthrow of the power of evil, and consequently righteousness will govern. But what brings in the difficulty now is the perfection of God’s ways in Christianity, while outwardly evil remains.

God permits, but lifts the Christian above, the very worst evil. It rose up against the Son of God Himself; and the Christian follows Him and His cross. Accordingly this is precisely where and how he has to walk. The evil God permits to rage to the uttermost, but grace and truth in Christ in the power of the Spirit is brought into his heart and governs his ways. Hence he is called to abhor evil just as much as to love that which is good; and the heart which does not show divine hatred of evil has really but scant love for what is good. The one is the measure of the other: they are inseparable from Christ, and should be from the Christian.

In Deut. 26 we arrive at a brighter scene: we anticipate Israel entering on their own land. Here we find a relief from the numerous exhortations which suppose dangers on every side. On the contrary blessing flows richly in prospect; for God is seen accomplishing what He had promised His people of old. If He has brought them into the land, they come in grateful acknowledgment of His grace.

And it shall be when thou art come in unto the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee far an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein, that thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that Jehovah thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose to place his name there. And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto Jehovah thy God {Deut. 26:1-3}.

Here then is the full confession that God’s hand had accomplished what His mouth had promised. This in a higher atmosphere is the characteristic of the Christian. It is the same principle, not of promises only, but these made good in Christ. The Christian is not merely a man that is passing through the wilderness, but already blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Both are true. If we have our march through the wilderness, we have also our portion in the heavenly land.

Now what becomes of him who is conscious of this place? For what does God look? Remember, it is the place of every Christian, and a part of the ministry of Christ to put every Christian into the consciousness of it. He cannot worship God fully unless he have in his soul the certainty of his nearness to God through Christ and His work as the ground of his relationship. As to his body, he is no doubt in the earth, still...
surrounded with what is far from God; but when he looks up into the presence of God, he knows that his home is there. It is not merely that he will find his home there, but that his life and righteousness being there, the Holy Ghost has come down to give him a present link with Christ in glory. The consequence is that there is that in him which corresponds with the Israelite’s here bringing of the fruits of the land before Jehovah. His praise of God is to be founded on the Spirit’s leading him to worship according to the new place of blessing, but with a far deeper sense than ever of his unworthiness in the light of such grace on God’s part.

Thou shalt speak and say before Jehovah thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: and the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: and when we cried unto the Jehovah God of our fathers, Jehovah heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labor, and our oppression: and Jehovah brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: and he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first-fruits of the land.

He had been brought into Canaan, as it is said, which thou, O Jehovah, hast given me {Deut. 26:10}. And thou shalt set it before Jehovah thy God {Deut. 26:5-10}.

In whatever form the most important exercise of life in the Christian is worship.

And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which Jehovah thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you {Deut. 26:11}.

This is another trait; that is, the heart going forth towards those that are poor, despised, miserable in the earth. This is supposed to follow afterwards.

Then, further, we find a peculiar direction as to the giving of tithes.

When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite {Deut. 26:12} (it was a special tithe),

then thou shalt say before Jehovah thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite {Deut. 26:13}.

It is not only that the heart considers what God has done for it, but it is brought also to regard those that are outwardly friendless in the world as the special object of our care. Are we learning such a duty before our God, and caring for them according to that which His bounty has given us? This is what is next introduced. Thus the Israelite was called not only to an expression of praise, but to the confession, in an exercised conscience, how he used the place of blessing into which he was brought; how far he diffused the sense of the blessing around.

Last of all is a prayer; for no matter how God may bless us, to whatever extent He is pleased to make us a means of blessing to others (and both these are clearly the points we have had), there is this further consideration -- that we are not taken out of the place of dependence. Worship does not weaken prayer.

Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which thou hast given us {Deut. 26:15}.

Now we desire a blessing for the people of God, suitable to the position of grace in which we stand: This makes us feel the need of God moment by moment.

This day Jehovah thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments {Deut. 26:16}.

Again, obedience, instead of being in any measure enfeebled, is strengthened by the sense of the nearness to God into which we are brought.

Thou has avouched Jehovah this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice: and Jehovah hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments; and to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honor; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto Jehovah thy God, as he hath spoken {Deut. 26:17-19}.

Next we come to another and a very important division of this book. The first remark I would make is that we must beware of confounding Deut. 27 with Deut. 28. The two chapters are distinct in principle. It is not merely a question of form, but they are altogether distinct in character. A scripture which will help much to put this in a clear light is the use that the apostle makes of Deut. 27 in citing it in Gal. 3. He does not quote from Deut. 28. One may boldly say that it would have been incompatible with the object of the Spirit of God to have there cited anything hence but from Deut. 27. Certainly such is the fact; and in scripture, if not in nature fallen as it is, whatever is is right.

Now this calls for our notice. In Gal. 3:9, 10 it is said,

So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

This is a quotation from the last verse of Deut. 27. Of what is the apostle treating? Not merely of that which pertains to the present life. He is looking at law as that which brings in the curse for ever. Using this light then, it is not a question of present things, but of a curse in the sight of God. This gives the true key to the passage as compared with Deut. 28. We shall see that the blessings and the curses of Deut. 28 are strictly those that pertain to the actual curse of man here below.

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In Deut 27 we read,

And Moses with the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, Keep all the commandments which I command you this day,

and he directs that when they passed over Jordan they were to set up great stones.

And it shall be on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee, that thou shalt set thee up great stones, and plaster them with plaster: and thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law, when thou art passed over, that thou mayest go in unto the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee, a land that floweth with milk and honey; as the Jehovah God of thy fathers hath promised thee. Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaster them with plaster. And there shalt thou build an altar unto Jehovah thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them. Thou shalt build the altar of Jehovah thy God of whole stones: and thou shalt offer burnt-offerings thereon unto Jehovah thy God: and thou shalt offer peace-offerings, and shalt eat there, and rejoice before Jehovah thy God {Deut. 27:2-7}.

But further he says (Deut. 27:12, 13),

These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people, when ye come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin: and these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

Thus the charge is given that half the tribes were to stand on one mountain to bless, the other half on another mountain to curse. Here we find how it is carried out.

And the Levites shall speak, and say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice, Cursed . . . . {Deut. 27:14-26},

and so it was through every verse to the last.

How comes this? Where are the blessings? Nowhere. Nothing remains but the curses. Is not this solemn? The point is, as the apostle puts it, the bearing of the law on souls before God. By Moses’ word half the tribes are directed to take one mountain to pronounce the blessing, the other half to pronounce the curse; but when all has been carried out, scripture has nothing to record but the curse, without a word of the blessing whatever. It is impossible for man to find blessing from the law in the presence of God when we come to its positive application. No matter what may be the call, when we stand before the fact, there is nothing but a curse to speak of. One scarcely knows a more solemn scripture, or more characteristic of this book.

It is not that there is the least unwillingness on God’s part to bless, far from it; and the charge was given to bless as much as to curse. But alas! the creature, the first man, was under probation by the law of God; and the result is, and can only be, that if it depends on man, the only thing he gets when we come to the fact is the curse. The curses were pronounced, and not a word about blessings. There was a call and due preparation to bless; but in result there were no blessings to pronounce, nothing but the curse. And what an awful thing it is that in this Christendom of ours, after the gospel itself has been brought in at the cost of the death of Jesus the Son of God, this is what is thundered out still -- the curse and not the blessing! Is it a legitimate excuse, that an entire want of spiritual understanding prevails? Why should it exist with Deuteronomy commented on by the apostle Paul to the Galatians? There is no want of divine light there. What we see in both is the perfect matchless wisdom of God. In the one Moses speaks of the awful issue, himself full of love to the people, and of fervent desires for them; in the other, the light which the gospel gives by Paul confirms it: on the ground of law there remains nothing for man but the curse. Blessings may be held out, but there is no hand that can take up the blessing, any more than a mouth here to pronounce them: there is a dead and ominous silence as to the blessing. The curses sound out from the mountain of cursing, and are recorded in all their minute sternness; but there is no blessing here reported from the mountain of blessing. Not a hint of these is given in Deut. 27. In order to eke out an appearance of blessing, men have confounded the chapters and their wholly distinct bearings. They have looked for the blessing in the next chapter. They are quite wrong. There is not the slightest ground for such a connection.

Let us turn to Deut. 28 and the distinction will be seen with singular clearness.

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of Jehovah thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that Jehovah thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth {Deut. 28:1}.

It is merely national. It has nothing to do with the soul in the sight of God.

And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of Jehovah thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field {Deut. 28:2, 3}.

This is not what a poor soul wants. It in no way meets a sense of guilt or a dread of judgment. The sinner needs something which will stand for ever. He wants what will be in heaven, and not merely in the field or in the city. He wants acceptance for himself with God, not merely to receive in his basket and in his store; there is nothing of that sort here. Thus the distinction is radical and quite plain. What shows that these are not the blessings which were to have been pronounced on the mount of blessing is that we find at the end of the blessings these analogous curses follow after Deut. 28:15.

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of Jehovah thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field {Deut. 28:15, 16}.

In the previous chapter it is no question of where we are cursed, but rather of the person cursed. Here it is a particular curse which falls on a particular sphere.
In Deut. 27 it is an absolute and a personal curse; it is not in mere circumstances, however great the change. Such is the difference. In short then in this chapter we have the profound intimation of what the law comes to in man’s -- the first man’s -- hands. Whatever may be the goodness of God, man is ruined. The consequence is, there is only a curse and no blessing.

In Deut. 28 we have law, not looked at in its own nature as a question between God and man, but regarded as the rule of earthly government, as having to do with the circumstances of man. And here accordingly we have the blessing on the one hand and the curse on the other. Nothing can be plainer than the teaching conveyed when the idea is once seized.

It is in vain to say that we receive the blessing which belongs to Deut. 27. We do not. There we get the curse and no blessing. But in Deut. 28 we get certain blessings and then curses. Thus as a part of this chapter we have the state in which Israel was to be found to the present day.

Jehovah shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies. Jehovah will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou cannot be healed. Jehovah shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart {Deut. 28:25-28},

and so on. This is detailed.

And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither Jehovah shall lead thee {Deut. 28:37}.

It is not a question therefore of dealing according to God’s nature, but a matter of His dispensational ways with a nation in this world, and nothing more.

In Deut. 29 another important point comes up -- a change still more manifest. We have the fact that

These are the words of the covenant, which Jehovah commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb {Deut. 29:1}.

Now it is important to bear in mind that, if it had been merely the covenant made in Horeb, the children of Israel could never have entered the land at all. It was necessary, according to the far-counseling wisdom and mercy of God, that there should be another covenant. I say not the new one, but that God should bring in fresh terms, and not merely insist on the strict application of the law that was pronounced in Horeb. He brings in governmental mercy. Thus God now as it were says, Here you are on the very borders of the land, and I will bring you in. You must take care how you behave when you are there. Hence it is God making fresh terms for the very purpose of putting His people in the land without compromising Himself. This is here shown with care.

The end of the chapter gives us even more. When the people had altogether and publicly failed, grace can bring out from God Himself the only suited remedy. Now Israel take their place before God. They are called to keep the words of the covenant; the very children are brought in and put before Jehovah, with solemn warning against idolatry, as well as other acts of rebellion. But the point lies here:

The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law {Deut. 29:29}.

The character of this has been often noticed before; but it cannot be too much insisted on always; that grace, though in a distant and enigmatic manner, alludes to an unrevealed secret, whereby, when the people have utterly failed, as we have seen, on the ground of law, God will not fail to find ways and means of justifying them by faith. It is not merely words by which He can bring them all provisionally into the land, but means as yet secret by which He can justify them in the face of all their faults, and work in their hearts according to what is in His hear -- in short, His secrets of grace.

Accordingly all is strongly confirmed by that which Deut. 30 reveals. Jehovah takes them up where they are. He supposes them driven out of every land under heaven; yet that in their low estate their heart, no longer haughty but humbled, turns before Himself.

Thou shalt return and obey the voice of Jehovah, and do all His commandments which I command thee this day. And Jehovah thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, &c. . . . if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of Jehovah thy God to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto Jehovah thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it {Deut. 30:8-12}.

Now these words, it is notorious, are applied by the apostle Paul in Rom. 10; and we never can overlook the applications of the New Testament without losing a deeply interesting and weighty key for understanding the Old. For what does the apostle use them? For the very purpose which has been already hinted in the close of the last chapter. The children of Israel had completely ruined themselves under the law. They had failed before God. The righteousness which the law claimed had only proved their actual unrighteousness. What was to become of them? Christ is brought in -- the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth {Rom. 10:4}.

Hence therefore the apostle by the Spirit gives the passage of Deuteronomy this admirable turn, that it is no question of going up to heaven to find the Savior, nor of going down into the bowels of the earth to bring Him from the dead -- that the gospel brings the word of salvation near to the very door, in thy mouth and in thy heart {Deut. 30:14}.

It is only to believe and confess the risen Lord Jesus. Therefore, in virtue of the gospel of God, let them take the full everlasting blessing of His grace, once wicked, defiled, lost, but now washed, sanctified, justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God {1 Cor. 6:11}, if I may quote another scripture.
On this principle will God surely bless His ancient people Israel, scattered and broken among the Gentiles, when it becomes impossible therefore, as far as their state is concerned, to carry on their Jewish ritual. What will become of them? Their heart bows to the word of God; they look up to the Messiah, and God will work in grace. Powerless, sensible of past wickedness, full of darkness (for I have no doubt that they are those described in the end of Isa. 50:10 as the servants of Jehovah who walk in darkness, and see no light), nevertheless their heart turns to Jehovah, and they stay on their God -- a condition that may not suit the Christian now, but which grace will open to a Jew then. Such is precisely the happy turn furnished by the apostle in Romans, only of course with a fuller application to the Christian; but it is on the same principle that God will deal with the remnant of the Jews by and by.

After this, in Deut. 31, we find Moses about to close his ministry. He had given, so to speak, his last discourse, and addresses to them a most solemn warning, telling them that he knew the rebellion of which they would be guilty: Joshua is charged, and the Levites also.

But Moses does not end without a song (Deut. 32); and this song is grounded on the secret things of God’s grace, though it also embrace the judgments of the latter day. Not ignorant of the evil, he looks onward to the blessing that would surely come to them. He deeply feels what they would do against Jehovah in their stiff-necked folly and ingratitude; but he beholds in prophetic vision what He will do for them.

Accordingly he says,

Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth {Deut. 32:1}.

Because he would publish the name of Jehovah, they were to ascribe greatness to their God. He is the rock, abiding in unshakeable strength for His people. Not they but He is this tower of strength.

His doing is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth without iniquity, just and right is he {Deut. 32:4}.

As for the people, it was manifest what they were. The corruption was theirs, not His; it is that of His children, theirs is the spot -- a perverse and crooked generation. The lawgiver indignantly reproves their ingratitude, and clenches it the more by reminding them that it was no new thought on God’s part. Their place in the world to His glory was no last resource that by reminding them that it was no new thought on God’s part. Their place in the world to His glory was no last resource that by reminding them that it was no new thought on God’s part.

Alas! Jehovah then has to prepare arrows against His people, and patience to that people and their falling into every kind of iniquity, sacrificing even to demons ("he-goats" they are contemptuously called), not to God, but to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee {Deut. 32:17, 18}.

Then Moses sings of His wonderful love and goodness and patience to that people and their falling into every kind of iniquity, sacrificing even to demons ("he-goats" they are contemptuously called), not to God, but to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee {Deut. 32:17, 18}.

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When the Most High (Elion) divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel {Deut. 32:8}.

This, it is true, has not the eternal character of our election as Christians (Eph. 1). The difference is just and appropriate. When God reveals His counsels in Christ touching His children, His choice is declared to be before the foundation of the world. Not so with Israel. It is always said to be in time, though just as sovereign as in our case. Eternal election would not suit that of a nation. The choice of Israel is strictly connected with the earth. The speciality in His choice of us is that it is outside creation; it attaches to the eternity of God Himself, and is altogether apart from the created scene that was about to be ruined by man and Satan. God would have saints to share His nature morally and to enjoy Himself, no less than angels to do His pleasure as His servants. What had that to do with creation? It is a question of God forming according to His own wisdom and love those who would be able to share His mind and enjoy His love. And this is done by Christ His Son, and made known by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. It is altogether above a question of creature condition. Nobody doubts that those who were to be so blessed did in fact form part of the creation, yea, in its deepest ruin and guilt. We had our part in that world which rejected and crucified Jesus. Then comes in the triumph of grace. It was necessary that there should be not merely eternal life given us in Christ but redemption. Life would have been enough, had we never been sinners. But we were guilty and lost, and therefore Christ comes to die in atonement. He took our judgment on Himself and suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. The consequence is that He in His death on the cross conciliated what was otherwise irreconcilable, and made it righteous for God to deliver us, as well as free to bring out withal those eternal counsels which He had in Christ before the world was. With Israel the case is different. There, as we have said, the election is in time, the people separated to Jehovah in the midst of the bounds assigned to the other nations among the sons of Adam; for it is no question here of the divine nature, but of the human race.

He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For Jehovah’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance {Deut. 32:8, 9}.

Then Moses sings of His wonderful love and goodness and patience to that people and their falling into every kind of iniquity, sacrificing even to demons ("he-goats" they are contemptuously called), not to God, but to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee {Deut. 32:17, 18}.

Alas! Jehovah then has to prepare arrows against His people, has to pour out His vengeance even on His loved Israel -- more guilty than any other, and in fact to leave them for a no-people (the Gentiles), by whom He would provoke the Jews to jealousy. 74 Then the heathen take advantage of God’s

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74. It is hard to imagine a greater lack of spiritual intelligence than is displayed in the remarks of Dr. Davidson (Introduction to O. T. i. 391-393) and the German authors he controverts. The choice lies between deeper or shallower pits of error. "The thirty-second chapter, as far as verse 43, contains Moses’ song referred to in 31:19, 22, 30. It is pretty clear that the song was not written by the Deuteronomist himself, who never appears as a poet, and from whose style it strongly differs. Neither can it have been written by the Jehovist; for the difference of diction and manner is too great. It proceeded from some unknown poet, whose historical allusions and linguistic peculiarities show that he lived after Moses (?) and even after Solomon (!!). Thus the fifteenth verse presupposes that the Israelites had passed through highly prosperous and peaceful times; and in the twenty-first the people
indignation against His people, till He at last in mercy to Israel will rise up to deal with their enemies.

For Jehovah shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left. And he shall say, Where are their gods, which ye danced with in the tabernacles of Hamath? The mountains of.squeeze them, and they shall be gathered together. Then will I make mine hand to come against you, and smite you and take you away from mine earth: then will I let the一部 of 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 {Deut. 32:36, 43}.

Then not only will God deliver His people Israel, but He will cause the very nations themselves to rejoice with His people in the enlarging circle of His grace; for though the principle apply under the gospel, it is only in the millennial reign that the full import of their predicted joy together will be realized.

In Deut. 33 we have a blessing pronounced on the various tribes of Israel. This may be entered into rather more closely just now, though one cannot hope to do so with satisfaction in so small a space. Let me only just say that it is altogether in reference to the land which the people were on the point of entering. This is perhaps the chief difference as compared with Jacob’s blessing. In the latter case notice was taken of the tribes from the beginning of their history to the end, and apart from their possessing the land or not; whereas the blessing that Moses pronounces here is in the strictest subordination to the great object of Deuteronomy. From first to last the point of the book is God’s bringing His people into the land, and putting them into a relationship as immediate with Himself as was consistent with the first man. This we have systematically and always: so the blessing here is suitable to it. Moses does not therefore show us historically the course of things as when Jacob prophesied, but a more specific benediction of the people in view of their place in relation to Jehovah in the land.

The song opens with the vision of Jehovah coming from Sinai and shining forth from Seir as well as Paran. It is His judicial manifestation to His people, His saints, around Him in the wilderness: from His right hand [went] a fiery law for them.

Yea, He loveth the peoples: all his saints are in thy hand; and they sat down at thy feet, each receive thy decisions {Deut. 33:3}.

The special place of Moses is then named as commanding a law, the possession of the congregation of Jacob; he is king in Jeshurun when the heads of the people, the tribes of Israel, gathered together.

As to the first-born, the word is, Let Reuben live and not die, and his men be few. 76

The next, though a singular choice in appearance, is ordered in divine wisdom so as to bring forward that tribe which would take the place of Reuben, politically soon, but eventually according to the counsels of God. For of Judah Christ was to be born after the flesh.

And this is for Judah; and he said, Hear, O Jehovah, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people: let his hands be numerous for him, and be thou an help from his adversaries {Deut. 33:7}.

We know that the Jews have long had a separate place; but the day is coming when Judah and Israel shall be joined in one person according to the expressive symbol of Ezekiel, which may illustrate the language of Moses.

His own tribe has then his blessing.

And of Levi he said, Thy Thummim and thy Urim are...
for thy holy [i.e. pious] one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; who said of his father and of his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children; for they kept thy word, and guarded thy covenant. They shall teach thy judgments to Jacob, and thy law to Israel: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt-offering upon thine altar. 77 Bless, Jehovah, his force, and accept the work of his hands: strike through the loins of those that rise up against him, and of those that hate him, that they rise not again {Deut. 33:8-11}.

The blessing of Benjamin 78 alludes to Jehovah’s dwelling there; for Jerusalem was within the limits of that tribe which Judah just skirted. Joseph has his full twofold portion in the land. Zebulun’s blessing 79 is rather without, Issachar’s within. Gad’s haste to get rich appears, though he shared the trials of the people, Dan’s warlike impetuousity is noted; and Naphtali’s peaceful satisfaction with his portion; and Asher’s acceptance among his brethren, and abundant resources and vigor.

Nothing can exceed the grandeur of the closing words of Moses; and they will assuredly be fulfilled in the future brightness and glory of restored Israel. He has dealt with His people according to the fiery law in His right hand; but He has not exhausted the resources of His tender mercy; nay, the best wine is kept to the last, to be brought in by Him whom they knew not in His humiliation but will own to theirs, yet in the end with exceeding joy when He returns in glory to change the water of purifying after their manner into that which gladdens the heart of God and man.

There is none like the God of Jeshurun, riding the heavens for thy help, and for his excellency the skies. The God of ages is a refuge, and underneath the everlasting arms; and he shall drive away the enemy from thy presence, and say, Destroy. Israel dwelleth in safety, the fountain 80 of Jacob on a land of corn and new wine; his heavens also drop down dew. Happy thou, O Israel: who is like thee, O people saved by Jehovah, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! And thy enemies shall lie to thee; and thou shalt tread on their high places {Deut. 33:26-29}.

Moses (Deut. 34) goes up to the top of Pisgah, and there Jehovah points out to him the land in detail. It was impossible that the fault of Moses could be slighted without weakening the authority of law. There was surely righteousness in the ways of God; but this did not in the smallest degree hinder the perfectness of His love to Moses. It was part of His government to chasten his fault: His grace to Moses remained entire. Had it been possible, consistently with the ways of God (which it was not), that Moses should have entered the land, what grief to Moses to have beheld the unfaithfulness of His people, their slighting of His law, their imperfect conquest of the enemy, their readiness to turn back to iniquity and idolatry even in that land! Can this be compared with the blessedness of looking down on it from beside Jehovah -- not seeing it in the hands of man, imperfectly rescued from the Canaanites, but God Himself calling it already the land of this tribe and of that, and thus giving His servant’s heart to look to the time when no Canaanite should be in the land?

Faith has always the best portion.

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77. Thus, if Simeon disappear, Levi gains a good degree by fidelity at the severest crisis in the desert history of Israel. No doubt the word in Deut. 33 is supposed to be after that in Gen. 49, but there is not the smallest ground for the assumption of incredulity that the writer of the one lived after the other. As the representation of Scripture is that Moses wrote both, so the differences in the view taken on each occasion are perfectly compatible and indeed remarkably verified. Levi is involved in the sentence with Simeon according to Gen. 49. But Deut. 33, though it omits Simeon, does not reverse the scattering predicted of Levi by Jacob; but it turns that very circumstance into a blessing for Israel and an honor to the tribe which covered over their old fault with the truest zeal for Jehovah’s honor and a burning love for the people at all cost to their own feelings and appearances. Ability to plead for man is in proportion to faithfulness for God. The priesthood was within that tribe, and the service of the sanctuary, and the teaching of the people.

78. "Of Benjamin he said, The beloved of Jehovah shall dwell in safety by his means, he shall harbour him all the day, and he shall dwell between his shoulders. " The prophet alludes to Jerusalem as the place of the sanctuary and throne, the city of the great King. But the notion that the language savors of the reign of Josiah or near Jeremiah’s day is wholly unfounded. There was anything but safe tabernacling then for Benjamin. This is yet more evidently refuted in what follows.

For on Joseph the inspiring Spirit dwells largely. “Blessed of Jehovah be his land for the precious things of the heavens, for the dew and for the deep couching beneath, and for the precious things brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things driven out by the moon, and for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things driven out by the moon, and for the chief things of the lasting hills, and for the precious things of the everlasting arms; and he shall dwell between his shoulders. " The prophet alludes to Jerusalem as the place of the sanctuary and throne, the city of the great King. But the notion that the language savors of the reign of Josiah or near Jeremiah’s day is wholly unfounded. There was anything but safe tabernacling then for Benjamin. This is yet more evidently refuted in what follows.

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79. "And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents. They shall call the peoples to the mountain; there they shall sacrifice sacrifices of righteousness; for they shall suck the abundance of the seas, even treasures hidden in the sand. And of Gad he said, Blessed be he that enlargest God: he dwelleth as a lioness, and teareth the arm, also the crown of the head. And he provideth the first part for himself, for there is the portion covered for the lawgiver; and he came with the head of the people; he did the righteousness of Jehovah, and his judgments with Israel. And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion’s whelp; he shall leap from Bashan. And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with good will, and full of the blessing of Benjamin, let him be acceptable to his brethren, and dip his foot in oil: thy shoes iron and copper; and thy strength as thy days. “ Will it be seriously pretended that all this was put forth as a prophecy after the most sweeping storm had fallen on all these tribes, and the last blows were about (continued...)
Lectures

Introductory To the Study

of

The Earlier Historical Books

of

The Old Testament

by

William Kelly

1874
Preface

The volume before the reader has been long delayed through more than usual press of other work on the author. Even late as it now is (for the lectures were delivered some years ago), less has been done than is desirable in the way of developing remarks thrown out orally, which seemed to call for enlargement when correcting the report for the printer. Nevertheless, it is committed to the gracious blessing of the Lord on the Christian reader, with the earnest desire that some help may be afforded in retracing the books of Scripture from Joshua to 2 Samuel. They are books dear to every heart that values the word of God; yet do they often present difficulties to those that know not how to distinguish dispensations, or to read with precision the Old Testament, its types especially, in the light of the New. May He, who alone can make the work edifying to His own or to any souls, deign to use it to the glory of His name.

December, 1874.
The Earlier Historical Books
Lecture 1
Joshua 1–4

The book of Joshua naturally follows the five books of Moses, and indeed is connected more manifestly with those that go before it than might appear to an ordinary reader. It opens not with a mere particle of time nor of transition but of connection. This is not expressed in the English version, but it is the fact in the Hebrew text. Undoubtedly it was the Holy Spirit writing by another servant of the Lord; but He was carrying on the same testimony, and a testimony too for which the book of Deuteronomy more particularly prepares us; for all that book was uttered by Moses when the children of Israel were upon the eve, as it were, of entering the promised land. Here, as elsewhere, it is of great importance that we should clearly apprehend the special object of the Spirit of God in the book. I shall make a few remarks therefore of a general nature in order to present it as clearly as the Lord enables me.

No spiritual person who considers the matter can doubt that what the Spirit of God has been pleased to give us in Joshua, if we take it as typical of blessing to us, is not our passing out of the world into heaven. We are all familiar with the usual way of representing the Jordan as death, and the crossing of the Jordan as the leaving the world for heaven at death. But this is not its true force, though it is a matter of immense importance practically for the soul. If you thus assign its import for heaven after death, you miss the prime object of God in giving it to us for the earth. If you put it off till the future state, present application of its meaning can evidently have no direct place. Not of course but that there may be blessing gathered from particular passages here and there. We know that even those who apply the crossing of Jordan to our departure to be with Christ do not scruple to use the deliverance of Rahab in Josh. 2:6, as they would seek to glean moral profit from every chapter. But I am not now speaking of an application or use in which we all agree, but of what some of us, it may be, have to learn, of what we all, I am sure, have had to learn at one time or another.

On the face of the book there is one plain fact which shows us its real nature or bearing, and that is what the children of Israel did when they crossed the Jordan. Did they enjoy rest? Not so; it was still labor; nay, further, it was conflict with the enemy, and not only the patience of faith in which they had been tried as they passed through the wilderness. There was a beautiful moral order in God putting the hearts of His people to the test where there was nothing around them but the barren sands and Himself. In the desert God was there alone to teach them themselves as well as Himself. This was the great lesson for forty years of pilgrimage; but it is clear that it was, as far as the circumstances were concerned, by no means the place where direct positive blessing was displayed. God was there and then turning every circumstance into blessing by His own grace, by what He said, by what He did, and by what He was to His people. This is most true of the earlier time and scene; but in the book of Joshua we enter upon actual and distinct blessing -- the bestowal of His gifts in love to Israel according to His promise to the fathers, though as yet on the tenure of their fidelity to the covenant of the law. Thus, it was not merely taking them out of what was evil, neither was it the lesson of God in the wilderness -- His proving of and dealings with His people: God was giving what He had promised to give them; and now He was accomplishing it in His power; He was bringing them into the goodly land of Canaan. But all the while in the book of Joshua we hear of the wars of the people. Now this simple fact shows us its true character. Certainly when we leave the world to be actually with the Lord, we shall not have wars. Plainly therefore the crossing of the Jordan does not answer to the quitting the world for rest in the presence of God; but applies to the full change of position for Christians while they are still in the world. How can they be said to cross the Jordan? This is what one desires to bring out simply according to the light furnished by the New Testament, at least as far as God gives ability. We shall find that divine light is abundant, so that we may see the mind of God distinctly.

It is obvious to every thoughtful Christian that a strong link of connection exists between the crossing of the Red Sea and of the Jordan. It is found in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus; but there are two effects sensibly different and of great importance that we should distinguish. Regarded in the type of the Red Sea it is simply setting us apart to God from the world, making us pilgrims while we are passing through it; crossing the Jordan, or the death and resurrection of Christ, in this point of view, does far more. It is the power of that mighty work as bringing us into the possession of our heavenly blessings before we go there. We are made consciously of heaven; we have still to fight before the time is come to rest. In both cases it is not...
that merely is Christ dead and risen, but this applied to us by the Spirit.

On the one hand the passage of the Red Sea is our being dead with Christ and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord as a question of righteousness. We are thus justified from sin, and effectually delivered from Satan’s power. There is no longer a question of dread as to the judgment of God. On the other hand the crossing of the Jordan means our introduction according to the fulness of Christ’s title, even now, into heavenly places. On this basis the Spirit would familiarize us with heavenly things.

Accordingly we are called to set our affection on things above, filled with that which is no doubt altogether a matter of faith, but is none the less real because it is so. There is no more grave error than to suppose that the things of sense are substantial, and that the things of faith are not. There is nothing so true as faith; nor does anything so endure as what rests on God’s word. Grace has given us in Jesus Christ our Lord a kingdom which cannot be moved. I grant you we have to trust Him; we have nothing to show. Are we the poorer for that? Incomparably richer! It is a blessed thing when we learn to trust God’s eyes and not our own, and this is what faith always does. Instead of faith abridging our vision, it enlarges our range infinitely. We may be feeble in seeing, according to such a measure, and undoubtedly we are; but there is such a thing as growth carried on by the Spirit, revealing more of Christ in the scriptures. Having in the word as in Christ that which is divine, there is infinite fulness to grow up into. This is what Christ introduces us to, not when we die as a literal fact, but when we know the power of His death and resurrection, not merely from Satan but from self. Such is the line of truth shadowed in the crossing of the Jordan. It is not deliverance from Egypt: the Red Sea has this import. There in type the world, the scene of Satan’s slavery, is left behind; but across the Jordan is the entrance into the heavenly land.

We shall find therefore by and by another most important difference, which can be merely touched on passingly now. Here circumcision comes in, expressly contrasted with the previous state of things. While they marched through the wilderness there was no such practise. Not a single person was circumcised that was born in the wilderness: no doubt some were there who had been circumcised before. But when they crossed the Jordan, they must not delay; it was imperative then to be circumcised. Clearly therefore it became a question of death to self by Christ, who is gone on high and united us to Himself there; and this is just the point that is meant by it. Thus the person is free to enter into what God gives above; and there is nothing that hinders this more than self unsubdued and unmortified. Circumcision therefore takes place directly the Jordan is passed. However I am now somewhat anticipating; nevertheless it seemed to me necessary to give these few words of a more general nature in order that there might be a simple and clear impression of the exact difference between the two.

Plainly then we have common ground in the Red Sea and the Jordan, but each has that which is special. All is found in Christ our Lord. Only it becomes us that we should not be content with the vague and general thought that we have it all. God means that we should know what we have received as His children, as it is what He has given us. Here the energy of faith comes in; that we be not content with the recognition of the truth that all things are ours, but that we diligently learn of Him what they are. God keeps back no good thing from us. We slight His love if we do not press on to learn and enjoy everything He has revealed. The Spirit that elates, and the conflicts in order to possession.

This then is one of the distinctive points of the Book of Joshua; that Israel is here seen brought into the promised inheritance, and not merely out of the house of bondage into a waste howling wilderness. What mercy to have God in that waste as their companion! It was God leading them into the land where His eyes rested, and in which He could take pleasure -- He did not in the wilderness; He took pleasure in His people there. And He was surely showing them what He was, and that He would eventually bring them into the good land; but it was not then a question of entering into the given blessings of Emmanuel’s land. This we shall find in the Book of Joshua.

Let us now look a little more particularly into some details of the chapters I shall glance over tonight.

Moses is dead, and Joshua takes his place; that is, Christ is represented both by him who was dead and by him who is alive. Thus it was Christ whether bringing out of the world or conducting through the wilderness, and now Christ in a new type -- the captain of salvation who is at the head of Israel in the land of Canaan. But, as we know, it is the self-same Christ in another point of view who was about to lead the people of God into the better country. We must carefully remember, as indeed involved in the truth I have already shown, that here we have not the death of the body and the separation of the spirit from it: still less is it the resurrection condition. Such is not at all the point in the Book of Joshua. For the same reason it is not Christ returning in glory: Joshua does not represent Christ coming again. It is Christ now in Spirit leading the people into the

81. {The Passover points to deliverance from judgment.
The Red Sea points to deliverance from Egypt (typically, the world; and deliverance from the power of the taskmaster (as in Rom. 7). The Red Sea points to Christ’s death and resurrection for us (as in Romans). The Jordan typifies our death and resurrection with Christ (as in Colossians). The land typifies our being in the heavens (as in Ephesians), where combat is with spiritual powers in the heavens (Eph. 6).
The purpose of God was to bring Israel into the land. In the ways of God, He tries them in the wilderness.

For the Christian, the Red Sea and the Jordan coalesce. It is as if we go into the Red Sea and come up out of the Jordan and into the land. Yet, we are in the wilderness and in the land at the same time, having different experiences accordingly.

Christ’s death and resurrection for us, and our death and resurrection with Him, is true of us at one and the same time.}
land, that is, the power of the Spirit of God who thus, answering to Christ’s glory, enables the Christians now to appropriate and know their place in heaven where He is. In short then Joshua represents Christ not as coming in person by and by, but acting in spirit now, and giving us therefore to receive and to realize our heavenly blessedness.

Again we shall find in this book, that there is first the reception of what God gives, and next that the people have to make the gift their own. These two distinct truths divide the Book of Joshua into two parts. The first twelve chapters are simply the question of our recognition of the grand truth that, having the heavenly land in title, we have to fight for it. The last portion of the book shows us the duty of grappling with the difficulties when we have received the truth, and puts us on our guard against the various ways by which Satan would enfeeble our sense of the blessing, and hinder its being made truly our own practically. It must not remain only an objective fact: we must make our title available and respected.

This divides the book, accordingly, into its earlier and its later parts.

In Josh. 1 there is another thing to which I would call attention: Jehovah, after stating the new form in which Christ’s power was to be shown in Joshua, says,

Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses {Josh. 1:2, 3}.

The land was given of God, but had to be won; the country over Jordan was open to the people of God. The book being devoted to this as its special aim, there is given at the starting-point a general notice of the extent of the land –

From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates {Josh. 1:4}.

Strictly speaking, this stretched much beyond Canaan. So we find what remarkably answers to it in that Epistle of the New Testament where the proper heavenly portion of the saints is brought before us. There is nothing more evident in the Epistle to the Ephesians than the two features I am about to state.

First, God has given us heavenly blessings in and with our Lord Jesus, and this now; only without doubt, it is for this reason a matter of faith as far as we are concerned till Jesus come. We are on the earth, but

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ {Eph. 1:3}.

And secondly, the very same chapter shows us not our Canaan only, but from the wilderness and this Lebanon to the great river, the river Euphrates.

So God gives us a measure of outreaching blessing far beyond that which is proper to us. In short, inasmuch as it is not merely the type of Christ but Christ Himself, so too the blessing is equally enlarged.

All things {Rom. 8:32}, and no measure short of all things, must be put under Christ; and if Christ be head universally, He is given head over all to the church. He, in connection with the church, does not take anything less than the whole universe of God. Thus we see what is special -- the heavenly things answering to Canaan; but along with this a great extent of territory, stretching from Lebanon on the north to the river Euphrates which was in the east beyond. Does it not bring before us that God, if He gives at all, must give as God? He will make good His promises, but He cannot act below Himself. And how this will be verified in the day for which we wait! We shall have our own (Luke 16:12); but we shall have Christ’s own, and God keeps nothing back from the rejected but glorified man, His own Son.

Further we find for the difficulties in the way, which in truth are immense, that God gives proportionate comfort and assurance. –

There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so will I be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage {Josh. 1:5, 6}.

The last words one sees are very emphatic, and even in the first chapter repeated over and over again. Let me ask my brethren whether they have really understood that this is what they are called to, -- what we are called to now. Not a few sincere Christians err greatly here. They confound good courage with presumption; that assurance in the Lord with the lowest, basest, proudest feeling of the flesh; mere thoughtless audacity without an atom of believing confidence in God. From presumption may every child of God be kept! On the other hand, God forbid that a child of His should be cheated out of the good courage and single-eyed confidence due to God by that which defames them. No, my brethren; we are called to be strong and of a good courage.

What is presumption then as distinguished from the courage of faith; and how are we to discern the difference? Is it not important to avoid mistake in so grave a matter? Presumption is man’s courage founded on self -- on the first man. The strength and good courage of the Christian is founded only on Christ. The difference therefore is complete. We cannot be too great-hearted if Christ be the one source of our courage: we owe it to Him. If it be a question of standing against the enemy or withstanding his wiles, we need indeed to be watchful. If it be a question of cherishing calm trust in what Christ is, and what He has given us, we cannot abate one jot of the full exhortation conveyed by these words to Joshua on that day. Was it for Joshua alone? It was for Joshua, who bound himself indissolubly with the people of God; it was to please the leader and those led by him. But so, beloved brethren, it should be with the children of God; for He does not, could not, complete a mere fraction of them. The best blessings
we have got are those God designed for the church -- for every member of Christ’s body.

Alas! we find ourselves in a state and day when but few members of Christ believe in their own blessing. If God has recalled our souls to faith in His grace, let us thank Him; but when we think of the infinite mercy which has caused us to see that God is for us, and what Christ is to us, and working too by the Spirit in us, -- let us adore Him that all is for all that are His. This will deepen our sense of the ruin of Christendom where their lack of faith refuses the good things God is giving, where flesh feebly judged mixes what is of self and the world without rebuke. At least we shall see what God is towards all saints, though we shall feel the more what they are towards Him in spite of all His love. First of all do we owe our freshest feelings to Himself; but also it becomes us, if we desire the blessing of others, that we should humbly -- yet at the same time courageously -- seek to enter in and possess the blessings ourselves. There is nothing that more conduces to the blessing of another than enjoying what His grace gives in our own souls.

Be strong then,
says He,
and of a good courage; for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous [Josh. 1:6, 7].

We know that He whom Joshua set forth cannot fail us. There were moments when even Joshua quailed; time was to be when Joshua would sink into the dust, when Jehovah would bid him rise with a measure of reproof too. Our Joshua never needs a check more than a stimulus; and all power is given Him in heaven and on earth. May His power rest on us in our weakness! We shall learn where the hindrances are and what.

But there is another point also in the preliminary chapter.

This book of the law,
says Jehovah,
shall not depart out of thy mouth [Josh. 1:8].

Along with the entrance of the people, through the power of the Spirit of Christ, into their heavenly blessing, comes increased need of the word of God. The value of every word is not so felt when souls are content with barely receiving Jesus as a Savior, when they want no more than to be assured that they will not come into judgment. Then a vague and general hold of the word of God, suffices for the need. But when we are awakened to see the truth which sets forth Christ on high and the heavenly place of the saints of God, and for desire to have a positive and definite hold of our own proper portion in Christ before entering there in person by and by, then indeed we need, and the Spirit of God does not fail to give us, the value in principle of every word. We feel we want it all; we know that it is good for us too that we should be searched and tried, and that we should not be shut up only to that which ministers direct comfort to us. We can bear that word which makes us conquerors over Satan by making nothing of self; and indeed it is particularly this which it is the object of the book of Joshua (typically viewed at any rate) to bring before us.

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for Jehovah thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest [Josh. 1:8, 9].

Here is another point of immense importance. We have not only the word but God Himself. Granted that in principle the same thing was true while Israel were passing through the wilderness. But it is good to have the sense of the presence of God with us in the introduction of our souls into our own proper inheritance. This then is afresh assured to the people; and need I say how truly we need to be under such a safeguard even in joy, and how good it is always! The time comes when the fresh bloom of truth is apt to pass. If it be no longer a new thing, what is to sustain a soul then? God Himself in the sense that He is with us -- in the sense of His will as alone wise and good and holy. Then it is that, even though there may be trial, difficulty, and a thousand things exceedingly repulsive to our nature, yet the consciousness of His presence supplies what is lacking, and outweighs every seeming drawback. What can be wanting when God is with us, and in perfect love?

It is evident then that the distinct assurance of the presence of God with His people, put as it is here with the entrance of the people into Canaan, is full of instruction as well as of consolation for our souls, which have it guaranteed in terms no less precise than full. We shall need it too, my brethren; and we do need it. Nothing else endures.

Then we have Joshua acting upon it; so do the Reubenites also, while choosing to dwell on this side of death and resurrection. It might have been thought that it was not for them to speak. They had been eager to seize the good land for their flocks and herds on the other side; but even so, remarkably enough, they cross the Jordan with the rest. There may be and are saints that stop short of their proper blessing; but God’s mind is that all His people should enter in. Hence therefore there is particular care to single out these Reubenites and Gadites and half the tribe of Manasseh, whom we find so impressed with the word of God, and with the task in which Joshua was just about to engage, that they themselves now take the place of exhorting him:

Only be strong and of a good courage [Josh. 1:18].

Such is the first chapter.

* * *

And where is the peculiar beauty of Josh. 2? and why have we the story of Rahab here? Can we not at once discern? Possibly more may when a few words are added.
Why did we not see a Rahab when the Red Sea was passed? Why here more than there? Is it not here that, along with the bringing of the people of God into their proper heavenly relationship, God must give a fresh sign that the distinctions of flesh and blood are worthless? that it is precisely when the saints of God are called heavenly that the fulness of the Gentiles must come in? There was nothing of the sort at the coming out of Egypt -- no particular witness of grace to the Gentiles then as now. Undoubtedly all is ordered aright; and there was no such propriety, no such special force, in that witness of a Gentile being called then. Now there is. Therefore I conceive that, as we have in the book of Joshua a general resemblance to the Ephesian epistle, so we may say that Josh. 2 answers to Eph. 2 or the latter part of it. Indeed the same principle runs through both, the one typically, the other in plain reality. For, after the new people who are called the church are shown as put into relationship with Christ at the right hand of God, then we have the bringing in of the Gentile particularly and expressly. Of the Jew it was not so requisite to say much. It was perfectly plain that the Jew was brought out of his Judaism; but the Gentile who had not a single religious privilege is declared to be the object of the fullest divine favor now in Christ. Without Christ, without hope, without God in the world, without promise even, a stranger to the covenants, spite of all their spiritual destitution and their actual degradation, the Gentiles are now brought nigh, and with this a wholly new kind of nearness unknown to Israel of old. Hence therefore it appears to me that we cannot doubt of the truly admirable wisdom of God in bringing in such an one as Rahab. Not merely was she a Gentile, but chosen by grace from the ranks of the fallen; she was avowedly, what is most degrading to a woman, a harlot. I know there are those who have by small points of philology endeavoured to argue that this was not necessarily the fact, and that the designation may have imported no more than that she kept a kind of public lodging. Men have thus sought to save the character not of Rahab only but of God's word. But they need not take the trouble. It is better to accept the Bible with simplicity. Flesh, all flesh, is grass. Indeed there is beauty in the humbling fact just as it is. For if God is going out in the might of His own grace, and showing what He is for His people, why should He not take up one that might seem to human eyes too far steeped in depravity for His blessing, more particularly at such a time? No mistake greater in truth could be made about it. When God raises up His own to the highest, it is the very time when grace goes down to the lowest. Therefore, far from finding a difficulty in that which was the character of Rahab, it appears to me that a great deal of the moral weight of divine truth, and of the beauty of the tale of grace here introduced, is lost by those who wish to make her a more respectable person than she really was. My brethren, it is not what we were, but what grace makes us, that is everything to the believer now; and so Rahab proved then.

We need not dwell upon that which would have the deepest interest for an evangelist's appeal. Nor is it my present aim to pass all in minute review, more especially such a part of the subject. Suffice it to say that Rahab shows us a faith strikingly in keeping with what God was now doing. Indeed this being always true must be more or less manifest. Faith is never a mere repetition in any case. There are hardly two souls whose conversion is exactly alike. Even though they may be converted at the same time, under the same discourse of the same preacher, still each has a speciality; and the more they are understood, the more anyone really gets into the heart of those who are converted, the more decided is the difference seen to be. But this is just what it should be; as it also gives a more living interest to those who really love souls and the ways of God with individuals. Assuredly it is worth learning what a soul is to God, and the manner of God's grace with every soul He brings to Himself. So there was distinctive character in Rahab's conversion. Who would mean to say that everything was as it should be with the object of His mercy? Far from it. The soul that is saved is not the Savior; nor can it ever rise up to the Savior, though we all shall be like Him. Unquestionably there is a mighty chasm which grace crosses; and the results are not small in those who believe even now. Still we may see in Rahab what appears to be connected with her old habits; for even at the very time when the truth had told powerfully on her, she lets out a little of what was, I suppose, her old character in her ways and words. There is no doubt she judged that it was all for a good cause; but can one deny that there was a spice of deceit along with the shelter she afforded the spies? Now I do not believe anybody is ever called or allowed of God to deceive in the smallest degree or for any end whatever. We sometimes meet the fact, even in saints of the Old Testament; but never the least justification of it. In short we may find as here the drawback of flesh at the very time when God's grace is blessing in the Spirit. We find it in others who ought to have known better than the Gentile harlot of Jericho. If we hear of such a fault in Rahab, there was at least as great in an Abraham even, none less in Isaac, and yet more in Jacob. If they after their knowledge of God could so fail, we must not wonder that, when this poor heathen was in but the transition state of coming to the Lord, she betrays what she was in herself, as truly as her faith shows what she had received from God. But this at least she was certain of, that God was with that people. This she saw clearly, -- that she was in the midst of the enemies of God; and in spirit she had done with them. Faith made her turn her back on her oldest associations of nature. Her heart now was with God and with God's people; and it is a good thing, be assured, that one should have one's heart set upon being not only with Him but with them, and this more particularly considering the world through which we are passing.

To have confidence in the link that is between God and His people is of great practical moment. To many perhaps it might sound and pass muster as more spiritual to say, "I am content with God only: as for His people, I am content to be apart from them. So grave are their faults, so many ways
and words that are unworthy, that I must be excused if I seek them not. Do not talk about the people of God: God Himself alone for me.” This, I say, was not Rahab’s feeling; nor is it God’s, who loves them, as we should also. He loves them, spite of what they are; and if we are led of His Spirit, if we have communion with Him, we love them too, and their faults will not alienate our hearts from them: who would put value on the love that could be turned away by a failure? Besides; who and what are we, so ready to criticize the failings of brethren? Have we none to confess of our own? Does it never occur to us that we may be a trial and grief to others, if not a stumbling-block by this very haste to judge? Let us rather learn to judge ourselves more, and to esteem others better than ourselves. I do not say this to make light of evil: God forbid! But assuredly true love labors and loves spite of faults, and seeks to get its object free. Indeed, sometimes we may rather rivet a fault by our own foolish way of dealing with it; but if we are truly led of God, we shall love those whom He loves. Rahab, understood this very simply when she identified not God only but herself with the spies she hid in the flux. And this expressed a better, stronger, more real faith, than any words could have done in the circumstances. She proved her faith by her good works, and this in loving not merely the God of Israel but the Israel of God. Was not this its character and meaning? Because of what she had heard (faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God), she connected by a true and single instinct Israel with God; and she was right.

Hence, if even the king of Jericho came before Rahab’s mind with a claim that would otherwise have been paramount, faith changed everything. No doubt it had its risk. She carried her life in her hand. It is for God to see to that. He did then as He always does; He acted for His own glory, magnifying Himself whether by our life or by our death for His name’s sake. She at any rate had her mind made up. She might be put to death for what the king would call an act of treason; and an act of treason undoubtedly it was after the flesh, judged by its sake. She at any rate had her mind made up. She might be put to death for what the king would call an act of treason; and an act of treason undoubtedly it was after the flesh, judged by its rules. It must have seemed to the men of Jericho selling her country and her king; but she measured every thing by God. This is faith’s reckoning. Not only are there cases where one must take one’s side thus, but the principle extends to the most ordinary occasions. It is really incumbent on every one who is brought to God. In that most solemn change for the soul, what is every body else in the world as standing between us and God? And what is the effect of faith? That the more you are brought out simply into confidence in God’s mind toward His people, the more you must love those whom God loves. Rahab in a striking and practical way apprehended this. Hence she risked her own life in giving effect to this divine conviction; for faith is most real, and can stake everything on God and His way. So she counted it no foolish speculation to risk the loss of life and all things for the spies, because they were the spies of Jehovah’s people, whose success to her mind was a certainty; and faith assures itself of His mercy in that day.

But she lets us know a little too of the state of feeling in Jericho. Her reasoning was sound, according to faith. It was no mere sentiment, nor sudden feeling either. There were many that shared her fears; but who shared the faith of Rahab? The warriors of the city were not without the same apprehensions. But in her case, as often in ours, God’s Spirit wrought where at first there was simply dread. This God followed up, replacing it by living faith in Himself and in His love for His people.

We have heard, says she,

how Jehovah dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when ye came out of Egypt.

She at least attributed their crossing to no second cause; nor did the men of Jericho share the unbelief of moderns who feign that Moses knew and used a ford in passing the Red Sea. She understood the truth because she had faith.

I know, she said,

that Jehovah hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how Jehovah dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for Jehovah your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by Jehovah, since I have showed you kindness, that ye will also show kindness unto my father’s house (Josh. 2:9-12).

Again I do not believe that it was for her only a question of saving natural life, though of course lives were preserved according to the oath of the spies. But her faith rose above the mere outward circumstances. The comment of James supposes a higher character, as it seems to me. Hence she was not merely incorporated in the line of Israel generally; she was actually brought into the line of Messiah, and sat in the most honorable place into which a woman could be brought after the flesh. The basis is laid in the book that shows us death to flesh, but God acting according to His own grace and accomplishing salvation in the midst of judgment. Accordingly an appropriate sign was given her not only for her own sake but for her family. Salvation came to her house that day, though they were poor and guilty Gentiles. Their deliverance shines the more brightly in the destruction of all the rest. The executors of judgment on Jericho guarantee the safety of Rahab and all her house.

* * *

Then comes the new scene in Josh. 3.

And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host; and they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of Jehovah your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it {Josh. 3:1-3}. 
It is plain that in this case there are some notable points that differ from those of the passing of the Red Sea. There was no such solemnity there as here. The ark of Jehovah had no place in that scene; nor any assertion of His right to all the earth -- the Lord of all the earth. There was no such order as the priests entering in with the ark first, and then the waters failing for the people to pass over. In the main substance there appears the same general truth: that is, God's power acts in grace, and His people enter into death and come victoriously out of it. But when this has been said, we have heard perhaps all that is common.

Let us now look a little at the differences which seem of chief moment. Jehovah there tells the people to sanctify themselves,

for to-morrow Jehovah will do wonders among you.
And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people. And Jehovah said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan {Josh. 3:5-8}.

So Joshua tells them to come hither and hear the words of Jehovah their God, assuring them that

Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of Jehovah of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man, and command ye them, saying, Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, and command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night (Josh. 4:1-3).

Twelve stones were laid in the Jordan where the priests' feet stood, and twelve stones taken out of the Jordan; being, it is evident, the memorials one more particularly of death, as taken into the river, the other of resurrection, as taken out of the waters. They were the signs not only of Christ's death and resurrection, but of the connection of the people with Christ in it. The Adam life cannot enjoy Canaan, and must go down into death. Beyond the Jordan it must be the power of a better life. For this very reason therefore there were twelve. Wherever man is made prominent -- wherever his administrative place is found in Scripture -- it has been suggested that twelve is the number ordinarily employed. It is the regular number for completeness in that point of view; that is, where human agency as such is brought before us. Though a familiar truth, still it seems well to notice it by the way.

Such is the reason then why we find twelve stones on this occasion. It was the sign that the people had been there, but having passed through death they had come out of it to the other side. It was the association of the people with the risen Christ Himself. Hence in this place we have the full sign of the glory of the person of Christ as far as a type could convey it. There was none more complete than the ark. Here we do not read of a rod stretched over the waters. The rod was used at the Red Sea; for it was the sign of judicial authority, and so it appropriately appears on that occasion. Judgment fell upon Christ in order that we should be delivered. In the passing out of Egypt it was a question of God's power grounded on His righteous judgment. His judicial authority interfered there, as we see in the destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts. But was not Israel both guilty and ruined? Have not we been also?

And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that Jehovah spake unto Joshua, saying, Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, and command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night (Josh. 4:1-3).

But at the river Jordan there are new wants. Judicial authority has fully run its course. It is not merely a question of Christ bringing us out from the judgment of God by His own bearing it, but of what Christ going down into death entitles us...
to enter into according to the rights of His work and the glory of His person. Christ, dead and risen, having perfectly glorified God on the cross, could not be adequately glorified short of heavenly glory. Born the Son of David, He ever called Himself the Son of man. Undoubtedly He had therefore a title to both the kingdom of God in Israel and the still wider empire over all nations and tribes and tongues. But is this the full extent? Not so. There could be no measure. These are the boundless ways of God’s glorifying Christ, not only in the highest seats of heaven but, as far as a creature could be a witness of it, in all creation put under Him. It is the same spirit we find here with the symbol of His person in death and resurrection as entering into that place which alone suits One so glorious. Where is it? Heaven alone suffices. Is there one part of the creation of God higher than another? It must be the place for Christ. If there be one sphere that could show exaltation more than another, Christ must be placed there. But Christ, if He goes there, will not be severed from us.

This is therefore what the ark represents. It is the fullest witness of the glory of Christ that could be found in Israel as a type. Hence therefore this is the way in which He is looked at. I repeat, it is not merely righteousness but glory. It is not entering into death to bring us out of what was wrong, but going into death by resurrection as a title to bring us into all that is good and glorious too. Into that connection, my brethren; we are brought now. The object of God’s doing so is to deliver us from the false glory of the world, in order that all that is of man, all that occupies his heart, or that could be an object here, should be left behind us. How? By an effort? Exclusively by belief of the truth -- by Christ received and known -- by the attractive power of the grace and might of God which, in so giving and raising up and exalting Christ in glory, has bound us up with Him for ever, and has bound us up with Him now. This then is what I shall endeavor to bring out still more fully as we look at the book farther.

Let me only add a few words more now as to this. It is not pleasant to the flesh to die; yet in these things is the life of the Spirit. For man it is an impossibility, but with God all things are possible.

All the Israelites passed over on dry ground (Josh. 3:17).
Ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3),

says the apostle to the Colossians for all Christians. We shall see that the attention of the people is particularly called to the event:

On that day Jehovah magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life. And Jehovah spake unto Joshua, saying, Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan. Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of Jehovah were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before. And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For Jehovah your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as Jehovah your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: that all the people of the earth might know the hand of Jehovah, that it is mighty:

\[\text{that ye might fear Jehovah your God for ever (Josh. 4:14-24).}\]

It is not now judgment. There is no question of destroying Pharaoh or his hosts. It is not the dealing with what is evil; but the power of Christ’s resurrection in bringing us into what is glorious and heavenly. And very certainly we need them both, and we need them in this order too. A person who looks at Christ simply as bringing into what is good is in danger of constantly allowing what is bad. It is not merely the gift of what is good that delivers the sinner. There must be the solemn sense in our own souls that we are evil ourselves, and are most righteously obnoxious to God’s judgment, because of our sinful ways; and that nothing could deliver us, had not Christ Himself borne it, putting Himself under it and exhausting it for us, and that thus -- thus only -- could we be saved according to God.

Therefore, it was then a question of Israel being saved; but here it is God magnifying His own love for His people according to His counsels for His own glory. It is God giving the magnificent proof of what He is for His people in the face of Satan and his hosts. If I do not enter into this, I shall only be occupied with my personal salvation and my own blessing. This is all right at first: all else is but theory then. But having gone through, in my own soul, the sense of my guilt and ruin, and of my deliverance in Christ from both, then I am free in spirit to enter into the scene of glory before going there actually; for the blessed Savior even now has brought me into His things, and not merely delivered me from mine of the first man.

This then is the double truth. This is what Christ has been for us and what God has given us in Him. May we value Him everywhere, delighting in all that grace has given us in the word! The same Israelite could not at the same time be a pilgrim in the wilderness and a conqueror of his Canaanitish enemies in the land. But we ought to know them both together; for in truth all things are ours, and we are now seated in heavenly places in Christ and in conflict with spiritual wickedness there, while we are journeying in patience through the desert.
The Earlier Historical Books  
Lecture 2  
Joshua 5–8

The passing of the Jordan was a wondrous and significant event; but it was not everything. It sank deep into the consciences of the Canaanites on all sides; but there was more that was needed, and more that was wrought by God in Israel. At once it brought into prominence a remarkable fact -- that those who had been born in the wilderness had never yet been circumcised. The Spirit of God uses this occasion to draw attention to a necessity that could be overlooked no longer. Here there is no question of any imagination of man’s. We have the plain fact before us; we have the Spirit of God dwelling upon it with no little precision; but we have more. The light of inspiration in the use made of the institution in the New Testament must be taken into account. We have therefore divine certainty as to its intended meaning and its importance. The children of Israel who had been in the wilderness had no doubt been objects of the tender mercy of God; but there was altogether another measure that became necessary when they were brought into the land of Emmanuel -- when His good hand conducted them into that land where He was pleased to dwell with them. If He deigned to dwell in their midst, they must at least be taught to feel what was due to the place of His habitation.

Here then circumcision becomes imperative. We may readily discover, from the Holy Spirit’s doctrinal allusion to it, what spiritual truth lay under the form. There is more than one passage in the apostolic writings in reference to it. I will take two of the more prominent places where an express mention is introduced, and it is not merely therefore open to us to gather the idea intended; for in this case the very term is so used as to preclude question, which is by no means always the case in the types of Scripture.

In the epistle to the Philippians the apostle says,

We are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh {Phil. 3:3}.

It is plain that he means Christians; but at the same time he means such as are conscious of, or at least been taught, what Christianity means. I do not mean by this that others are not so privileged; but it is no uncommon thing to find a Christian who walks below or even contrary to his principles; not of course dishonestly, but sometimes through ignorance, sometimes through will, unjudged in ways here and there which ignore his very calling. Now it is clear the Spirit of God does not contemplate this, but always addresses Christians according to the will of God and the glory of Christ our Lord. It could not be otherwise. If the word spoke with calmness of children of God while walking apart from His will, I need not say what an excuse for unfaithfulness it would give, if not an apparent sanction.

Men are ready enough to take license to themselves when in a poor condition before the Lord, gathering some apparent allowance of their wretchedness from the slips of good men who may have fallen into bad ways. Yet habitually in Scripture nothing can be more marked than the jealous care with which God renders inexcusable all such misuse of His word. I consider then that Scripture does wisely and holly as a rule address the children of God according to His thoughts and intentions about them. This alone could suit His glory; this alone is wholesome for us. Hence the apostle has his heart tried greatly by some who, having borne the excellent name of the Lord, were seeking earthly things, as he says here,

Many of them walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ {Phil. 3:18}.

But here in the beginning of the same chapter he addresses the saints according to God’s mind concerning them in Christ, and says,

We are the circumcision.

Thus he predicates of them what God has made them in Christ. The meaning is that nature is judged, sentence of death being passed upon it. It is not only that the saint is brought from under condemnation because of his sins, but the nature fallen into rebelliousness against God, evil, and selfish, has now had sentence of death executed upon it in Christ; and the believer is spoken of accordingly.

We are the circumcision, therefore, says he,

which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh {Phil. 3:3}.

Again, in Col. 2, we find another plain allusion. He says not only,

Ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power,

but

in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the
Thus he looks at the mighty working of divine grace in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. I need not say that the text has nothing at all to do with the historical fact of circumcision as related in Luke. It is a circumcision made without hands;

whereas the literal act of course was done by hands. This is in contrast with it. The ordinance was an obligation for the Israelite, a figure simply, and nothing more, as to truth. But here we are told of what God had wrought in Christ and His cross, where He had dealt with everything belonging to us that was contrary to His mind.

We accordingly are said to be circumcised. This is particularly laid down here. He does not say merely, “In whom we are circumcised,” but

ye.

He was speaking of these Gentile believers -- persons to whom the apostle had been a stranger after the flesh. That they had never seen him we may, I believe, fairly infer from an earlier part of this very chapter. Here he says that they were already circumcised by a better circumcision rite than man could observe. This was more especially seasonable for such as were in danger of attaching inordinate value to ordinances. There has been a tendency also to claim special value from the fact of having been personally under the teaching of the apostle. This was an early superstition. The Holy Ghost therefore seems to have taken care that some epistles should be sent to such as were strangers, and Gentiles also as well as to Christians who had been Jews. Every point was guarded; and amongst others the most distinct testimony to the only stable means of blessing -- the solemn fact that all that is offensive to God, all that savors of the fall, of the pride of nature rising up against God, is judged, cut off, and set aside before Him.

There is no greater comfort to the soul that really values being set in perfect purity and righteousness before God. Here it is not a question of what we have to attain. There is ample scope, as we shall find presently, for the practical power of the Spirit of God; but then that power for practice is based upon what God has done already, and always flows from His work in Christ. The Holy Spirit carries on an answering work; but surely there is something to be answered to, and this is what God Himself has done already for us in Christ our Lord. So he says that they were circumcised with the circumcision made without hands in putting off the body [of the sins] of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ.

We return therefore to our chapter, and we see thus the proper force, as it appears to me, of the blessing foreshadowed that day in crossing the Jordan. Canaan could not be entered as a place where flesh was to be gratified, or its evil to be allowed. Not that there was no dealing with the flesh in the wilderness; but it could not be said to be done with; it was not yet treated as that which had come under the final judgment of God. From the Jordan we see this: death is treated as the only door of deliverance, and the knife of circumcision must pass over all the males of Israel before the good fight. Thus it is not only that death and resurrection with Christ makes it possible for the people of God to enjoy heavenly things and enter into their own proper position, as we were seeing in the last lecture, but there is a further effect, though all be part of the same work of God, brought out distinctly in the type.

Just as we find various offerings to set forth different parts of the work of Christ, so, whether it be the Red Sea or the Jordan, or, again, the circumcision that follows, they each represent distinct aspects of that which God has given us in and with the Lord Jesus dead and risen. Very clearly we derive from circumcision at this point the fact that fallen nature in us is judged completely, and that we are entitled to take our stand peremptorily as against flesh in ourselves. We are then also fitted to have to do with one another, being all as to this upon the same common ground. God could not sanction anything less. He has given us Christ, and with Him, to faith, the full portion of His death and resurrection. That portion necessarily supposes the work in which He has completely done with fallen nature in all its forms before Him. Not a trace of evil was in Christ. He was man as truly as the first Adam -- Son of man as Adam was not, but Son of man which is in heaven -- a divine person, yet none the less a man. But for these very reasons He was capable and competent, according to the glory of His person, to be dealt with by God for all that was unlike Him in us. Had there been the smallest taint in Him, this could not have been done. The perfect absence of evil in this one Man furnished the requisite victim; as in Himself and all His ways the divine nature found satisfaction and delight.

Did He then bear all? be willing to go down to the depth of the judgment of all men, according to God’s estimate of the evil of our nature? The entire, unbroken, unmitigated judgment of God fell upon Him in order to deal with it and put it away for ever. No less, I believe, is the force of Christ’s death for us.

Hence we start now, no longer viewed simply as pilgrims and strangers, but as those who are ushered into the land of God even while we are here -- who take our place as heavenly persons; for this is our character now. So says the apostle,

As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly {1 Cor. 15:48}.

Accordingly nothing of the old man is spared; all that is really self is seen in its hatefulfulness. The necessity that all this be put away is brought before us; but, wondrous to say, for us united to Christ the thing is done. What we have to do now is, first of all, to believe it -- without question to take our stand before God as dead and risen with Christ, that through grace, Gentiles or not, if Christ’s, we are the true circumcision. Only such can mortify their members on the earth intelligently and thoroughly. Otherwise it is an effort either to die or to better the flesh; and both are vain. In presence of this the carnal circumcision now is a poor and pitiful thing at best, yea, a rebellious snare. The true
circumcision is what God has made the Christian in Christ, and that through death and resurrection. Those that of old were content with their Jewish place rejected the truth it symbolized, proving that they understood nothing as they ought; those who in Christendom can leave the truth of Christ to occupy themselves with the mere shadows are far, far worse. The reality of the truth is given to us only in Christ our Lord. All is ours in Him.

Can we wonder then that the Spirit of God dwells upon this at considerable length, calling the place where the people are circumcised Gilgal? We shall find the importance attached to this elsewhere in looking at the book. No flesh must glory in His presence. Made heavenly by grace, consciously dead and risen with Christ, we are called to mortify, for this reason, our members in the earth.

And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho (Josh. 5:10).

Again, another fact of interest is brought before us: the passover is kept now. Undoubtedly it had been instituted in Egypt, and kept even in the wilderness. Grace made provision, as we are aware, for the casualties of the dreary way. But all this is passed away. There is a deeper communion henceforth with God’s mind. The passover itself is now celebrated in Canaan with solemn joy. It is exceedingly precious for us that advance in the knowledge of God makes foundation truths to have a profounder character to the soul. To remember Christ in the breaking of bread was sweet and strengthening from the first: how much more where the revelation of the mystery wove into that showing forth of His death our oneness with Him and with each other! I am persuaded that the man who values most the gospel is he who has the deepest acquaintance with the mystery of Christ. There can be no error more offensive, and, I think, none which shows a shallower spirit, than to suppose that the great fundamental truth of God in meeting our souls in grace loses its importance because of entering into the counsels of glory or of any other advance in the truth, no matter where or what it may be. Contrariwise, we learn to see more in all we saw before; we value Christ better everywhere; we enter more, not merely into questions of our own need, or into a retrospect of Egypt or of the wilderness, but into the mind of God. Hence, as it appears to me, the force of introducing the passover here. The less we are occupied with the circumstances, the more calm, free, and deep is faith’s enjoyment of the deliverance of grace and of God Himself in it.

The children of Israel kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho (Josh. 5:10).

But there is also another remarkable notice –

And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day (Josh. 5:11).

That is, we find the witness of Christ risen in a way that was never connected with the passover before. New food was used and supplied now.

And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year (Josh. 5:12).

We too are given to eat of the old corn of the land: for this we do not wait till we reach heaven. As He is our peace on high, so is He risen our food and strength. Thus characteristically do we know Him no longer after the flesh, but glorified on high.

There is, however, a needed remark to be made along with this. In our case (for the Christian enjoys the most singular advantages) it would be a grievous mistake and a real loss to suppose that Christ as our manna has ceased. For Israel there could not be such a state of things as the eating of the manna and eating of the corn of the land continuously going on together. The Christian has both unquestionably. And for this very simple reason: Israel could not be in the wilderness and in the land at the same time; we can be and are. Thus, as we have often seen, the Christian stands on altogether peculiar ground. It is not only the wilderness and its mercies we now have to do with, but also the heavenly land and its blessings and glory. Hence therefore we have to be on our guard in looking at such a type as this. There could scarcely be anything more dangerous than to suppose that we had passed out of the circumstances of trial, or that the gracious supply of the Spirit of Christ was no longer needed. Here below we are ever in the place of weakness and danger and sorrow. Here we are but passing through temptation. Emphatically this is the wilderness. Here the daily manna is vouchsafed to us, and we own and feel that only the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ever living and interceding Priest, could bring us safely through. I do not mean the power of resurrection alone: this we have; but the grace that brought Him down, and that enters into every daily need and want, and that sustains us in all our infirmity. But this is not Canaan; and in such pitiful and tender consideration we have nothing at all to do with the characteristic blessings of Canaan. We have then to do with power: here the manna meets us in our need and weakness.

The Lord Jesus then ministers to His saints in both ways. Everywhere we have Christ. Take the same epistle to the Philippians already used for the present force of circumcision. We have not only Christ according to Phil. 3, but according to Phil. 2; for the second of Philippians shows us the very trait that I have been referring to -- the grace of the Lord coming down where we are; whereas Phil. 3 would fix our eyes and hearts on Himself where He is now. Surely we need both, and we have both. So here we find not that which takes away the manna, but the new condition and place of Israel, and the due provision of God for it. The old corn of the land points to Christ risen from the dead; and so the apostle Paul loved to present Him, though never to the disparagement of the Lord in His grace and mercy toward us in all our circumstances of exposure as
His saints. We are more indebted to the same apostle for this than to any other of the twelve; but then Paul does associate us truly and distinctly with Christ risen from the dead and in heaven, as no one else does. This he was specially called to make known. Not that he exclusively gives us the heavenly place of Christ, but that he, above all, brings us into it, while he magnifies the grace that watches over us here below.

This then is the eating of the corn of the land. It is what spiritually answers to the apostle’s word in 2 Cor. 5 –

Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more [2 Cor. 5:16].

This is our form of relationship to Christ the Lord in what is peculiar to us now as Christians. What distinguishes us is that we have Christ risen and glorified; we are entitled to take all the comfort of knowing old things passed away, all things become new; we are brought triumphantly into it ourselves, and have Him in all His heavenly glory as an object before us; nay, more, as One to feed upon. The Spirit of God brings out the Lord Jesus particularly in the epistle to the Ephesians, where His first introduction is as One dead, risen, and exalted in heaven. In Colossians, in a similar way, we have out Lord there. All this then is the old corn of the land. But then if we take the Gospels, and, further, if we look at John’s epistles, it is not thus we see Him. We behold our Lord here below particularly thus indeed as the object of the Spirit. It is clear then that all is brought out to us. We have Christ everywhere, and cannot afford to do without Him anywhere. What saint would have a part only of our blessing? God gives us a whole Christ, and in every way.

There is another point too in the chapter which may well claim a word. When God enters on a fresh action, or calls His people to a new kind of activity, He reveals Himself accordingly. The same God that made Himself known to Moses displays Himself afresh to Joshua, always, it need scarce be said, (for could it be otherwise?) manifesting Himself in the way which establishes His glory, and binds it up with the new circumstances of His people. There is no repetition of Himself -- the very same One, unchangeable of course, but withal real in His ways, and occupied with us in order to identify us with His glory. Hence therefore there is now no burning bush. Nothing was more admirably suited to the wilderness; but what had this to do with Canaan? What was wanted there? A witness not of One judging, but of one that would preserve, spite of appearances, the emblem of utter weakness yet of all that weakness sustained. Was not this suited to the wilderness? But how or what in Canaan? As the captain of Jehovah’s host. Here it is a question of conquering the foe, the power or wiles of Satan. God forbid that we should have any other foe! Others may be foes to us; but these emissaries of Satan only we have to count foes, and to deal with as such. It is not so with men. These may become our enemies, but never we theirs; while we have nothing to do with Satan, save to treat him, when discovered, as an enemy. We are entitled, steadfast in the faith, to resist him who only seeks in his workings and ways to dishonor the glory of God in Christ our Lord, and so ruin all that are blinded by him.

This then is the revelation that Jehovah makes of Himself for the new work to which His people are called -- a man of war to lead those who have henceforth to fight.

But there is another remark to connect with a previous part of the chapter. Joshua was not given to see a sword in the hand even of the captain of the host, till the knife was put in the hand of each Israelite to deal with himself. The call to circumcision had done its work before there was a moral fitness to have to wield the sword against others.

Further now, just as much as in the wilderness -- more, I think, we shall see as we go on -- the solemn word, even to Joshua, is this –

Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy (Josh. 5:15).

There was the more need to insist upon this, because the task in Canaan was one of putting down the enemy. This necessarily calls for severe blows, continual watchfulness, incessant opposition. So much the louder call to begin and go on with reverence and godly fear.

And now they are before the doomed city; and

Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in (Josh. 6:1).

In Joshua it is the standing type of the power of Satan in the world.

And Jehovah said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days {Josh. 6:2, 3}.

But let it be remembered that it is the power of Satan put forth by the world to hinder our entering into our heavenly blessings. It is not simply the world as a means of dragging us back to Egypt; this is not the point here. But Satan adopts fresh snares according to the blessing that God gives. Whatever would arrest the progress of the saints altogether; whatever might hinder their setting their moral mind, their affection, on things above -- to further this now Satan bends all his force.

Jericho then gives us a lively image of Satan’s power as that which stood right in the way of the people entering the Holy Land. Jericho was the key of entrance into Canaan, and must be taken: God would have it wholly destroyed. Hence Jehovah takes the whole case under His direction of His people. Not that He enters upon the work single-handed. It is not as was once done with the host of Pharaoh. Here the people must fight; they must have each their portion; they must take expressly and personally an active
part in the war with the Canaanites.

Ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once.

It was a well-walled and strong city, and Israel had but poor appliances for siege or storming; yet never did city fall so easily since the world began.

But then there is striking instruction in the manner of it:

And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams’ horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets {Josh. 6:4}.

There is the greatest care to insist upon the word of Jehovah. The city was to be taken, and would surely be taken; but this could only be in God’s way. There is no book in Scripture which demands obedience more rigidly than the Book of Joshua, which exhibits the people entering on their heavenly portion now by faith.

And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him {Josh. 6:5}.

So Joshua and the people do. He directs the priests and people accordingly, and they are found carrying out the instructions of Jehovah, whatever they might appear to the eyes of others, with the most careful obedience. All is persevered in exactly during the full term of waiting (Josh. 6:1-7).

And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams’ horns passed on before Jehovah, and blew with the trumpets: and the ark of the covenant of Jehovah followed them. And the armed men went before the priests that blew with the trumpets, and the reeward came after the ark, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets. And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout. So the ark of Jehovah compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp (Josh. 6:8-11).

At length comes the crisis when faith had its answer:

And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city {Josh. 6:16}.

Can anything be more remarkable than the way in which Joshua calls the people, in the use of means wholly and evidently insufficient on human grounds, to the settled and thorough assurance of what is going to befall Jericho before it takes place? There is communion with the mind of God. It is as fully set out before Joshua and all the people as if the city already lay in ruins. And so it should be with us. We are intended of God to know what He predicts before the event (2 Pet. 3). The world itself cannot but own when His word is fulfilled. Hence we are told that

we have the mind (or intelligence) of Christ {1 Cor. 2:16};

and this goes far beyond prophecy. But then there may be hindrances to this as a practical fact. Thus, where the saints are mixed up with the world, there can be no full enjoyment of nearness to the Lord. His glory is in this denied, and so the Spirit of God is grieved. The allowance of fleshly arrangement in the church, or of anything that is a departure from His word, hinders the genuine simplicity of God’s light from shining upon the soul.

But here all was sufficiently clear, as far as man could see, though we shall soon find how, as everywhere, the first man fails.

And ye, in any wise, says he, keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto Jehovah: they shall come into the treasury of Jehovah. So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword. But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot’s house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her (Josh. 6:18-22).

And so it was done: grace exempted before judgment.

And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of Jehovah (Josh. 6:24).

Nor was the word of mercy forgotten in the hour of victory:

And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father’s household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho (Josh. 6:25).

But a curse also is pronounced:
And Joshua adjured them at the time, saying,  
Cursed be the man before Jehovah, that riseth up  
and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the  
foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his  
youngest son shall he set up the gates (Josh. 6:26)  
– a word fulfilled in its due season.

So Jehovah was with Joshua; and his fame was  
oisided throughout all the country [Josh. 6:27].

There is not a blessing that God gives to man which  
does not furnish an occasion to Satan; and so it was at this  
moment of the capture of Jericho. The children of Israel  
committed a trespass in the accursed thing, and God called  
His people to such a close and comprehensive clearance of  
the evil by the judgment of the wrongdoers as never was  
heard of in the wilderness. The more magnificent the  
display of the gracious power of God to His people, the  
more tenacious He is and must be of that which belongs to  
His own character and nature. Had there been the allowance  
on God’s part of hidden evil, where were the testimony to  
His presence with the children of Israel? It had been  
irreparably ruined. This could not be. God must prove  
Himself there in their midst. And have we less now? Is He  
gone because of our ruined state? Did the Holy Ghost come  
down to be in us for a brief season, or for ever?

We shall find that God took a way to secure His glory  
not more effectual than humbling. And this is the more  
striking too, because it was at the very time when God had  
drawn the attention, we may say, of all the world to that  
which He was doing for His people. It had been confessed  
that their hearts were melting. The report of Israel had  
spread far and wide. But can it be supposed that men heard  
of such an act would have been fatal.

Against whom? Achan? Nay, more,  
against the children of Israel (Josh. 7:1).

The same principle applies yet more strikingly to the  
Church. If  
one member suffer, all the members suffer with it  
{1 Cor. 12:26}.

But to proceed: –  
Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside  
Beth-aven, on the east side of Beth-el, and spake  
unto them, saying, Go up and view the country  
{Josh. 7:2}.

We do not read at this time of any seeking the Lord; we do  
not hear of prayer to ask from the Lord counsel as to that  
which they were to do. I assuredly gather from all the facts  
that here the children of Israel failed in this. A little place  
seemed not to need God’s power, wisdom, and guidance as  
a great. It is not merely a question of the most guilty party.  
There may be fidelity in much, but withal the need in God’s  
eyes to deal with His people as a whole when He thus puts  
them to shame before the world. When we shrink from this,  
we only defraud our souls of the blessing; and, further, we  
drive a distrust of the Lord instead of cherishing perfect  
confidence, spite of what seems perhaps outwardly hard.  
Many an one, I dare say, may have thought it strange that  
Jehovah’s anger should be kindled against Israel, all because  
of one individual who, unknown to them, had been thus  
guilty. But He is always wise and good; and our wisdom  
lies in unwavering trust in Him. Joshua then, instead of  
inquiring of the Lord how the matter stood, and whether  
His holy eyes had discerned that which offended Him, is all  
for action. Now, where there is activity before men, there is  
especial need of previously drawing near to God. For one  
step taken is apt to involve many more, and there is danger.  
Here too we may well learn a lesson. We have the Lord’s  
anger kindled against them, and Joshua quite unconscious  
that there was anything amiss. Those sent go;  
and they returned to Joshua, and said to him, Let not  
all the people go up; but let about two or three  
thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all  
the people labor thither; for they are but few  
(Josh. 7:3).

There is self-confidence instead of dependence on the  
Lord. There was a looking at the comparative strength of  
the town; there was a fleshly judgment, reasoning after  
appearances, which for the believer is never safe, that it  
would call for no such serious action as in the taking of  
Jericho. There indeed that city with its high walls made  
them feel, and compelled them to own, that nothing but the  
power of God could bring it down; and there they found His  
strength made perfect in their weakness. God was their  
imPLICIT trust; but now it was in their eyes a mere question
of comparing the resources of Ai with their own. Thus the easy victory with which God had crowned them at Jericho became a snare. To those that had gained at once a city like Jericho, the capture of Ai seemed a matter of course. The inhabitants were but few. There was no reason therefore for the host of Jehovah to go up in force against such a place.

So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.

And not only so, but the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water {Josh. 7:4, 5}.

It was no longer the hearts of the Canaanites melting; no longer their kings who became as water; but Israel. What are we without God, my brethren? It is wholesome that we should feel it. Our only boast is in what He is not only to us, but with us. They had not God with them; they were utter weakness. And Joshua now is filled with chagrin and humiliation before God.

And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of Jehovah until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, Alas! O Lord Jehovah, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? They had failed in not seeking direction from God.

Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of Jordan! {Josh. 7:6, 7}.

There was repining, if not a reproach, cast on Him who had thus failed them.

I do not mean to say that there was not the working of real sorrow and shame of heart before God but certainly patience had not yet attained its perfect work in the soul.

O Jehovah, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name? {Josh. 7:8, 9}.

There at least he was right, and there it is that God answers

And Jehovah said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff {Josh. 7:10, 11}.

But mark, it is not Achan, it is not the ill-doer only but Israel. There was no such identification before the crossing of the Jordan. There was the principle, no doubt, of an evil thing affecting the camp. This was always true; but now it is made far more precise and definite. The greater the blessing of God to His people, so much the more their responsibility. So now, they being all identified with God, there was done in their midst a daring sin against God, who will make them feel it for the express purpose of their purging themselves from it.

Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed {Josh. 7:12}.

Whatever may be the rich grace of God in dealing with all our evil and putting it away, that which dishonors Him when God has so blessed us makes us nothing before the enemy. The worst evil disappears before the power of redemption; but what man would count a very little evil, if cherished or overlooked, becomes afterwards a source of incalculable weakness in the presence of Satan. Is this a reason for distrust? Not the least. It is the greatest possible reason for watchfulness and care. And more than that, beloved brethren -- for who are we, and what are our eyes worth, and where has been our watchfulness? -- our strength lies in this, that we have God to watch over us and for us. Here was precisely that in which Joshua had been lacking. He had not sought the Lord about it; he had not enquired. God accordingly makes the shame of it to appear, and Joshua now painfully learns it, and the people.

Up,

says Jehovah to His servant, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to-morrow: for thus saith Jehovah God of Israel. There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you. In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which Jehovah taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which Jehovah shall take shall come by households; and the household which Jehovah shall take shall come man by man. And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire {Josh. 7:13-15}.

Thus, although God would make them all feel that they were involved, there is careful provision in His own goodness that the particular offender shall be brought out, now that they are really waiting upon God, and humbling themselves because of it. Thus, when unwatchful and unprayerful, all are involved in the sorrow; but when His people draw near to God the sorrow is traced home to the one who is guilty. There is a clearing of themselves by the fact that they all humbled themselves before God. This very act shows that they have no wilful connivance at evil; and, God therefore taking the matter into His own hands, the offender is soon brought out.
And Joshua rose up early.

He was as much in earnest about this as he was about the fall of Jericho.

So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: and he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: and he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken {Josh. 7:16-18}.

God was faithful; but Joshua would have man vindicate Him, that others also might fear, not to speak of his own soul. Hence more follows.

And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to Jehovah God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against Jehovah God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it. So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before Jehovah. And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor.

And Joshua, and all Israel said, Why hast thou troubled us? Jehovah shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel numbered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. And all the people of war; then He promises to give all into the hands of Joshua’s hand.

And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto the city. And Jehovah turned from the fierceness of His anger {Josh. 7:26}.

That is, even more care and implicit obedience in every particular are insisted on as to the preparations against the little Ai than had been employed in the capture of Jericho. All this is set out with the utmost minuteness for our instruction.

Joshua therefore sent them forth: and they went to lie in ambush, and abode between Beth-el and Ai, on the west side of Ai: but Joshua lodged that night among the people. And Joshua rose up early in the morning {Josh. 8:9, 10}.

He himself numbered the people, and went up, and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. And all the people of war; then He promises to give all into the hands of Joshua’s hand.

Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land {Josh. 8:1}.

So Jehovah adds at this juncture, and such injunctions might surprise some. First He summons Joshua to take all the people of war; then He promises to give all into Joshua’s hand. He next lays down a plan, not the one that brought in the ark and the priests, where it was pre-eminently a question of following His own word and the power of Jehovah’s holy presence. But here he says,

Lay thee an ambush for the city behind it. So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai: and Joshua chose out thirty thousand mighty men of valour, and sent them away by night. And he commanded them, saying, Behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city, even behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready: And I, and all the people that are with me, will approach unto the city: and it shall come to pass, when they come out against us, as at the first, that we will flee before them, (for they will come out after us,) till we have drawn them from the city; for they will say, They flee before us, as at the first: therefore we will flee before them. Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city: for Jehovah your God will deliver it into your hand. And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, that ye shall set the city on fire: according to the commandment of Jehovah shall ye do {Josh. 8:2-8}.

But notice how

all Israel

have their part, as in the consequences of the sin, so now in every step of its judgment from God.

And now we have the Lord’s full restitution of the people. They had gone forth in self-confidence; they had received the most serious check; but, now that the sin was judged, Jehovah was free to act on their behalf. Even then He had His own way. And now it was not a question of great things, it was no season to show the resources of the all-overcoming power of God, which, before a blow was struck, brought down the towering walls of the city. I am persuaded that there is quite as practical and deep a lesson to learn hence as from the fall of Jericho; but it is a different lesson. And this is a very important thing, brethren; because, we being so ready to contract the ways of God into one single groove, it is a very good thing for us to leave room for His wisdom to shape its own course suitably to the new circumstances, in view surely of His own glory, but also in His goodness, always taking account of the condition of His people. Hence He says to Joshua,
people, even the people of war that were with him, went up, and drew nigh, and came before the city, and pitched on the north side of Ai: now there was a valley between them and Ai. And he took about five thousand men, and set them to lie in ambush between Beth-el and Ai, on the west side of the city. And when they had set the people, even all the host that was on the north of the city, and their liers in wait on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley {Josh. 8:10-13}.

The all-importance of heeding the Lord and His word was felt now; and recovery after haste must be humbling, however sure.

The enemy, as we shall see, is never so self-confident as when his hour is come. So men shall cry, Peace and safety, when sudden destruction cometh upon them.

And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw it, that they hasted and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; but he wist not that there were liers in ambush against him behind the city. And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. And all the people that were in Ai were called together to pursue after them: and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city. And there was not a man left in Ai or Beth-el, that went not out after Israel: and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel. And the Lord said unto Joshua, Stretch out the spear that is in thy hand toward Ai; for I will give it into thine hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city. And the ambush arose quickly {Josh. 8:14-19}.

They were on the other side. This is the more remarkable, because it might appear as if it were merely a signal; but it seems evident, as it has also struck others, from the disposition of the forces, that such was not the thought, but a far deeper intimation than a simple sign. It is rather a disposition of the forces, that such was not the thought, but seems evident, as it has also struck others, from the because it might appear as if it were merely a signal; but it appears to be a sign on God’s part, a significant token, that called them to the taking of the city. It was seemingly and strikingly intended to give them the certainty that Jehovah was with them now, Jehovah undertaking the lead, Jehovah prospering all in the very place where they had been put to shame; Jehovah would retrieve the glory of His own name. Let us always trust to Him so. No doubt it may be by no means a question here of that which would strike the mind of man with the same wonder as the capture of Jericho; but still it was no small cheer to Israel after their grievous check.

If God puts the sentence of death on us now, it is to help us the more really in result by leading us to trust only in Him that raises the dead. If we submit, He can use us. So here; it was the place of previous defeat, where the Lord, having purged out that which was the hidden cause of the mischief, and brought to light the failure of all in dependence, can lead them to victory. At the same time, while recalling to their mind every part of their fault, He impresses upon them more than ever the all-importance of subjection to His word, and, further, of dependence upon Himself. The word of God, blessed as it is, is not everything. We need the God of the word as well as the word of God. What weakness if God Himself be not with us! What assured victory when He is, as we find in this twofold history! It is true that only God knew Achan’s trespass in their midst. But God would have brought it all out if they had waited on Him for light; for He had no pleasure in the shame that haste entailed on Joshua and His
people. He will be enquired of, and must rouse His people to learn from Him, sooner or later, that which they knew not, but which He knew and would make known, for it concerned His honor as dwelling with them.

Thus then the taking of this little city is turned into weighty and most needed instruction for the people of God, we being such as we are here below. The men of Ai we have in all their distress when they looked behind and saw the snare in which they had been taken, the ambush rushing in on one side, and those that seemed to flee from them advancing to attack them on the other. The case was soon decided now, whatever the pains and trouble He demanded for it.

And it came to pass, when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness wherein they chased them, and when they were all fallen on the edge of the sword, until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword. And so it was, that all that fell that day, both of men and women, were twelve thousand, even all the men of Ai. For Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. Only the cattle and the spoil of that city Israel took for a prey unto themselves, according unto the word of Jehovah which he commanded Joshua {Josh. 8:24-27}.

They are allowed the prey now, having been tested at Jericho.

Observe this other fact too:

And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until eventide: and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his carcase down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raise thereon a great heap of stones, that remaineth unto this day {Josh. 8:29}.

God caused the word He had laid down as to these very matters to be brought to mind. Is not this an intentional instruction for us here? The conscience of Israel was roused by Joshua to the nicest care for the will of Jehovah. It was not a command that had been just then given, but one that had been laid down on the other side of Jordan. It was remembered now; as the circumstances indeed first called for it at this time. It was God’s land, and must not be defiled, but be regarded according to the rights of divine holiness. He had forbidden them to leave one hanged on a tree till the sun went down. They must never forget what was due to Him, and to His land.

Then Joshua, as we are told – and this too is in evident connection with the same principle –

built an altar unto Jehovah, God of Israel, in mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of Jehovah commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto Jehovah, and sacrificed peace offerings. And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses {Josh. 8:30-32}.

All shows the exercise of conscience and sense of the glory of God according to His revelation. It was the expression of thanksgiving offered to the Lord, but we see care for the law under which they were.

And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of Jehovah, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of Jehovah had commanded before {Josh. 8:33}. It is a fresh proof of the jealousy which Israel felt for the word of Jehovah, and the Christian may learn from their reverent attitude before it.

And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them {Josh. 8:34, 35}.

Every word was read, and read to every man, woman, and child, yea, to the strangers among the Israelites. As His authority extended over all, so each and every word was caused to fall on their ears thus solemnly, and the stranger that sojourned in their midst must hear the law, though there were privileges which none but Abraham’s seed could share.

I shall not proceed farther now, desiring to dwell more particularly on these chapters where the moral principles of the book are apparent to me. We have seen, first, the secret of victory; next, that of defeat; then we had, thirdly, the means and process of restoration; and, fourthly, the great practical lessons that resulted from all. May the Lord grant us, beloved brethren, to read every word as the revelation of the living ways of the living God with our souls! Those of the children of God will feel its application seasonable who have been brought in some little measure to appreciate the place given to all, but which all alas! have not taken. If we have, let us rejoice and fear not, though God will surely deal with us according to that which He has given us in His grace, not as on ground which our faith has left behind as none of His, whatever be His considerate care for such as have never learnt better.
In the wars of Jehovah it was not always a question of hostile power. Indeed this is not the most serious evil which the people of God have to encounter in this world. The very same principle which was true of Israel then applies to the Christian now. The wiles of the evil one are much more to be dreaded than his power; and Satan as a serpent acts far more grievously to the injury of the Lord’s name among His people than as a roaring lion. Undoubtedly it is an afflicting thought, how far the adversary can, and does, employ the world to the hurt of God’s people and God’s dishonor; but grace is ever above evil, and through its full revelation in Christ we have now a new standard to judge of good and evil, more particularly for the Christian. He can thus say that all that is wrought by the mere enmity of the world, set on by Satan, cannot harm; for he is not like a Jew, called to the preservation of life in this world, or to any by Satan, entitled to do so, as Christ always did. It mattered not who the person or what the thing was; it might be Herod or Pilate as instruments. The Lord, viewed now as the blessed witness for God here below, always took them from God.

The cup which my Father giveth me, He says,

shall I not drink it? {John 18:11}.

No doubt there lay behind what was, if possible, deeper than the outward fact of rejection. For the expiation of sin God must act according to His immutable nature in righteousness, and not merely as Father. But whatever might come, the effect on our Lord Jesus was that He justified God, even when in atoning for sin there could be no sensible enjoyment nor expression of communion. It is impossible that the eternal Son, the perfect Servant, could welcome or be indifferent to divine judgment, when He for us became its object, which He necessarily must be, if we were to be cleared from guilt and ruin by His bearing sin away. Hence we find the Lord Jesus then, but in the expression of abandonment, not of fellowship, not in doubts or fears, as some have said blasphemously, but realizing what it was when God made Him sin for us. Anything else would have been morally impossible and unsuitable at such a moment; but even then did He cherish unwavering confidence in God, reckoning upon Him, feeling the reality of His own position, entering in all the depths of His soul -- and those depths were unfathomable -- into all that God’s moral nature must demand when the question was of sin, even though with Christ Himself, His only begotten, suffering for us in atonement.

We speak here of the cross of Christ in view of atonement. This doubtless is the one solitary exception. It belongs to Christ in atonement, and to none else but Christ there and then; and out of Him came, not only His praises for ever, but ours with His, His in our midst. Apart from that which thus stands necessarily alone, where thanksgiving would have been wholly unseasonable and unsuited, not to say a mockery -- apart from this one stupendous fact which refuses comparison with all others, because of its nature, and where failure could not be, because He was then as always absolutely perfect, ever do we hear Him blessing His Father. Jesus in all things glorified His Father; and in the final suffering His perfection shone most of all; not because He was one whit more perfect then than at any other time, but because never before had it been His so to suffer, and it never could be again.

Take the Lord at any other moment than His suffering for sins, and no matter what came upon Him, the effect was
because the people ventured to act without the guidance and had been a severe repulse from Satan’s power, and this kingdom and throughout eternity. to be enjoyed now by faith, then to be displayed in the forth when it seemed to go out in death, only to rise again, shining one; but the brightest of all was the light that shone so to be? It was far otherwise with Jesus. His way was a the first occasion should be brighter than the last! Ought it the victory that this book affords. Alas, that it should be so! that crossed, Jehovah gave His people the most magnificent strength of the enemy presented itself after Jordan was now, is a harder thing than before his power already broken for us.

So it turns out here. We have seen that, when the full strength of the enemy presented itself after Jordan was crossed, Jehovah gave His people the most magnificent victory that this book affords. Alas, that it should be so! that the first occasion should be brighter than the last! Ought it so to be? It was far otherwise with Jesus. His way was a shining one; but the brightest of all was the light that shone forth when it seemed to go out in death, only to rise again, to be enjoyed now by faith, then to be displayed in the kingdom and throughout eternity.

In this case we find Israel more than checked. There had been a severe repulse from Satan’s power, and this because the people ventured to act without the guidance and protection of Jehovah. Having already proved the Lord’s presence with them, they did what we are apt to do. They assumed that Jehovah must follow them, instead of their waiting on and following Him. It was human inference, and this is never safe in divine things. They took for granted that, Jehovah having brought them into that land, there was nothing for them but to go forward. What was that? A forgetfulness of the enemy and themselves? More than that - a forgetfulness of God. Would it become men of faith to do without the Lord in the wilderness, not to speak of contending against the enemy in Canaan? Certainly not, if our souls had the sense of having to do with One that loves us; with One without whom we are nothing; with One who, having been glorified, has called us and saved us for the purpose of being glorified in us. Absolutely do we need Him; but besides it is our heart’s earnest desire, though we are apt sometimes to forget it.

It was so with Israel, and even Joshua, upon this occasion. After having been victorious at Jericho, one can well understand the sad mistake in the matter of Ai. But was the profit now lost when, by the intervention of the Lord’s gracious power, the mischief was retrieved? The Lord had put Israel in their proper place, disciplined them, broken down confidence in their own power. He had made them feel that there was nothing for Israel but to be subject to Him. They must not think, like the Gentiles, that it is a question of marshaling strength against strength. Such thoughts leave out God, and are utterly unbecoming to those who are called to walk in the consciousness of His presence.

This was a most wholesome lesson. But there was more to learn; and now they must be tried after a new sort.

It came to pass when all the kings that were on this side Jordan, in the hills, and in the valleys, and in all the coasts of the great sea over against Lebanon, the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, heard thereof; that they gathered themselves together to fight with Joshua and with Israel, with one accord {Josh. 9:1, 2}.

In all probability these tribes were encouraged by the check before Ai. The fall of Jericho had struck them with dismay; but they learnt through what took place at Ai that Israel were not necessarily invincible. So far they were right. They had learnt that Israel might be beaten, and disgracefully beaten. They had learnt that a much smaller force sufficed there to arrest that wonderful host of Israel, which before had filled them with consternation, and made their hearts melt at the very thought of their approach. They seem, however, to have consulted together, and judged that with a union of their forces the people whom Ai had stayed for awhile might be defeated. Even that little town, with its feeble resources, had contrived unaided to delay the advance of Israel, and was only afterwards, when too confident and off their guard, taken by stratagem.

Evidently the Canaanites had no notion of the lesson God was teaching His people. Nor need we wonder; for the people of God themselves had not learnt it thoroughly. They had profited, yet it had not so convinced their souls of the need of God’s guidance, the one thing which ensured victory, but that now, in presence of all this muster of nations against them -- Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, Canaanites, and so on, when the inhabitants of Gibeon came forward and offered an alliance with them, this seemed to many a desirable and welcome aid. Israel then had some friends who would succour them against the enemy. It is true that a certain uneasiness was felt.

They went to Joshua, unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country {Josh. 9:6}.

This naturally threw the children of Israel and Joshua off their guard. They knew perfectly -- and it is important to see how well understood it was that God had called His people to no peace with the Canaanites -- that they were a doomed nation. It is hundreds of years before God had given that land to Abraham. The Canaanites were then in the land, but they had gone on undisturbed for centuries, and until lately had allowed themselves to think their settlement there not so dangerous. But, when the passage of the Red Sea was heard of, terror struck their hearts. Then when the people, after their long pause in the wilderness, crossed the Jordan, fresh pangs warned them of approaching destruction if they defied the God of Israel. No doubt they might have fled. It was open to them to leave Canaan. What title could they pretend to seize the land of God? Had God

Woe {Matt. 11:21}

upon these places. It could not be otherwise; for they had refused the gracious and rich testimony of the Messiah. But He turns to God with

I thank thee, Father {Matt. 11:25},
at the same time. So we see victory in Him always. We too are entitled to look for it. Only remembering that to stand in presence of the wiles of the devil, as we are called to do now, is a harder thing than before his power already broken for us.

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no sovereignty? Is He the only one who possesses in this world no right? What a thought of God prevails in this world!

But there is more to consider. We may have noticed, and it is important to bear it in mind, that it was under the fullest title on God’s part that the Jordan was crossed. His was the ark of

the Lord of all the earth {Josh. 3:11}.

He would not abate His claims; He would not deny His rights. It was on this very ground, and with that banner as it were, that they entered the Holy Land. It was at the peril therefore of any who, knowing that God destined that land (and it was well known) for Israel, and who, having the warning voice of all that had befallen Pharaoh, and Amalek, and Og, and Sihon, and Midian, still dared to brave His host. Assuredly then they must take the consequences.

But the Gibeonites set to work after their fashion. If the mass of the nations trusted to force, the Gibeonites betook themselves to crafty counsel. There we may see typified the wiles of the devil. This represents some of them at least. The epistle to the Ephesians gives us divine authority for the solemn fact, that we need the whole armor of God in order to resist the two things -- the power of Satan on the one hand, and the wiles of the devil on the other, and this with pointed reference to this very book of Joshua. Josh. 6 teaches us in contrast with Israel that, as they wrestled with flesh and blood, we, on the other hand, have to contend with spiritual wickedness in heavenly places.

Thus the nature of the case comes before us very plainly. The Gibeonites denote those that are energized with Satan’s craft to deceive the people of God into a false step, and how far this succeeded we have now to learn.

They went to Joshua, unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country. Now therefore make ye a league with us. And, the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us {Josh. 9:6, 7}.

To my mind this is painfully instructive. It was not Joshua that suspected the trick, nor yet the elders or princes of the congregation, but the men of Israel. How often simplicity is right where the best wisdom fails: God makes us feel the need of Himself. And if this was true of Israel, it is still more needful in the church of God. We cannot be independent of a single member of the body of Christ; where the simple-minded man has a suspicion roused that is given of God, it were well that the wise should heed what the Lord would use to bring all to a right conclusion. But it was not heeded at this time. It is not often, and it seems not natural, that men accustomed to guide and rule should listen to those who are used to obey and follow. But in divine things those who despise the least must pay the penalty; and so it certainly was now.

The men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us, and how shall we make a league with you? {Josh. 9:7} Feeling, no doubt, that it was dangerous to talk more on so delicate a subject, they said,

We are thy servants {Josh. 9:8}.

This again seemed fair-spoken; but when Joshua put the question,

Who are you, and from whence come ye? {Josh. 9:8}

they said unto him,

From a very far country thy servants are come, because of the name of Jehovah thy God {Josh. 9:9}.

Here the unscrupulous deceit of the enemy comes out thoroughly. It was extraordinary to hear from the lips of a Canaanite the confession of the name of Jehovah; and this they knew well would tell more particularly with such an one as Joshua. He who most values the name of Jehovah would be apt to welcome it most where he least expected it. Accordingly, this weighed powerfully with him, when they added,

We have heard the fame of him and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroth. Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We are your servants: therefore now make ye a league with us. This our bread we took hot for our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you, but now, behold, it is dry, and it is mouldy. And these bottles of wine, which we filled, were new; and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey. And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of God {Josh. 9:9-14}.

The bait had taken, the mischief was done, and its effects wrought long. The men of Israel, who were not without fears at the beginning, allowed themselves to be ensnared. If Joshua led, we must not wonder that the rest followed. They took of their victuals

– the sign of fellowship in its measure –

they took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of Jehovah {Josh. 9:14}.

The enemy had defeated Israel. It was a fatal act, though the consequences did not yet appear. How much may be involved in what might be called the simple act of taking victuals! So another day, when it is rather the converse of this, we find in the New Testament. Thus to Paul’s mind, who ordinarily made so light of meats or herbs, the truth of the gospel might be staked on eating or

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not eating. I do not even speak of the Lord’s Supper, but of a common meal, when it was a question between the Jew and the Gentile, and this tried before no less a person than the great apostle of the circumcision. For a time was Barnabas carried away, and Peter too, by the old traditional feeling of the Jew. The good man and the fearless withdrew from the uncircumcised, ashamed or afraid of thwarting the feelings of the brethren at Jerusalem. Thus Satan gained a great point for the moment; but there was one at hand to vindicate grace promptly. Thank God, it was not yet that Satan had drawn away the whole church, or even those that best represented it. If there were together Peter and Barnabas, there was a Paul who resists, and Paul promptly decides, at cost (you may be assured) of every feeling. On the other side stood the man who had once shown him generous love, on the other side Peter, chief among the twelve, honored of God most signal among Jews and Samaritans, and even Gentiles (Acts 2–10), most to be honored of man therefore, and very justly so.

But who is to be honored if the Lord is to be put to shame in His grace? And so it was that Paul rose up in the might of his faith and in the simplicity of his jealous vindication of the truth of the gospel; for this was the question, this was what he saw involved in it. Who would have seen it but himself? But so it was; for there, and on that very occasion, the whole point of the gospel would have been surrendered, if Paul had consented to withdraw like the rest from the uncircumcision. Thank God, Satan did not succeed altogether in his wiles, though he did to a considerable extent.

But here it was God who was not consulted; and it is a more serious thing, beloved brethren, when it is not merely the men of Israel, but the elders, the princes; the chiefs of the congregation, yea, Joshua himself who thus left Him out of a matter which He only knew. And so it was on this occasion. They asked not counsel at the mouth of Jehovah. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them to let them live, and the princes of the congregation sware unto them {Josh. 9:14, 15}. There they bound themselves by the name of Jehovah, and it is a very striking thing for us also to see that at this time there was no trifling with the honor of that name. They felt that they had been beguiled. This was true; but they did not therefore consider that it was open to them to break the oath of Jehovah because they had been deceived into it. We too must take care how, where we have committed ourselves to that which is wrong, we lightly deal with that name. No; the thing was done: it could not be undone. They could have asked counsel of the Lord again; we are not told that they did so. They had made a double error: they entered into it without the Lord, and when the thing was done, we do not find that they spread the difficulty before Him. Thus it is most manifest the enemy gained an immense advantage over the host of Jehovah on that day.

And may we be watchful in our day, beloved; for these things are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come {1 Cor. 10:11}.

Nor is there a more important thing in difficulty, trial, or anything that may involve the feelings, and perhaps drag us into practical obligations, than that, before we venture on an opinion, before we take a measure, before we allow ourselves to be engrossed on this side or that, we should ask counsel of the Lord. This would spare us from many a sorrow, and it would hinder much shame and defeat before our enemies, and more particularly, I must say, in men that have wisdom, that are accustomed to guide; for there are few things harder than for such to retrace their steps, and the more so, the higher the character, the greater the experience, in the ways of God. If Satan gains such an advantage, the difficulty is enormous. We have only to apply it to ourselves. It is very easy to speak about what another should do; but let us only consider for a moment it to be publicly our case. It is easy to say what ought to be, and there is no doubt of it; but those who in any measure approach to it, and know the seriousness of such a position, cannot ignore, whatever others may theorize, that this mischief is incalculable. Therefore let us pray for one another; let us pray for those that most of all need counsel from God, that they may be ever kept from hasty words and measures either for themselves or for others, especially where the name of the Lord is involved with the adversary.

This then is, as I judge, the grave teaching that is brought before us in the account of the men of Gibeon. It is true that God permitted that they should bear a certain stamp of degradation in consequence. They were enslaved as the only course left open righteously. There was wisdom given so far to those who led the host of the Lord that the Gibeonites should be hewers of wood and drawers of water. After the treaty it would have been fresh sin, a crime, to have put them to death. The name of the Lord had been solemnly passed, and that can never be trifled with; but on the other hand, the Gibeonites were reduced to the most menial services for the sanctuary of Jehovah. Thus it was made plain that nothing preserved them but His name. Hence they were attached to the sanctuary, but this with the brand of slavery on them.

Nevertheless the wrong in the matter of the Gibeonites was of the most serious kind. It was not even like what had occurred before, where they sustained a temporary defeat, for there God looked to and brought them out of their humiliation; but here was a permanent difficulty that rose up witheringly for Israel at a later day, as we find elsewhere in Scripture. So grave and injurious were the consequences of the wrong step now taken through want of seeking the counsel of Jehovah.

In Josh. 10 we find the threatened coalition of the Canaanite nations consummated, not checked, by what had just taken place, and directed against Gibeon.

Now it came to pass, when Adoni-zedec king of Jerusalem had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and
had utterly destroyed it; as he had done to Jericho and her king, so he had done to Ai and her king; and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel, and were among them; that they feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty {Josh. 10:1, 2}.

Accordingly the king of Jerusalem turns to the kings of Hebron, and Jarmuth, and Lachish, and Eglon, saying, Come up unto me and help me, that we may smite Gibeon {Josh. 10:4}.

This is the shape that it takes. Gibeon becomes an object of attack; but Jehovah accomplishes His designs. This is a great and gracious consolation. There is never ground to distrust the Lord, no matter what the circumstances may be. We may have been foolish, hasty, and drawn into a snare, but we are never justified in distrusting Him. When we justify Him, which in such cases necessarily supposes our taking the fault to ourselves, there is a moral victory gained over our souls; and victory over self is the direct road to victory over Satan.

So it was on this occasion. The Canaanites joined together:
The men of Gibeon sent unto Joshua to the camp at Gilgal, saying, Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us; for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the mountains are gathered together against us. So Joshua ascended from Gilgal {Josh. 10:6, 7};

that is, from the place where circumcision took place. Such was the earliest result of peace with Gibeon. Joshua had to help them, not they Israel, as was expected. As this was never repeated, it is a fair question suggested by the Book of Joshua, what are we to gather from Israel’s constant return to encamp there. We have seen the force of circumcision to be the judgment of our fallen nature in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, which, once done, cannot in itself be repeated. But if so, what is the force of Gilgal always recurring? Why was the camp pitched there rather than anywhere else? We might have supposed that the camp would be naturally pushed forward. The victories of Israel gained, why do they always take the trouble of going back to that point? Why there rather than anywhere else in the land? The reason is most important, and it is this, that, founded upon the fact that the old man has been judged in the cross, we are always to rest as it were on that fact, and always to dwell upon what has been done there.

In short, then, it will have been seen that practical mortification is the answer to Gilgal, as the judgment of the flesh is the answer to circumcision. Thus the constant encamping in Gilgal is the continual recurrence to mortify self before God. Self-mortification would be useless unless the judgment had taken place in the cross of Christ. So far from being from God without the cross, it could only puff up the flesh. A man without Christ crucified as the expression of his own total ruin, judgment, and means of deliverance by grace, always thinks himself so much the better for his efforts in this way. There is no more insidious snare sometimes than even a man confessing a fault; he really seems greater in his own eyes when he has done so than before. He arrogates a certain credit of lowliness to himself because he has owned himself wrong. Now it is plain that the reason of that is, because the cross of Christ is so little, self so great, in his eyes. There then the importance of the encamping at Gilgal is felt, because Gilgal is not merely a man striving to mortify himself, but self-mortified on the ground of what God has done in Christ our Lord. This only is of grace, and hence by faith; that is, something humiliating in appearance, but exalting self because it is self-occupation, not God’s judgment in the cross.

There is another thing to be observed. It is an important thing that we should, according to the language of this book, encamp at Gilgal. I have not the slightest sympathy with one who says that it is enough for him to find all his nature already judged in Christ. Yes, my brother; but what about returning to encamp at Gilgal? What about your mortifying yourself? Remember this always; for one is just as true as the other, though no doubt God’s great act of judgment in the cross takes due precedence as the ground of our habitual self judgment. It is granted cordially that our mortifying self is nothing without the work of grace in the Lord Jesus; but when we have known it, are we to allow the thought that we are not to judge ourselves? that we are not to be ashamed of our inconsistency with the cross and with the glory of Christ? that we are not to use both as the best of reasons for not sparing ourselves?

Of course nature at once rises to argue stoutly, and defend itself if it can, for the last thing a man fairly and fully gives up is himself. But the moment the heart turns to Christ, and considers that all my blessedness is bound up with the solemn truth that all flesh has been made nothing of, and a new man brought in, and that God has done both in One who, having no evil, nevertheless suffered all for it, there only is the soul brought back to its true starting-point. When we fail in our souls to judge ourselves, God sends some painful circumstances to help us. Were we always walking in the power of divine truth before God, and judging ourselves, we should not come into so many sorrows of our making, nor require so much chastening from our Father. But supposing we fail in self-judgment, God is faithful; He takes good care of us, and makes us feel what cuts us every now and then, just because we have not returned, as it were, to the camp at Gilgal.

We have been going forward, desirous, it may be, to add victory to victory, or perhaps settling down without identifying ourselves as we should with God’s people and testimony and conflicts as a whole. For I am not now supposing our rest on the other side of Jordan; still less do I put the case of going back into Egypt; but it is easy in Canaan to forget the need of returning to Gilgal, yet there is Gilgal, and we need it in the scene of our blessing. Not only
was Christ crucified for me, but I am crucified with Him. They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts {Gal. 5:24}; and therefore, if we fail to walk consistently with the cross, snares from the enemy, and from God grief and bitter humiliation, come to us, it may be, exactly where we are most sensitive. He will have us back to Gilgal. Thus I think it is not hard to see the practical moment of the type. It is not only that Gilgal saw Israel circumcised. There it was done; but there is also the keeping up of the place of circumcision as being the only proper place for the host of Jehovah to encamp in. They must always start from Gilgal, and always return there.

So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valour. And Jehovah said unto Joshua, Fear them not {Josh. 10:7, 8}.

Why should they? yea, why should they not?

Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee. Joshua therefore came unto them suddenly, and went up from Gilgal all night. And Jehovah discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Beth-horon, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah. And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Beth-horon, that Jehovah cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died; they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword {Josh. 10:8-11}.

Then spake Joshua to Jehovah in the day when Jehovah delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel {Josh. 10:12}.

How truly the intervention of that day is all felt to be Jehovah’s doing! He uses His people, and it was a gracious thing in a certain sense that He should; for He could now, as at the Red Sea, have done all without them; but He would employ the people of God according to the dispensation. Thank God, we have a better calling than this, even an heavenly; but still, in its own place it is shortsighted and irreverent folly to overlook the honor of being employed in doing the then work of the Lord -- clearing the land of what was an ulcer and plague-spot, not merely for that locality, but for the whole earth; and such the Canaanites were. If there was to be a people of God at all, what other way was open than sweeping the land clean from the world-polluting Canaanites? And so Jehovah then delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel.

But mark the beauty of the truth. It was to Jehovah Joshua spoke, not to the creature, for Him only did He honor. How admirably clear of all creature worship even when creation was to be used marvelously!

And he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies {Josh. 10:12, 13}.

A memorable day it was in every point of view -- the cavil no doubt of the infidel, but the joy of every believer. I grant you that the men of science have their difficulties, as they usually have in what is above them; and I am afraid that we shall not be able to help them much. The truth is that the main, yea, only thing which lifts out of every difficulty, is confidence in God and in His word. Let us not essay to measure God by difficulties, but measure difficulties by God. Alas! it is the last thing that man thinks of doing.

Another thing not a little remarkable is that on this occasion Joshua addresses not merely the sun (a bold enough thing to do, to bid the sun stand still), but the moon also. It was not that the moon could give any appreciable increase of light when the sun thus ruled the prolonged day. There must therefore have been some other and worthy motive why the moon should be joined along with the sun in Joshua’s command, if, as I have not the slightest doubt, Joshua was guided by God in so singular an appeal to the sun and moon, when divine power was exerted to arrest the apparent course of the sun. We all know, of course, that it is the earth that moves; but Scripture does not speak in the technical language of science, which not only would have been unintelligible to those for whom it was intended, but unnatural in the ordinary language of the greatest philosophers. Sir Isaac Newton talked about the sun’s rising and setting just as much as the simplest countryman, and quite right. The man who does otherwise has no common sense. Here then Joshua employed so far the only language proper to his purpose. But this does not explain his call to the moon. Not only was no knowledge then possessed by Jews or Gentiles, but one may doubt whether our men of science would have thought of it even now: at any rate one has never heard it from them. Yet, if there had not been an action of the power of God with regard to the moon as well as the sun, the whole course of nature must have been deranged. How could Joshua, or any Jew who wrote Scripture, have known this? There was no astronomie science for two thousand years afterwards adequate to put the two things together; and mere observation of phenomena would certainly have been content with the light of the sun alone. But so it was. He whose power wrought in answer to the call guided his voice and the pen of the writer of the book. If there could have been an interference with the sun without the moon; if the moon’s course had not been arrested as well as the earth’s, so as to give this appearance to the sun, there would have been confusion in the system. It seems to me therefore that, so far from the sentence affording a just ground of cavil against God’s word, it is none of the least striking instances of a wisdom and power incomparably above science. So faith will always find in Scripture.

But there is one remark more to be made. Whenever
you hear men talking about science against Scripture, fear them not. There is not a man of them that will stand before you if you only cleave to the word of God. Do not dispute with them: there is no moral profit in it, and seldom anything of value to be gained by it: on the contrary, one may have the spirit ruffled if we do not try others by it. But God’s word is sharper than any two-edged sword, and can only be wielded aright by the Holy Ghost. And God will be with you if you trust in the perfectness of His word, and will deign to guide you if dependent on Him. Look the adversaries full in the face, and hear all they have to say to you; but confront them only with the written word of God. Cleave to the word in simplicity, and you will find that the difficulties urged against revelation are almost all due to wresting a passage out of its context. When they take this passage, they try to ridicule the voice of man telling the sun to stand still; whereas the moral truth is strikingly grand and beautiful. These scoffers never think of his including the moon in his command, still less of its force, as already hinted.

I merely use the instance that comes before us in this passage; but you will find that the principle applies to every part of the word of God. Read it as a believer; read it not as one that doubts or that distracts God; for you have known it, you have fed upon it, you have lived upon it, you have been blessed by it, you have been cheered in every sorrow by it, you have been brought into peace and joy by it, you have been delivered from all your fears by it, you have been set free from follies and sins by it, you have gazed on the glory of God in the face of Jesus by it. All this and more you have enjoyed thereby, and you have thus learnt by it, what science never teaches, because it never knows, the reality of God’s grace and love in Christ; yea, you thus know God Himself. Am I not then entitled to say, beloved brethren, confide in that word in the smallest detail, in every difficulty, whatever arises? Take it, looking up to God, and He will be with you in all your need.

But what is the main purport of the wonder of that day? For there surely is no miracle without a divine or moral reason attached to it. I doubt that there is a mere display of power in the Bible. And here let me add a needed observation on the usual notion of a miracle. Men constantly lay it down that it means a suspension of the laws of nature. This is really defective and misleading. The laws of nature are never suspended as a rule; but God withdraws from the action of those laws either a thing or a person as to whom He wishes to show His special interest. For instance, to give an application of this by examples taken anywhere from the word of God, when Peter was sustained upon the water, or when the iron was caused to swim, the laws of nature were not really suspended; they went on all the same. Everywhere else iron sunk, and had any other ventured to follow Peter, he must have failed to walk on the water. Thus it was no question at all of suspending the laws of nature. But Peter, by the direct power of God, was sustained, spite of those general laws. That is, he was exempted from their application; but the laws themselves were not suspended. Just so in the case of one raised from the dead before the day of Jehovah. There is no change in the reign of death as a law; but unequivocally the power of God interferes for the particular person that is exempted from the operation of those laws -- nothing more; so that it is all a mistake to speak of the suspension of the laws themselves. This observation will be found to be of some use in meeting not a little sophistry that prevails on the subject.

But to what end was it that God interposed on this occasion? Why this singular intervention? It was the most wonderful sign of a manifest kind up to that moment of the direct interest of a God, who was not only the God of Israel, but evidently the Lord of the heavens as well as of all the earth; and this was exhibited on that day particularly for man here below, but more especially in behalf of Israel. And what makes it so much the more surprising was this: it was not wrought when Israel had walked without mistake. Grace was much more apparent than when they were crossing the Jordan. It was in an hour of need, after they had erred and been defeated before the little city of Ai; and it was done after they had been thoroughly deceived by the great city of Gibeon. It was evident therefore that the people of God had no great might or depth of wisdom to boast of. They had been more than once at fault, but only so because they had not sought counsel of Jehovah. There is no enemy that can stand, and there is no defeat that can succeed, where the people of God wait in dependence on the Lord. But it is better to be defeated when we depart from the Lord, than it would be under such circumstances to gain a victory. If there could be victories gained at the expense of dependence on the Lord, I do not know that it is possible to conceive a greater snare. No, beloved brethren; far, far better to be broken, to suffer and be put in the dust, than to be allowed to triumph where we are really far from God and without His direction. The moral import of the wonder is thus plain; and God’s part in it appears to me most wholesome, needed, and weighty instruction for the children of God now.

We are approaching the end of the chief lessons of the book as to the wars of Jehovah. The latter part of Joshua does not so much consist in that. The middle and end of this chapter (Josh. 10) lets us see the dealing of Joshua with the kings that were taken in the land, by which Joshua caused it to be felt that the victory was in Jehovah’s name, who would completely put down the power of the world before His people. They might combine; but they must be broken if Israel looked to Jehovah. Stronghold, city, army, people, all fell before Joshua.

And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the Jehovah God of Israel fought for Israel. And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal [Josh. 10:42, 43].

In the next chapter (Josh. 11) are some further matters on which a few words may suffice before noticing the latter portion of the book.
And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor had heard those things, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shihmon, and to the king of Achshaph, and to the kings that were on the north of the mountains, and of the plains south of Chinneroth, and in the valley, and in the borders of Dor on the west, and to the Canaanite on the east and on the west, and to the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Jebusite in the mountains, and to the Hivite under Hermon in the land of Mizpeh. And they went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many. And when all these kings were met together, they came and pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. And Jehovah said unto Joshua, be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time -- {Josh. 11:1-6}.

How gracious is Jehovah! He speaks to Joshua now, not merely Joshua to Him, and we have both. Do not overlook either; we have both. It is not only that we need to pray, but we have His word. And we need both.

Let none in his ignorance slight the word, nor think that, because His word is written, it is not Himself speaking to us. What difference does the writing make? What there is is in our favor. If we could have the Lord speaking directly to us, without His written word in a permanent shape, would we be gainers? No; but losers, unquestionably. And therefore it is that our Lord (in John 5) puts the Scripture, as a weapon to use with others, above His own words: this we all know familiarly. The Old Testament may not by any means enter so profoundly into the truth as the words of the Lord and His apostles; but the Old is just as much God's word as the New; one writer is just as much inspired as the other; still, though God made the heavens and the earth, it will be allowed, I presume, there is a great difference between them. And so it is, that though the words of the Old Testament are as truly divine as those of the New, it has pleased God in His later revelation to bring out deeper and more glorious things according to His own perfection, as declared in His Son, not merely in the measure in which man could bear it, as He was doing of old. Still the Lord Jesus, spite of all that difference, tells the inculcuous, as must be well known to most of you, that He did not expect His words to convince where the Scripture was slighted. If they did not believe Moses' writings, how should they believe His words? Such is the way in which He treats unbelief as to Scripture.

I therefore use this fact the more readily, because many a simple soul might think what a delightful thing it would be to have the Lord saying now, “Go up to-morrow, and I will give thee the victory.” But, beloved brethren, do not forget that although it may not come home to feeling, to nature, in so direct and explicit a manner, the possession of God's word, which we can weigh and consider, and pray over, and take up again and again before God, not only gives His mind and will with assurance, but with permanency to those who are apt, through carelessness, to lose its force. Who does not know that a word or letter may make a most important difference, easily let slip by negligent eyes and thoughts? God has provided against this in His written word. Whether it be prayer, in which they are encouraged to ask counsel of the Lord, or whether it be the Lord Himself anticipating their wants, both are true; but they are not true of them merely, but of us, and, as we have seen, even more fully and definitely true of us. Let us not complain, as if we had not a God to count on to direct us by His word; and the less as He has given us His Spirit whereby we search all things, even His depths.

Here then He says to Joshua,

Be not afraid because of them: for to-morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire. So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon them. And Jehovah delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephothmaim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining. And Joshua did unto them as Jehovah bade him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire {Josh. 11:6-9}.

It is well known that not a few have found a difficulty in these extreme measures of Joshua, as expressing Jehovah's will. The exterminating severity with which the work was pursued in the land of Canaan shocks them. But they forget, or do not know, that these Canaanites were the most daring enemies against God, the most openly depraved and shameless on the face of the earth; not only morally the grossest, but this bound up most of all with idolatry of the most corrupt kind. They were the chief originators and patrons of unnatural crimes, which were as common as possible in their midst. If then God meant that the seed of Abraham should be His people in the land, how possibly could those who must be in evils moral and idolatrous the most infectious to Israel be tolerated there? I repeat, they might have fled elsewhere if they did not repent of their iniquities. It had been long revealed that God meant to bring His people to Canaan. It was therefore their rebellious unbelief if they did not look for it; for God had long ago said it plainly. But then, as we are told in the book of Genesis, the cup of the Amorites was not yet full {see Gen. 15:16}. If God was waiting for His people to go through the necessary discipline in bondage and sorrow, all that time Satan was working up the Amorites to their abominable excesses of evil. The cup of their iniquity was full when the divine dealings with Israel were sufficiently ripe for bringing His people in.

Again, it is evident that God has been pleased at various times to judge the world, as notably and on the largest scale at the time of the flood. If it was consistent with God
Himself to deal with a corrupt earth, then surely He was equally free to employ the Israelites later as His instruments for the land He gave them.

Besides, it was accustoming Israel to feel, by that flagrant example, what iniquity, corruption, idolatry, rebellion were against God. Their having to do it was of moral importance for their souls and ways: sharp discipline; but what of the cause? If God so judged the Canaanites, would He spare Israel? There was the reflection it was intended to produce on their consciences. And God, as we know, was far more unhesitating in dealing with His own people when they yielded to any of these enormities. In point of fact their own ruin was largely due to the fact that the children of Israel failed to carry out the will of Jehovah as to the Canaanites, perhaps yielding to sloth and cowardice, to amiability in some cases, though, I have no doubt, far more frequently because they were not really up to His mind in the matter. Thus they spared themselves far more than they spared the Amorites, and God was forgotten by them.

The moment you know the will of the Lord, leave all appearances with Him, who will take care of you. Do not you be afraid to do His will. You may be charged with harshness; you may be accounted as having no love. Do not you trouble about that; go on with what you know to be the will of God. He will vindicate your doing His will, though it may not be all at once. Faith has to be tested, and patience must have its perfect work.

Thus we find the Lord strengthening Joshua at this time to do His will to a very considerable extent. The chief cities were dealt with, and every creature that breathed was destroyed.

As Jehovah commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that Jehovah commanded Moses. So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same; even from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them. Joshua made war a long time with all those kings {Josh. 11:15-18}.

They may plot and fight awhile, but cannot hinder; for they have to do with Jehovah, and not with Joshua only.

There was not a city, that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle. For it was of Jehovah to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle {Josh. 11:19, 20}.

Not that Jehovah made them that they should be wicked, but it was of Jehovah that they, being wicked and indifferent to His will and warnings, should not now believe their danger -- that they should be blindly daring at last to their own destruction. God never makes a person a sinner; but when men are wicked, and are following their own lusts or passions, He may close and seal their eyes to the folly of what they are doing and the danger they are incurring, and till their extermination becomes a moral necessity. But these races deserved to be an example before the Israelites arrived; it was no hardship, boldly as they disputed God’s will, if they suffered in this new way. They deserved to suffer before they were led in this path in which they were devoted to death.

Justly therefore,

It was of Jehovah to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favor, but that he might destroy them, as Jehovah commanded Moses. And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anah, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities. There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained. So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that Jehovah said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes.

And the land rested from war {Josh. 11:20-23}.

So it will be in the day that is coming: there will be war and resistance then, but war in order to rest -- the rest that remaineth to the people of God.

Then in Josh. 12 we have a catalogue of the various kings that they conquered, with their kingdoms, all given in detail. It is a retrospective glance at the victories which the people had won, and the natural close of this portion of the book. The rest of the book does not consist of the wars of Jehovah so much as of the details of plotting the several portions of the land which had been already gained. They had defeated some of the Canaanites, but still there were many of the accursed that were not yet dispossessed of the inheritance given by God to Israel. On this I do not dwell, but merely refer to it. The important principles which lie beyond can only be brought out now in a cursory view.

Thus Josh. 12 is a summary of the conquests of Israel: first, those of Moses on the other side of Jordan (Josh. 12:2-6); next, those of Joshua on this side (Josh. 12:7-24). It will be noticed, however, that the kings are made prominent here. These were smitten if their people were not quite subdued, and their possessions became Israel’s; nevertheless we must distinguish between title and actual entrance on it, as we shall see in the half of the book that follows.

To the believer it ought not to be a question whether Israel was justified in the conquest of Canaan; and the endeavors to soften the matter, whether by Jews or by Christians, are vain. It was righteous vengeance on earth, not wrath from heaven, still less grace reigning by righteousness as in the gospel. It is not well founded, if
Scripture be our authority, that Joshua proposed flight or peace, with war as the unwilling alternative; nor is there any ground to suppose that the Canaanites would have been spared in case of surrender, whatever the mercy to individuals exceptionally. The Canaanites were devoted, in the most stringent and solemn manner, to utter destruction. It was not vengeance on the part of Israel, but of God, who was pleased to make His people executors of judgment.

On the other hand, Deut. 32:8 should be weighed: when the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.

God might have justly claimed all the world, but He was pleased to claim only the land of Canaan for the seed of Abraham. This is no Jewish fable, but the revealed will of God; and from the very call of Abraham it was certain that a land was to be distinctly given him -- a land soon understood to be Canaan, however long the chosen people might have to wait for it. (See Gen. 15.) Scripture therefore is very far from being silent on God’s resolve to take that land for Israel, though it was a part of His ways that their fathers should be pilgrims and strangers, while the Canaanite was then in the land.

Along with this would coalesce the moral necessity of judgment on its actual inhabitants (Gen. 15:16). Natural right of course it was not, but a divine gift, to be made good by the extermination of the enemy. But for this very reason it is absurd to argue that the God of the Old Testament is the same in character and working as the God of the New, unless earthly righteousness be the same as heavenly grace. It is to play into the hands of infidels if theology countenance such an illusion as the denial of the difference of dispensation, on the pretence that the difference is in form only with an essential agreement: only we must bear in mind that the former is excellent in its season, the latter perfect for eternity.

Undoubtedly, ever since sin came into the world, God is its righteous judge and avenger. In this very land the destruction of the cities of the plain was a standing witness to it; so did Israel prove in the wilderness, as well as in the land, and this up to the destruction of their city by the Romans. But New Testament time is not necessarily New Testament principle; nor is providential government in the world to be confounded with the principles of Christianity; nor temporal judgment with that of the secrets of the heart, the issue of which is the lake of fire.

But every Christian must feel that Jehovah was thoroughly justified in visiting their iniquity upon the Canaanites; for indeed the land, according to the energetic language of Scripture, could not but vomit out its inhabitants because of their abominable idolatries and their unnatural crimes almost unspeakable. They had many warnings also, both in the judgment executed on the most notorious in the land at the beginning of God’s ways with the fathers, and then again at the end when the children were brought out of Egypt and through the wilderness, with such wonders as did speak to their consciences, however they might brave all at the last.

But it is ridiculous to contend that the practical principle of the gospel, suffering for righteousness and for Christ’s sake, is not in direct contrast with the calling of the Israelite, the appointed executor of divine wrath. The Christian ought to know better than either to question the propriety of the past, or to assimilate it with the present. He ought to know also that the Lord Jesus is Himself coming again, and this not more surely in grace to take us to be with Himself in the Father’s house, than to appear in judgment of His adversaries, let them be Jews or heathen, or falsely professing Christians; for God is about to judge the habitable world by that man whom He has raised from the dead, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is the confusion of the two distinct principles which does the mischief: for Christians in making them worldly-minded; for unbelievers in affording material for their unseemly scoffs. He who holds both without confusion alone adheres to the truth intelligently, and affords no countenance to the infidel, while he maintains his own proper separation from the world unto Christ. There are judgments yet to be inflicted, but upon apostate Christendom, and even apostate Judaism. Never will the church have in her hand a two-edged sword to execute vengeance on the heathen. This is an honor reserved for all Jewish saints (Psa. 149:6), not for Christians. We shall be at that time glorified. The only vengeance which the church can rightly execute is of a spiritual kind (2 Cor. 7; Eph. 6). It is the sheerest confusion to pervert such intimations as these into the work of the gospel; and to interpret them of destroying men’s condition as heathen by the sword of the Spirit, and turning their antagonistic into a friendly position. God has made it as clear as light in His word that there is to be an outpouring, first of providential judgments, ending with the ruin of Babylon, next of the Lord’s own intervention in vengeance at the close of the present dispensation and the introduction of His reign of peace for a thousand years. But all this is as distinct from the ways of the gospel as from the state of things in eternity.

It is curious also to notice how modern Rabbinism approaches in this to modern theology. They do not hold the execution of divine vengeance in its plain and natural sense at the end of this age. They both soften down, the one for the Jew, the other for Christendom, the solemn threats of God into a sort of moral suasion -- a conquest to be effected not by external violence, but by the exhibition of truth and righteousness putting to shame the adherents of falsehood and corruption. Alas! it is not only with sneering infidels we have to do, but with real but half-hearted and wholly unintelligent believers who have ceased to be, or even understand, a true witness in the church for Christ, rejected in the world, but glorified on high. Hence they court and value worldly influence themselves, instead of maintaining our true place as a chaste virgin espoused to Christ, above the world through which we pass, and cast out by it, till we
are caught up to meet the Lord, and He appears for its judgment.

In Josh. 13 Jehovah says to Joshua,

Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed {Josh. 13:1}.

He was jealous for His servant, and rouses him to the fulfilment of his commission. For the Israelites had been slothful; they were slow to act upon the full grant of Jehovah. They would have rested when they had acquired enough to sustain themselves; but not such is the mind of God for us any more than for them. He will have us care for the things of others, yea, for the things which are Jesus Christ’s; for indeed all things are ours, and the more we make them our own in the power of the faith, the more is He glorified and the church blessed. For there is no better way to help on another saint than to win upon Satan and make progress ourselves.

Hence the land that remained is set out in detail:

All the borders of the Philistines, and all Geshuri, from Sihor, which is before Egypt, even unto the borders of Ekron northward, which is counted to the Canaanite: five lords of the Philistines; the Gazathites, and the Ashdothites, the Eshkalonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avites: from the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that is beside the Sidonians, unto Aphek, to the borders of the Amorites: and the land of the Gileites, and all Lebanon, toward the sunrising, from Baal-gad under mount Hermon unto the entering into Hamath. All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon unto Misrephoth-maim, and all the Sidonians, them will I drive out from before the Israelites: only divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites for an inheritance, as I have commanded thee. Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance unto the nine tribes, and the half tribe of Manasseh {Josh. 13:2-7}.

Thus Joshua is commanded to divide by lot even what was not yet wrested from the hands of the inhabitants. What an encouragement to advance without fear! Is not Jehovah worthy of trust? Nevertheless He will have His people to fight for Canaan; not for redemption from Egypt, but for their inheritance in the promised land -- to fight as those who are dead and risen with Christ, blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Him. And most minutely does Jehovah point out the borders of what He was giving them, and the enemies who must be dispossessed of their present hold, even as He deigns to mark out precisely what the two tribes and a half had already acquired under Moses, though it was short of the proper inheritance of His people.

We may note also how repeatedly, even in this chapter, attention is drawn to the tribe of Levi as without any such portion by the will of God (Josh. 13:14-33). To the Levites was given no inheritance in the land. The sacrifices of Jehovah God of Israel made by fire, yea, Jehovah Himself, was their inheritance, as He said unto them. The workmen of the Lord stood on a different footing from the rest of His people, and were called to special confidence in His provision for them and His word about them. If they failed in this, could they wonder that their words had little power?

In Josh. 14 we find Eleazar and Joshua, with the heads and the fathers of the tribes, distributing the lands by lot in the land of Canaan. The first who comes before us is Caleb with the children of Judah, who reminds Joshua of what Jehovah had said unto Moses concerning both in Kadesh-barnea. According to his faith so was his strength now, though forty-five years were added to the forty; and in his confidence, still as simple-hearted as ever, he asks for the mountain to be given him of which Jehovah spoke in that day.

For thou hearest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be Jehovah will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as Jehovah said. And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance {Josh. 14:12-13}.

Caleb is the striking witness to us of one who was strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, here for conflict (compare Eph. 6:10-12), as before for patient endurance in the wilderness (Col. 1:12). Nor do the words, if so be Jehovah will be with me, &c. {Josh. 14:12}, imply the least doubt of His presence and succour in making God his hope, but a pious and becoming expression of his own distrust of self. Again, there was no covetousness in this, but confidence in the Lord, which made him the more value what He had promised. We cannot too much have our mind on the things above: to this Caleb’s request answers for us. And this becomes the more evident, when we remember that the dreaded sons of Anak were there with their great fenced cities, in the face of which Caleb had to wrest it out of their hands, as, on the other hand, the city itself was afterwards assigned to the Levites. Caleb indeed was a lowly, or, rather, faithful man; and, though fearless, it was for peace he fought, not for love of war.

And the land had rest from war {Josh. 14:15}, says the Spirit at this point. Indeed it was the lack of faith that prolonged the need of fighting so long; otherwise the people had soon taken possession of what God gave them, and the enemy had vanished away before the people leaning on Him.

In Josh. 15 we have not the tribe of Reuben, but that of the children of Judah’s lot for themselves, a very considerable one indeed, independent of the special portion of Caleb, as traced in the last chapter, from the Dead Sea to the river of Egypt, to Jerusalem on the north, and the Mediterranean on the west. This, however, was modified by the introduction of Simeon afterwards, as we shall see. But here again Caleb is introduced, as he had a part among the children of Judah, with details of his generosity to his
daughter Achsah, whom he gave to Othniel. Thus early does the lot of Jehovah give the first place to the royal tribe, according to divine purpose and the prediction of Jacob. Grace makes a difference.

In Josh. 16 we have the lot of the children of Joseph, that is, of Ephraim, and the half-tribe of Manasseh (compare Gen. 48 end). They receive, in consonance with the fruitfulness of their father, the center of Canaan from Jordan to the Mediterranean. But here we find even greater failure than at the close of Josh. 15. For as it is said, the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites to this day, as was said of the Jebusites or inhabitants of Jerusalem. There was this great difference, however; that the children of Judah could not drive out the Jebusites, but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites to this day, and serve under tribute. Josephus is wrong in his way of putting the case; for he says the Benjaminites, to whom belonged Jerusalem, permitted its inhabitants to pay tribute, and that the rest of the tribes, imitating Benjamin, did the same. Scripture discriminates. The men of Judah could not drive out all, the men of Ephraim did not; and these latter turned their remissness into a source of gain.

So following up this naturally, in Josh. 17 we have a lot for Manasseh, the first-born son of Joseph, and once more the case of the daughters of Zelophehad among the rest. Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of their cities, but the Canaanites willed to dwell in that land (Josh. 17:12). Had Manasseh looked to God the obstinacy of the Canaanites would have proved a slight defense.

And it came to pass, when the Israelites were waxing strong, they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out {Josh. 17:13}.

They suited their own convenience, without care for the word of the Lord. The unfaithful are apt to complain, as the children of Joseph did to Joshua, as we learn from Josh. 17:14:

> Why hast thou given me one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people, forasmuch as Jehovah hath blessed me hitherto?

Joshua answered them on their own ground. If a great people, why not get up to the wood, and cut down for themselves? On their rejoining that the hill was not enough, the men of Judah could not drive out the Jebusites, the men of Ephraim did not; and these latter turned their remissness into a source of gain.

And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the Jehovah God of your fathers hath given you? Give out from among you three men for each tribe: and I will send them, and they shall rise, and go through the land, and describe it according to the inheritance of them; and they shall come again to me. And they shall divide into seven parts; Judah shall abide in their coast on the south, and the house of Joseph shall abide in their coasts on the north. Ye shall therefore describe the land into seven parts, and bring the description hither to me, that I may cast lots for you here before Jehovah our God. But the Levites have no part among you; for the priesthood of Jehovah is their inheritance: and Gad, and Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh, have received their inheritance beyond Jordan on the east, which Moses the servant of Jehovah gave them {Josh. 18:3-7}.

He would both rouse the people to feel what they ought to possess, and keep up before them in the way best adapted to their state that the whole disposing of the lot is of Jehovah. The separate position of those who served the sanctuary is carefully maintained: a striking testimony in the midst of the earthly people.

And so it was done. This Domesday-book was made according to their survey and description (Josh. 18:8, 9):

> And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before Jehovah: and there Joshua divided the land unto the children of Israel according to their divisions.

Benjamin’s lot is next described, borders and land and cities, to the end of the chapter (Josh. 18:11-28).

The second lot came forth to Simeon; and this is described similarly in the beginning of Josh. 19:1-8, with the added statement that it was out of the portion of Judah Simeon’s inheritance was taken, the part of the former being too much for them: and therefore the latter had their portion within their part (Josh. 19:9).

The third lot fell to the children of Zebulun, according to their families; their landmarks are laid down in Josh. 19:10-16.
In the fourth place comes Issachar’s allotment, described in Josh. 19:17-23; in the fifth, Asher’s, in Josh. 19:24-31; in the sixth, that of Naphtali, in Josh. 19:32-39; and in the seventh, Dan’s, in Josh. 19:40-48.

Beautifully is it shown (Josh. 19:49) that when they had made an end of dividing the land for inheritance by their coasts, the children of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun among them.

Nor is this all:

According to the word of Jehovah they gave him the city which he asked, even Timnath-serah in mount Ephraim: and he built the city, and dwelt therein (Josh. 19:50).

Self-seeking was not in Joshua more than in Moses. Each had his part in what was given to their leader -- Jehovah’s word, Joshua’s petition, and Israel’s gift: but not till they had ended their dividing of the land.

In Josh. 20 we have for the last time the cities of refuge, of which we heard repeatedly in the books of Moses; and my mind has no doubt that the introduction of their appointment here connects itself with the scope of Joshua. It is the shadow of God’s provision for His people after they shall have lost the land of their inheritance through blood-guiltiness, unwittingly and without hatred as grace will make good account in the godly remnant by and by, when apostates and rebels perish in their sin.

And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbor unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime. And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled (Josh. 20:4-6).

It is at the end of the age that the return of the slayer takes place -- at the death of the high priest that shall be in those days.

The Jew returns, when Christ closes that intercessional priesthood which He is now carrying on within the veil for us. As long as He is now in heaven, pleading as the true great priest {Heb. 10:21, see New Trans., JND} over the house of God, the manslayer abides outside his possession; but when it comes to an end, Israel, the all Israel {Rom. 11:26} of that day, will be restored as well as saved.

Josh. 21 gives the list of the forty-eight Levitical cities, with their suburbs, including the six cities of refuge just spoken of.

And Jehovah gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And Jehovah gave them rest round about, according to all that he sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; Jehovah delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which Jehovah had spoken unto the house of Israel; all had come to pass (Josh. 21:43-45).

The two tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh are then called and blessed and sent away by Joshua in Josh. 22. On their return to their possessions beyond Jordan they built an altar by Jordan,

a great altar to see to {Josh. 22:10}.

The report of this altar at once roused the whole congregation of the children of Israel, who gathered together at Shiloh. Before proceeding to war however, they sent Phinehas, and with him ten princes representing the other tribes, who taxed them with their trespass against the God of Israel in rebelling against Jehovah. As yet they realized the solidarity of Israel and the honor of Him who dwelt in their midst, and urged on their brethren’s consciences the iniquity of Peor and the sin of Achan, offering them room on this side of Jordan, if their land were unclean. To this the two and a half tribes called the God of Israel to witness how far from iniquity or rebellion it was that they had built the altar, for it was with no thought of offering upon it in independence of God’s altar, but lest their children should cease from fearing Jehovah:

A witness between us, and you, and our generations after us, that we might do the service of Jehovah before him with our burnt-offerings, and with our peace-offerings; that your enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which Jehovah had spoken unto the

This appeased the rising wrath of their brethren, who owned themselves delivered from the hand of Jehovah for the trespass they had dreaded. Whether it was not an invention of man -- in divine things always dangerous, as being a substitute for faith in God and His memorials -- is another question.

In Josh. 23 Joshua calls for all Israel, their elders, heads, judges, and officers, and lays before them what Jehovah had done and would do for them if faithful, warning them against affinity or religious fellowship with the Canaanite: else Israel must perish -- not their enemies -- from off the good land He had given them.

The final charge of Joshua follows in Josh. 24, where we learn the striking fact, never told us before, that their fathers were idolaters, even Terah, the father of Abraham,
and the father of Nachor, on the other side of the river (i.e. the Euphrates) when Jehovah took Abraham as the root of promise, and began that line whence they were born. His deliverance of the people from Egypt, care through the wilderness, and gift of the land, are next recounted, all of His grace; on which Joshua challenges them and their allegiance, to which the people answer, owning His mercy, and repudiating all other gods. But Joshua lets them know their insufficiency (Josh. 24:19, 20) and danger, which draws out their resolve to serve Jehovah repeated again and again in various forms. A covenant was made that day, and Joshua wrote the words in the book of the law, and set up a great stone in witness, lest they should deny their God. Then the people departed, and Joshua died; but the people served all the days of the elders that prolonged their days after Joshua.

Joseph’s bones too were buried in Shechem, in the ground bought by Jacob of the son of Hamor, the father of Shechem, naturally mentioned with the death of Joshua in mount Ephraim as well as that of Eleazar, Aaron’s son, buried in a hill of Phinehas his son, which was given him in the same mountain. Joshua brought the people into the land, as Moses led them out of Egypt, in accordance with the faith of Joseph. But a greater than all will give a deeper meaning in His day.
The Earlier Historical Books
Lecture 4
Judges 1–8

The book of Joshua has shown the power of Jehovah in the conquests of His people, and this too distinguished from the measure of their practical taking possession of what was conquered. For as these are not the same things, so the line drawn divides the book into its two portions: first, the actual blow that was struck at the enemy; and, secondly, the measure in which they took advantage of their successes in order to enter on the positive enjoyment of their own possessions.

The book of Judges stands in painful contrast -- the inevitable lesson of the first man. In it we are given to see the failure of the people of God to retain even what they had actually conquered; still more to press on in the acquisition of that which Jehovah designed for them. In both we have what clearly answers on the one hand to the blessing in which God has set Christians, and on the other to the ways in which the enemy has contrived to rob them of their just portion in the enjoyment of the Lord. This no doubt is a humbling lesson; but it is unspeakably gracious that God has given it to us in His word. It would have been overwhelming, if the New Testament had consisted of nothing but the inspired testimony of divine grace to that into which the Holy Ghost introduced the Christian in Christ. Yet not less humbling undoubtedly it is as God has given it to us. But otherwise there had also been utter depression; for it would be to leave us without divine solace: it would expose us to every kind of uncertainty, and to the utmost danger from the enemy, if God had not given us in the New Testament itself our book of Judges just as much as our book of Joshua. In short the Spirit of God has set out very clearly in the New Testament the departure from their own proper privileges of those that had been brought into blessing. It has even shown us, with the greatest fulness and care, the ways in which Satan gained the advantage over those that bore the name of Christ.

Who can fail to notice divine wisdom in the fact that the worst features that were afterwards to appear in Christendom should be then manifest before the eye not indeed of all saints but of the Spirit of God, that they should so far exist, at least in form, as to furnish the just and fitting occasion for the apostles to pronounce, more particularly in the general epistles or the later writings, whether of Paul or of Peter, of Jude or of John -- above all, in the book of Revelation? For this simple reason it is now only unbelief or negligence of Scripture that can be surprised. Let the shadows of coming evil be ever so filled out by developing facts, still they only verify the word of our God. Thus the confirmation of the word, being thus borne out not only in the good that God has imparted but in the havoc that the enemy has wrought among those that call on the name of the Lord, really turns, when learned from God, into a very solemn warning, and the increasing vigilance of the saint, by making him feel the wisdom and the goodness of God in separating us -- a thing always in its own nature repulsive, and naturally so to one who loves the saints unless there were an absolute call for it and confidence in His grace, whose will it is when unity is perverted to His own dishonor.

Granted that there are those to whom separation is no trial. They are not to be envied. It ought to be a sore trial, which nothing justifies but the stern and solemn sense that we owe it to Christ -- nay, further (as is always the case, what we owe to Christ being the best thing for the saints of God), not only a necessary course for our own souls in allegiance to the Lord, but a warning due to those ensnared by the enemy. Do we truly desire the blessing of all the children of God? Who does not that loves the Lord Jesus? Must we not pursue, if it were only for their sakes, that which will be most salutary for them under such circumstances will surely be to show them the danger of desiring paths which they might too lightly tread -- the paths of ease and yielding to the world, where Christ is unknown, forsaking what is true and holy to God’s glory.

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments {1 John 5:2}.

Thus it is then that the discovery of the declension of the people of God is turned to serious but real profit, yet never unless our souls are kept simple and self-judging, grave yet happy, in the grace of God. Hence you will find, taking the epistle of Jude as an instance, the care with which the Holy Ghost exhorts them to

- build themselves up on their most holy faith {see Jude 1:20},
- keep themselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life {see Jude 1:21}.

It is not only brotherly affection, but higher up the stream, if from the same source. It is divine charity which is
pressed. Never does the love of God lead to forgetfulness of His holiness, never in any way or measure to yield to the influences of evil that are flowing with a constantly increasing tide. This too we shall find in the Old Testament as in the New. In fact, if there be the same material looking at man, there is the same substantial truth if you look at God. Not of course that there was equal development then as now; for unquestionably the time was not yet come for the fulness of that which was from God to be manifested; nor consequently for man to display his enmity, and hatred, and incurable evil. How could either be till Jesus was known? Still there was from the earliest day a new nature in the saints, and the testimony of the word and Spirit of God, who was always looking on to Jesus. But now that grace and truth are fully before us in Jesus, His invariableness revealed cannot but invigorate the affections and brace the conscience, associating all with Him who came to do God’s will in exercised hearts towards God. He therefore keeps back nothing that is profitable, but tells us of our danger.

It is true, as all know, from the first. We see it as individuals as well as of communities. Both have their departure from His will and ways was by no means a result of centuries. Neither of old nor after Christ did it require ages to betray, though of course it always went on growing. Contrariwise the common law of the first man is immediate and invariable departure from God. It is not meant by this that there may not be fidelity exceptionally by grace; but it is unspeakably solemn to find the fact always in scripture, that there may not be fidelity exceptionally by grace; but it is not meant by this that the departure is immediate; and that this is true of individuals as well as of communities. Both have their importance. It is true, as all know, from the first. We see it in Paradise; we see it after the world was renewed; we see it now in the chosen nation. The same thing reappears in the Christian profession, as the apostle warns the Roman saints from the example of Israel. And their failure too the book of Judges shows us to have been not merely among some here and there, but alas! everywhere. There might be great differences between one tribe and another morally, as for instance relaxation was unquestionably more complete in Dan than in Judah; but the failure of Judah to rise up to the just recognition of Jehovah’s glory on their part is plain from the beginning of the history in the land.

All this appears to me to be of no inconsiderable importance, as meeting a difficulty that perhaps all minds have felt who have been somewhat exercised about the church of God. In the New Testament the church we see set up in fulness of blessing by redemption, as associated with Christ. Not only did the Holy Ghost act in power for the soul, but He was ever the witness of superiority over all circumstances for body and mind, and these displays of energy not confined to apostles, those chief envos of the Lord and instruments of the work of God on earth, but diffusing the victory of Christ over the church as such. But it is not merely that in the history that man has made of the church we find departure. There indeed it is most manifest for those that have eyes to see and ears to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. But the salutary lesson is this, that the simple child of God has got it all in the word, so that he needs no ecclesiastical history to show the solemn fact. The New Testament itself is amply sufficient; and indeed for most readers the histories that even saints of God have made of the church would but mislead. They palliate, excuse, or even justify the general departure from the word of God. Where not? Who can tell me one history that vindicates adequately the word and Spirit of God? So widespread and deep became the departure, that the very worst can hardly defend Christendom in the face of scripture. The grossest adulators of priestly power, those that sold themselves to the purposes of ecclesiastical ambition, have not been able to veil the heinous iniquity into which what was called the church of God sank before long; but it is an immense mercy that the simplest child of God has got in his Bible, not only the moral profit of all the ways of God, and the analogies of every previous dispensation of God, but what concerns himself. His own place and privileges, his own duty on the one hand, he cannot find except in the Bible; but even also the history of his failure he can find nowhere so clear, nowhere so simple, nowhere so rightly shown and proved as in that perfect word of God. And further, the familiarity with evil everywhere out of scripture tends to blunt conscience, if not to make us content with it, and therefore to settle down as if it were hopeless to find a path according to God in the midst of abounding iniquity. Whether it be the Old Testament or the New, the word of God never forms such a path, nor ever excuses it even for the weakest; and it is important to see that it is not weakness that goes astray: it is the subtlety of unbelief that can pervert even scripture itself to justify its own will. Undoubtedly there is nothing that man’s will may not find a reason for, perhaps too on the surface of scripture. There is no limit to its perverse ingenuity. But when the word of God is read with conscience, this is quite another thing. There the Shepherd’s voice is heard and known. Not that He fails to tell the truth in any case, for indeed He does in every case; but He makes the truth felt wherever there is a conscience open to hear.

This no doubt is the great instruction of the book of Judges. It is not the only one, thank God. The same book shows us the slipping away, or defection, of the various tribes of Israel from the purpose of God in bringing them into the land -- a purpose which, you must remember, will surely be carried out yet. No purpose of God ever fails in the end, while every purpose in man’s hand fails for the time. These are two of the most prominent lessons of the word of God; and the reason is just this -- all His purposes stand because there is a Second man: every purpose fails when entrusted to the first man.

It is of the first man we read of here; but at the same time we have the testimony of the gracious power of God, not now in conquest, but in lifting up from time to time, and in partial deliverances. Your attention is called particularly to this. According to the analogy of God, it is not to produce anything but a partial interference after the first
God is as now putting honor on Christ. No doubt this is presence not merely of law but of grace, as well as of what be found in that wondrous scene where the Holy Ghost was juster feelings, or were more truly in communion with the — a great mistake to suppose that Peter or the others had made for the very reason that we may read the word of God and, while we may seek to enter into and understand the just application of the Old Testament, that we may also avail ourselves of what lies everywhere before us, those great and divine and ever precious principles of divine truth which we want, and which God has given us to meet us in the circumstances where we are now.

We need not therefore dwell on the minute particulars of the first few verses. I will only make a remark on one point; namely, the blessing which confidence in grace always receives from God. We know how Caleb was blessed; but we find also that God’s grace developed in his daughter the same confidence in grace. She looked for good, and failed not to get it; and we do well to cherish the same spirit. It glorifies God to expect great and good things from Him. Why should we doubt Him? Would we abridge Him to the pettiness of our own thoughts? He had brought His people into a goody land, and His honor was pledged to bless them there. And yet not many there looked for the blessing. They thought of the difficulties, and they were discouraged. Such discouragement constantly leads to the dishonor of God. For if to complain of what God gives grieves Him on the one hand, on the other hand the enemy is most sensitive, and gathers encouragement to oppose from the want of faith that is thus soon, too soon, manifested in our gracious God.

Nothing indeed so disturbs the world as to see a man thoroughly happy in the Lord. It is not finding fault with the world that rouses its feelings, but the certainty that you have got a blessing to which they do not even pretend. And this, my brethren, is not best attested by strong expressions about it. The most effective testimony on every subject may be indirect; nor is anything of greater power than the simple unaffected expression of our heart’s satisfaction in a worthy object. Even the men of the world are sensible of this. There is nothing that so forcibly proves or disproves as that which does not lie on the surface, and is not said to serve a purpose. You are in trial, or difficulty, poor, persecuted, in prison, or dying; yet you are thoroughly happy. What can the world do with a man that nothing can conquer? It may oppose, insult, punish; but he only gives God thanks, and rejoices the more, and this without in the least making light of what is done. What can the world do with such a man?

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith {1 John 5:4}.

It is refreshing therefore to see that, when God must give us many a failure, it is not all failure. Nor should it be so with us. It is an unhappy spirit that always dwells upon the dark side; but at the same time it is never a truthful spirit that does not take full account of it. Has not grace brought us, beloved brethren, into such a place that we can fairly look at anything and any one in the face? We have no reason to fear, except that we should not confide in our God, and that we should not also dread the letting slip ourselves -- the letting in self to anything that concerns the Lord. Then I grant you there are weakness and failure at hand.

But Judg. 2 shows us another thing, a strange and very striking change.
The angel of Jehovah, it is said, came up from Gilgal to Bochim {Judg. 2:1}.

There was a deep significance here. Why should the angel of Jehovah come up from Gilgal? We have seen already what Gilgal was. O that we knew it better for our own souls! But this at least we have learned from the word of God, that it was the place where the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. It was the place where flesh came under the execution of the sentence of death. Nor was this all. For it was the place in which the host was regularly encamped; and thence it marched out to conquer at the bidding of Jehovah, and thither it returned again. Mortification of the flesh is the true place of power in the Spirit, and this is what Gilgal means. It was where Israel was reminded of the judgment of God on self, on man’s nature, on that which is unclean, and only fit therefore to be cut off and cast away. There God led them back, and thence they came out in divine strength. But the angel of Jehovah now finds himself in a place as characteristic of the book of Judges as Gilgal was of Joshua. It is the place of tears. Not to know sorrow when the people of God have slighted Him and declined is not to know where His Spirit dwells. Hardness of feeling, never according to God, is most of all opposed to Him when the people have failed to meet His glory, when they have not according to God, is most of all opposed to Him when they do not know where His Spirit dwells. But the angel of Jehovah now finds himself in a place as characteristic of the book of Judges as Gilgal was of Joshua. It is the place of tears.

The angel comes then from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I have made you go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. And it came to pass, when the angel of Jehovah spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto Jehovah {Judg. 2:1-5};

and then in the middle of this same chapter (Judg. 2:11-13), after the people had thus humbled themselves before God, we find that they turned away again.

They forsook Jehovah, it is said, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

Their grief was but passing.

And the anger of Jehovah was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies {Judg. 2:14}.

It was not merely now that there was a check. It was not that Israel had a passing humiliation. For Jehovah delivered them up expressly into the hands of their enemies; not that He did not love them, not that He would not work all for good, but that He must have the people in the truth of their state before He would prove Himself in the truth of His own grace.

Whithersoever they went out, the hand of Jehovah was against them for evil, as Jehovah had said, and as Jehovah had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. Nevertheless Jehovah raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of Jehovah; but they did not so. And when Jehovah raised them up judges

- that is, when they were brought down to this great distress, Jehovah appeared for them in showing them suited mercy –

Jehovah was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented Jehovah because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

But they would not hearken to their judges;

and it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers; in following other gods {Judg. 2:15-19}.

If the children of Israel would abandon Jehovah to serve idols, they are themselves given up by Jehovah to serve idolaters. It is so with us. If we sin, this measures and defines our chastisement; and so grace works repentance when we turn and cry to the Lord in our distress.

In Judg. 3, we have the details of this. The first two chapters are general. The nations come before us that were left to prove Israel according to the word of Jehovah. The earliest deliverer is brought before us in Judg. 3:9:

When the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah. Jehovah raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother.

So again we are told that afterwards

the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of Jehovah: and Jehovah strengthened Eglon [not the children of Israel, but their enemy] the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of Jehovah. And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees.

So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. But when the children of
Israel cried unto Jehovah, Jehovah raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded [Judg. 3:12-15].

Then we have details of the killing of the leader of their enemies, the king of Moab. Then again, in the end of the chapter, we are told of Shamgar the son of Anath {Judg. 3:31}, who delivered Israel from the Philistines.

But there is one feature common to all these three deliverers which may be pointed out, and not, I think, without moral profit. There was in every one of them an apparent defect, and they were therefore men that no one but God would have put forward. One was a younger brother; another was a left-handed man; and the third slew the enemy with an ox-goad. Thus in each there was an element against the prospects of their success. There was awkwardness, seemingly, in the weapon employed, or in the left-handed man, or in the younger brother, rather than in the eldest, the father’s might and the beginning of his strength, as Jacob says. It was not the pride of the family, the first-born, but his junior, that went forth to victory. Not thus does man choose.

This feature, however, belongs characteristically to the ways of God in a broken state of things. The instrument that He employs when His people are fallen is not according to the same pattern as when all things are orderly in His sight. In short, when the people of God depart from Him, He marks it, not by withholding a deliverer, but by the kind of deliverance given them. I am persuaded that there is a fitness in His choice of instruments, and that the same men that He employed, say, to found and form the church, are not of the class which suits His thoughts when all things are fallen into confusion. When the church was brought into being, when the ecclesiastical air was clear and bright, then it was simply a question of God working by the Holy Spirit upon earth in answer to the glory of Christ in heaven; then He raised up witnesses in accordance with the glory of Christ and the reality of His victory as man over Satan, as well as of His love in caring for His body, the church. When on the contrary the Christian profession had quite failed as a witness to Him, there could not but be God’s answer to the cries of distress that went up from His saints; but none the less has each instrument a marked weakness in some particular or other.

So I cannot but believe it will be found, without exception, in this respect throughout the history of Christendom. Thus, if we look three or four hundred years back, we can judge with considerably more calmness than in forming an estimate of our own day; we are free at least from much which is apt to warp. We see that in those whom God then employed there was no deficiency in a certain sort of power. There was a great energy, with a palpable, large, and speedy result; and we, of all men, ought to be the last to forget whatever form or measure of blessing God has been pleased to shower on souls. Can we not, beloved brethren, afford to recognize it where and when ever it may have been? Ought we not to give ungrudgingly the honor that is due to the work of the Spirit of God by anybody? The more you are blessed, the more free and generous should you be towards others; the more simply and fully you have received the truth, the larger should your heart be in rejoicing at the activities of divine grace. You are called on, by the very richness of God’s grace, and by the comfort and certainty of the truth He has given your souls, to acknowledge whatever has been of God either in the past or in the present to His praise.

Looking back then, I say, according to the love and humility that can value whatever is from above, we can see no doubt the power that shook nations and gave them an open Bible in such a work as Luther’s, or even in Calvin’s; yea, in others inferior to these. But are we therefore to consecrate everything they said or did? Or are we to shut our eyes to that which manifestly showed the strange shape of the earthen vessel? Certainly not. Far from complaining of such irregularities, I consider that they were in keeping with the state of things in God’s sight, just as we see in Israel’s case before us; just as the power of the Spirit which in general lifted above the manifestations of nature -- such as we see, for instance, in a Paul, or even in a Peter, or in a John (where it is hard to say what one could blame) -- suited the new-born church when the Holy Ghost was just given. It is not meant that there was nothing to judge, and that God did not see it; but still it would be hard for us to see it, judging fairly. Take the blessed apostles. It is in no way meant that they never slipped. Far from it; we know that they did; but what were slips of such as the apostles compared with the comparatively unjudged flesh of a Luther or a Calvin? In such as these, do we not come down to the left-handed men? or such as won victories with an ox-goad? That is, we see, in a day of utter weakness and declension, rather awkward witnesses, employed by God no doubt to accomplish His purpose, but with the significant mark that they were to the praise of His grace much more than to their own honor.

We have not done with the witnesses yet. There is another, perhaps more remarkable, and assuredly more singular in the form taken, in the next chapter (Judg. 4); so that it seems evident that it is a principle here. I am not choosing out some particular cases; but taking all as they stand. Here then we find a deliverer unquestionably, and one much put forward by God, but who would not have been thought of in an orderly state of things. I need not tell you that I refer to Deborah now. Certainly she does not act according to natural order. But wherefore was this? It was according to grace, though a rebuke to the men of Israel. Further, it was the grace of God, who, in the form of the deliverer, contemplated the condition of His people; for He meant them to feel that things were out of course. So it was, and so only, that Deborah was employed.

Now this was a day of great trial:

And the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years
he mightily oppressed the children of Israel {Judg. 4:3}.

It was a long-continued and grievous affliction:

And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not Jehovah God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? {Judg. 4:4-6}

Here there is no doubt that God wrought sovereignly. She was a prophetess; she was the communicator of the mind of God at that time -- pre-eminently so. But there is more to note.

Was not this a rebuke to man -- for instance to Barak? Undoubtedly; but it was according to the wisdom of God, and was ordered of Him to take that shape. It was the more remarkable, because one would not think at first sight such a thing probable as that a woman should be not only called out to direct men, but to direct them in a campaign -- to direct the leader or general of the hosts of Jehovah. Surely therefore there was some marked and indispensable reason of God that should have so arranged it.

And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go {Judg. 4:8}.

Can any one say that this was to the honor of Barak --

If thou wilt go with me?

A woman’s going down to a field of slaughter indispensable to the leader! The general could not go without Deborah to bear him company, share the danger, and ensure the victory! So it was.

If thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee {Judg. 4:8, 9}.

In her at least there was no want of confidence in God. But we shall see that we have God marking His sense of Barak’s unbelief:

Notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honor; for Jehovah shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman {Judg. 4:9}.

Another woman! Thus evidently on all sides of it the victory was altogether to the praise of God, and, as far as the form of it was concerned, man, Israel, general and all, ought to have received it as in this respect a humiliation. We need not dwell now on the particulars of this scene. These are more familiar, it may be, than the principle I have endeavoured thus to bring out plainly.

A song follows (Judg. 5), as to which one need only make a general remark. It has often been a difficulty to many souls how the Spirit of God could indite such a song - - a song that triumphs more than usually in the carnage and ruin of the foe. But what is it that persons who cavil at it conceive of the Spirit of God? The root of the difficulty appears to be this, that men are apt constantly to judge from their own circumstances. Now if we think indeed that God’s Spirit is bound to do or say nothing but what suits a Christian -- that He has never written anything but what is the expression of His power in magnifying Christ to our souls -- I grant you we could not have the song of Deborah. But then we could not have had the Old Testament as it is. The same principle that would supplant this song and deny its inspired character would, in my opinion, decapitate and destroy the Old Testament itself. It would leave us nothing at most but a few shreds of prophecy pointing to the Lord Jesus. It would dislocate, nay, blot out, the whole texture of the old oracles of God. The Spirit of God did work, but He wrought according to the state of the people of God then; and who but an infidel can deny the wisdom and the goodness of God in such a guidance?

The truth is that the only way to understand or to enjoy the Bible is the very same that we need to magnify God where we are now, and the same unbelief that sits criticising the Old Testament loses all power according to the New. The same men that find fault with the song of Deborah do not understand much better what the Spirit of God is in the Christian and in the church of God now. I am convinced that the darkness of unbelief which is allowed thus to dishonor the Old Testament meets its just retribution. What do such detractors really know of St. Paul or St. John? Nothing as they ought. When we approach the Bible as believers, when we draw near as those who owe everything to God’s grace that reveals to us according to His own wisdom, when we bend down before God as those that are willing to learn and grateful to be taught of Him, what then? The beauty, the excellence, the salutary character of every part of scripture more and more dawn upon our souls, and the very portions that were once difficult because of our (perhaps unconsciously) setting up to judge, when we ought still and always to take the place of learners, turn then into streams of blessing and light and strength for our own souls. Is it not the fact that the texts or whole books of the word of God that, even as believers, we felt our total inability once to read with profit are now what we most of all delight and rejoice in? And can we not therefore draw the simple and just conclusion from this, that if anything else be dim to us -- and surely there is still much that is but little and very feebly entered into by our souls -- all we want is to be more lowly, to be more thoroughly dependent upon God, who will reveal even this unto us?

In Judg. 6 opens the preparation for another and a greater deliverance. On this we must say a few words more before we close. Here undoubtedly the Spirit of God may well prepare us for a larger work and for fuller lessons. It is not a deliverer despatched in a verse, like Shamgar. Neither is it a man that was employed overshadowed by the superior light and even courage of a woman, Barak being small indeed in comparison with Deborah. Here we have the grace of God interfering to raise up a deliverer when the
Midianites had reduced the people of God to slavery for seven years.

And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strongholds {Judg. 6:2}.

They had never been brought so low. To be like wanderers and fugitives in the land of God, in their own land, was a burning disgrace to Israel. But there was a deeper need. They had forgotten Jehovah, and gone over to Baal more than was ever known before: hence also the necessity for awakening to this him whom God would use. What was it before God? Gideon felt this, and he felt it all the more because he knew their servitude to Midian was Jehovah's doing, who was obliged, because of the moral condition of Israel, to reduce His people to so despicable a condition. What must God have felt so to deal with those He loved!

Midian then,

and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.

For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah {Judg. 6:3-6}.

How touching it is, my brethren, to find this so often repeated story! Any one but God would have refused to listen to such a cry, at least from such a people. For had they not over and over sinned, and been chastised, and cried? Had they not gone back, cried, and been delivered; then fallen into sin again, cried again, been delivered again -- always crying, always delivered, and always falling back again, into a lower depth than ever? Only God could feel patience and show tender mercy to such a people. For if they cried under the sore trouble which Jehovah brought on them for their sins, none the less did He answer, grieved for them and pitying them.

And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah because of the Midianites, that Jehovah sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith Jehovah God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt? but now Jehovah hath forsaken us, and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not Jehovah bring us up from Egypt? but now Jehovah hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites {Judg. 6:13}.

They were both true. It was Jehovah that had blessed, and it was Jehovah that had delivered into the hands of the Midianites; and that very fact, overwhelming as it was, is precisely what gives confidence. Had it been merely that the Midianites had got the better of Israel, this were nothing for precisely what gives confidence. Had it been merely that the Midianites had got the better of Israel, this were nothing for

Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites {Judg. 6:7-11}.

Mark the twofold process of the Lord. He sends first a prophet, then an angel; the one to bring their sin home to their conscience, the other to raise up a deliverer. He loves to extricate His people from the wretched consequences of their failure, but He will have the evil owned first.

Clearly therefore Gideon knew by experience what the state of the people was. His condition was in miniature what that of the people was in general. He was threshing wheat behind a winepress, no doubt for fear of the Midianites. The commonest duty of a man in Israel could not be done without the dread of those mighty and numerous foes; but the angel of Jehovah appeared unto him, and said unto him, Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valour {Judg. 6:12}.

Now there is power that goes forth with the word of Jehovah. What an encouragement to its object! What! the man that was cowering behind the winepress? This to be the choice of God to break the yoke of Midian! What grace on God's part!

And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if Jehovah be with us

– for on that he takes his stand –

if Jehovah be with us

– not merely

with me.

He binds the people with the name of Jehovah, not merely with himself -- the invariable mark of true faith and love.

If Jehovah be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not Jehovah bring us up from Egypt? but now Jehovah hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites {Judg. 6:13}.

Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

A difficulty presented itself to his spirit. His heart was no doubt not without its exercises how all these things could be. It was not that he doubted; but he desired to have it explained. He was realizing the position of things before God; and Jehovah looked upon him, and said,

Go in this thy might.

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Was not this enough, that Jehovah was with him -- the same Jehovah that had delivered over Israel to their foes? The God of Israel declared Himself with him to deliver them now and to bring to nought the power of the Midianites.

Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And Jehovah said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man [Judg. 6:14-16].

He asks a sign, it is true; and Jehovah answers. I am far from denying that there was weakness in the faith of Gideon; nor is it implied that there was not a drawback here as in all the others who have passed before us. But allowing all this, it must be allowed that, after the Lord graciously condescended to his weakness, we find the power of God at work in his heart and ways.

But it is a great lesson to which our attention may be drawn here, that the might by which God works for His glory is in no sense a consciousness of communicated power. Never before had Gideon so felt his own littleness, his family poor, himself the least. And now there is another and deeper feeling.

When Gideon perceived that he was an angel of Jehovah, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord Jehovah! for because I have seen an angel of Jehovah face to face; And Jehovah said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die [Judg. 6:22-23].

He was consciously withered up before the presence of God -- the habitual effect, as we find in the Old Testament continually, of meeting what is there called the angel of Jehovah. Gideon, strengthened by that which put the sentence of death on his nature, builds an altar in the confidence of the word given him, and calls it Jehovah-shalom. Thus he lays hold of the word of peace, and promptly acts on it; and when once he has done this alone as a question between him and God, another great moral principle is seen. There is no groundwork for any deliverance according to God, there is no proper basis for His intervention, but the removal of all barriers between God and our souls. This is the prime necessity -- peace, then work; but there is no service safe till the person is secured and in peace.

On the other hand, before God can according to His own mind use a servant with strangers or enemies, He will have him begin at home. This is the next thing traceable in Gideon's history. How act abroad if there is sin and dishonor of God in the family?

And it came to pass the same night, that Jehovah said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: and build an altar unto Jehovah thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down. Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as Jehovah had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night [Judg. 6:25-27].

Still it was done.

And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they enquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing. Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it. And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death while it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar. Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar [Judg. 6:28-31].

Thus does God honor the uncompromisingness of faith. The will of Jehovah was explicitly declared to Gideon. He had nothing but death to expect, had it not been the will of the Lord; but, come what will,

he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever [1 John 2:17];

and Gideon was content to abide all consequences. I do not of course say that he could definitely anticipate these blessed words of John to us; but he had the instinctive sense in his soul that there is nothing like obedience; and Jehovah had made His will plain about His own dishonor at home. Indeed the inconsistency would have been enormous of a man's going forth to deal with the heathen enemies of Israel, while Baal was worshipped in his own father's house. No doubt there was the difficulty for a son so boldly to deal with his father's idolatry; and the greater too for one who did not disguise from himself how little he was, as we find when the angel appeared just before, meddling with that which would shock the prejudices of the family and of all around. For nothing wounds more than that which treats their religion as nothing.

Again, whatever appearances may say, there is nothing so truly humble as obedience; nor is anything so firm as faith. There are many persons who seem to think that man's will is the only thing that is strong. It is a great mistake. Self-will -- the action and energy of the flesh -- is merely spasmodic; it soon passes away, and this in the measure of its violence. But
he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

There is never continuance except in obeying Him. Gideon then went forth in this his might. But his might was shown in his father’s house at home before it could be displayed abroad, and he wins a new name over the false god before a blow is struck at the Midianites, though they are seen now gathered together in Jezreel, for Satan was roused; and the Lord meets again his difficulties, giving him external and repeated tokens, as we see at the end of Judg. 6.

The next chapter (Judg. 7) shows him in public. The children of Israel gathered round him whose bold stand for Jehovah would soon be spread abroad; for they well knew how sinful it was for any, and for Israel above all, to worship Baal.

And Jehovah said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many {Judg. 7:2}.

What a blessed thing it is to have One to guide us who is entirely independent of circumstances!

The people that are with thee are too many.

Never before in going to war in this world was there heard such a plea. Though the principle might be seen perhaps in the selection from the twelve tribes under Phinehas to fight against the same Midianites before Moses was gathered to his people, they were, in God’s estimate, too many to go to war with a host like grasshoppers for multitude (Num. 31). It is good to have God to judge for us, whether in peace or war, service or suffering.

The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead {Judg. 7:2, 3}.

This was a distinct appeal to His own word in Deut. 20:8:

And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren’s heart faint as well as his heart.

How precious thus to find God recalling His word by Moses!

And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand {Judg. 7:3}.

But they are not few enough for the purpose of the Lord.

And Jehovah said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go {Judg. 7:4}.

The root of the mischief, which really had brought in declension, was that the people, ceasing to value what God had given, were not willing at first to contend for it, and that, having accustomed themselves to the presence of Jehovah’s enemies, they had fallen into their evil ways against Himself. The great moral lesson they had then to learn was what Jehovah is for His people. For Israel it was no question of numbers, or munitions of war; but of Jehovah, who would use and bless those only who have confidence, whose heart is to Himself. So it was brought down to a strange but searching test.

Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth {Judg. 7:5}—not those that took the water with ease as at ordinary times, and like men. From this very thing, from themselves and their comforts, they wanted to be delivered. It was not here only a question of faint-heartedness, but of entire devotedness to the Lord and the work before them. We may not walk as men, nor entangle ourselves with the affairs of life, to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ. The evil was in thinking that it was merely a question of man against man, whereas the faith that counts on God is willing even to be counted as a dog before Him. Those God would use must not seek their own ease or honor. They were men so hanging on the word and work of the Lord that to partake of the refreshing by the way, though it might be in the most hasty fashion, no better than a dog might, seemed intuitively good enough for them: their hearts were set on His task before them, and not on their own things.

This then at once severed those who cared not for themselves, but for what was given them by God to be done, from the men who, even upon such an occasion, could stay to consult their own habits, their own liking, their own ease. This I believe to be just the truth intended here for our instruction: with a little handful of that sort Gideon was to do his errand.

By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place {Judg. 7:7}.

Then comes another remarkable dealing of God with other instruction for us.

Jehovah said unto Gideon, Get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand {Judg. 7:9}.

He was encouraged, though it was a service of immense danger in appearance; but what is this to the Lord? Ours is only to obey.

But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: and thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host {Judg. 7:10, 11}.  

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There is no book in the world comparable to the Bible for transparency. The writer was inspired to tell as calmly as by the Lord the Spirit. And the war-cry was heard; and more, as we are changed into Christ’s image, beholding God’s glory in Christ: our God would have it reflected more. For it is not only that we see the light of the earthen vessels breaking; and thus it is that the light can shine out brightly. For it is not only that we see the light of Christ, as they blew with trumpets; we too must have death working in us, if life in those we serve, and the earthen vessels breaking; and thus it is that the light can shine out brightly. For it is not only that we see the light of God’s glory in Christ: our God would have it reflected more and more, as we are changed into Christ’s image, beholding it, as by the Lord the Spirit. And the war-cry was heard, the sword of Jehovah, and of Gideon [Judg. 7:20].

Who but God could speak out so simply? He was afraid, and takes with him the servant. Where is the honor of the successful warrior? It belongs to God alone.

And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seaside for multitude. And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host. And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for Jehovah hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian. And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man’s hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers [Judg. 7:12-16].

The cake of barley bread was no great thing in itself or in men’s eyes. But so it is that God delivers, not by wit, power, or wealth, but by His Spirit working through a despised instrument. And Gideon worships as he hears. His confidence is in the Lord. He was less than ever in his own eyes: God filled them, and His people too had therefore a great place:

Jehovah hath delivered into your (not my) hand the host of Midian.

Yet we know that their actual state was as low as their number within was small. All turns on Jehovah; but these were His ways. And Gideon’s faith saw it all done.

The two arrive about the beginning of the middle watch.

And they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands [Judg. 7:19].

Strange mode of fighting this -- to us how full of suggestive instruction! We too have to bear testimony, not of ourselves, but of Christ, as they blew with trumpets; we too must have death working in us, if life in those we serve, and the earthen vessels breaking; and thus it is that the light can shine out brightly. For it is not only that we see the light of God’s glory in Christ: our God would have it reflected more and more, as we are changed into Christ’s image, beholding it, as by the Lord the Spirit. And the war-cry was heard, the sword of Jehovah, and of Gideon [Judg. 7:20].

And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. And the three hundred blew the trumpets [Judg. 7:21, 22].

It was not their skill, nor their prowess, but their testimony, that was used, their loud testimony of Jehovah’s mission, Jehovah’s will, Jehovah’s deliverance of the Midianites into their hands.

But if faith does not wait for numbers, nor rest on them in the battles of the Lord, others follow when the enemy has received a manifest defeat.

And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledest us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply. And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer [Judg. 8:1, 2].

Many, however, who had no heart for the work when all was depression, are forward to complain of the conquerors.

And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledest us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply. And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer [Judg. 8:1, 2].

It is admirable to find one who knows how to meet the chafed spirits, even of those who have done little to secure the victory. These men of Ephraim no doubt helped, and Gideon only said what was quite true. Everybody knows, I presume, that the main destruction of an army is far more when the battle is turned than when it rages. Those who fall during the struggle are comparatively few, while those who are cut down when it has become a flight may be very many; and therefore one can see how the mild answer of Gideon might be strictly true; but we do well to weigh the lowness of it, and the willingness of him who bore the brunt, exposed to all danger, to take the least and give the highest place now that God had wrought for His people. Alas! it is as sweet as it is rare.

And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing [Judg. 8:4].

Here we have another lesson, bright as to the conquerors, but a painful one as to others. The Christian has a divine spring of power against weariness; but are we always thus pursuing?

Paul was.

This one thing I do {Phil. 3:13}.

How little it was valued in Gideon! He asked for refreshment for the three hundred; but he meets with taunt
and reviling, and this Gideon remembers to their cost another hour; for it was heartless. The victory once secured, that which was needed to vindicate the outrage on Jehovah’s people in the execution of His work has its grave place; for Israel was called to be the theater for the display of God’s earthly righteousness, which is the true explanation of all these things that are sometimes difficult to the Christian mind, if uninstructed in the difference of dispensations.

The chapter does not conclude without another, and a serious warning. The request of Gideon becomes a snare to himself and his house. How painful this is, my brethren! How often we see that the result of the victory of faith is too great for the faith that won it! Gideon refused for himself or for his son to reign.

Jehovah,
as he said simply and strikingly,

shall rule over you {Judg. 8:23}.

But he desired the earrings of the prey, and made an Ephod of the gold, &c.,

and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house {Judg. 8:27}.

Peace followed, and Gideon died in a good old age, leaving seventy sons, beside one born of a concubine. But it came to pass as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god. And the children of Israel remembered not Jehovah their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel {Judg. 8:33-35}.

Thus manifest and lamentable was the break down in the faith that had done such things. For it was an effort to preserve by a form what can only be sustained by grace from the same source. How blessed for the Christian, for the church, is the presence of the Holy Spirit with us for ever! How inexcusable for Christendom the attempt to perpetuate some apostolic ephod, a snare to all that bear the name of the Lord! Nothing can stand but the Spirit of God, nothing take its place; for He alone secures the glory of Christ in the church. This consequently is the true article of the church that stands, however momentous justification by faith is to the individual believer. And a form, however well-intentioned even, is no preservation from the grossest idolatry, but rather paves the way for any or every idol, as we see here after Gideon’s death among the children of Israel, quick to forget Jehovah and the vessel of His delivering grace. Alas! the beginning of the mischief was in Gideon’s house, and even in Himself. One is worthy, One alone.
My object being no more than a sketch, as most of you know, I desire to say but a few words on such of the chapters as bear a similar character to that which has been already pointed out in the early portion of the book. We see that God was faithful; but the fidelity even of those whom He used in deliverance is another matter. Their faith was owned; but it was of a sadly mingled and imperfect character. Indeed this is found regularly throughout the book of Judges. In the case of Abimelech it is seen most conspicuously, yet is it always true, though it may be occasionally more marked than at other times. In him we have a man who took advantage of the reputation for the power of God that had wrought by his father; but where anything of the sort is used for self, and not for God, bitter disappointment must be the result; and if there be anything more marked than another in his history, it is the solemnity of divine retribution. This is always true in the ways of God. What a man sows he must reap: if he sows to the flesh, of the flesh he reaps corruption. And this is just as true of the saint as of the man who rashly or lightly bears the name of the Lord Jesus. In the latter case it is nothing but flesh, which becomes manifest in the long run; but even in the case of him who is truthful, whatever is carnal, whatever lets out that nature which is already judged, the confession of whose judgment is the very starting-point of a Christian, but which it is his calling to act upon and treat as a dead and condemned thing to the end -- if he forgets this, then, in the measure in which he does so, it brings in that to which the Lord must infallibly deal with. Now, in Abimelech's history we see that he had begun with the most intense selfishness -- taking an utterly reckless advantage of those who had a better claim to represent their father than himself. The end was that he met with the judgment least of all to be coveted by man, most of all detestable to a proud spirit like his own (Judg. 9).

On Tola and Jair (Judg. 10) we need not pause; but in Jephthah again we have solemn issues brought out. But here again is found the same brand of what was worthless or untowardly in the instruments that God used in a day of declension.

Jephthah the Gileadite, we are told in Judg. 11,
was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot {Judg. 11:1}.
Abimelech was no doubt the son of a concubine; but here we descend lower still. Nevertheless he

who lived a kind of freebooter's life -- the chief of a reckless company of outcasts and desperadoes. So low were things now in Israel, that even this man becomes an instrument of God's deliverance; and so evidently in all this was God stamping on the people His moral sentence of their state. He could not in their then condition employ vessels of greater moral worth. He plainly intended to testify to his state by the agents whom He used for their good (Judg. 11).

Nevertheless we learn even from the lowest He deigned to work by that, while doubtless there was a most humiliating condition in Israel, God's rights were maintained for His people. Jephthah takes the greatest pains to prove, when he comes forward, that he has clear right on his side. This is an important principle. It was not merely that the people were unworthily oppressed by the Ammonites, but Jephthah does not venture to go to war, nor does the Spirit of God clothe him with energy for the conflict, until he had the certainty in his soul that the cause was a righteous one, and this founded upon the dealings of God with the children of Israel and with Ammon respectively. This is exceedingly instructive.

Nothing justifies, in the work of the Lord, a departure from His mind or will. It does not matter what the line taken may be, no good end will ever be owned by God unless the way be according to His word and righteousness. Even the man who above all others perhaps illustrates the danger of rash vows in the joy of a divine deliverance, and that affecting him in the nearest possible way, was the very reverse of rash in entering on his service for the people of Israel. Hear what a solemn appeal Jephthah makes to the elders before he acts. Undoubtedly the desire of his own importance and aggrandizement is but too manifest; but when he enters upon the service itself, he not only takes care that the right should be felt by Israel to be indisputably with them, but that this should be known and pressed on the conscience of his adversary.

So he

sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land? And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt,
from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably {Judg. 11:12, 13}.

The answer however was incorrect. The king of the Ammonites did not speak candidly. It was not true that the children of Israel had taken those lands as was pretended. The Ammonites had lost them before the children of Israel took them from others whom they might lawfully attack and despoil; but God had forbidden that the children of Israel should spoil either Ammon, or Moab, or Edom. God held even to the distant tie of connection -- a most striking proof and witness of the ways of our God. There had been in ancient times a link between Ammon and Moab with the children of Israel: a cloud of dishonor and of shame overhung them; yet a link there was, and God would have this at least to be never forgotten. Years might pass, hundreds of years roll over, but moral principles and even natural relationships do not lose their power. And it was of the greatest importance that His people should be trained in this. The lands might be good pasture, the temptation great, the provocation given by Moab or Ammon very considerable. On human grounds there might be a just right of conquest; but all this would not do for God, who must decide everything even in the battles of His people. God does not permit Israel, because this one or that is an enemy, to take the place of enemies to them. He stands to it that they must never have an enemy unless it be God’s enemy. What an honor when Israel are permitted to take up only the cause of God! They are not allowed to enter on campaigns out of their own head. What courage and confidence may they not then cherish!

So it was pressed on Israel then. The king of Ammon had forgotten, or had never enquired after the real righteousness of the case. What he felt was that these lands had once been his lands, and that the children of Israel now possessed them. More he knew not, nor wished to learn. But this was far from the true and full history of the case. The fact was that some other races and peoples had dispossessed the Ammonites of these lands. Now it was perfectly lawful for the children of Israel to treat them as intruders and strangers, who had no rightful claim, no valid plea why they should be restored. For we must remember carefully this, in looking at the dealings of God with the holy land and with His people Israel, God had always destined the land of Palestine for the chosen people. Had not He a right to do so? The Canaanites might have retreated from it; the Ammonites might have sought other lands. The world was large enough for all. There was at this time, as at every other, ample space for occupying here and there; and if the reason why they did not move was because they cared not for the word of God, they must take the consequences of their unbelief. They did not believe that God would enforce His claims. They had no faith in the promise on God’s part to Abraham or to his seed. But the time came when God would act upon that promise, and when those that disputed the title of God must pay the penalty.

Undoubtedly the children of Moab, Ammon, and Edom, for reasons of relationship at least, were exempted from the sentence to which God subjected the races of Canaan. If some of these had taken away lands that belonged to the Ammonites, it was open and perfectly lawful in this case for Israel to put these intruders out of the land, and to take possession of whatever was their spoil. If Ammon could or would not seek to recover it previously, they had no title to claim now from Israel. It was on this principle then that Jephthah pleads the righteousness of the cause that was now to be decided by the sword between Ammon and Israel. Therefore is it explained with great care.

Thus saith Jephthah, was his answer,

Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon.

Nothing justifies departure from the word of God. It matters not what is the apparent good that is to be gained, or what may be the mischief that is to be avoided: the only place that becomes a believer is obedience. So says he:

When Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red Sea, and came to Kadesh, then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land; but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh {Judg. 11:15-17}.

And what did Israel? Resent it? Not so: they took the insult patiently; and these were persons who were called to be the witnesses of earthly righteousness. How much more are we, brethren, who are the followers of One who knew nothing but a life of continual sorrow and shame for the glory of God! This is our calling; but we see even in Israel that outside the limits, the very narrow limits, in which God called them to be the executors of divine vengeance, even they calmly bear and brook as they best might; and there were those that understood the mind of God, and knew perfectly well why they were not so called to do. They took it quietly, and passed along their way.

Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon {Judg. 11:18}.

It was a great way about, and extremely inconvenient. Who doubted the unfriendliness of Moab and of Edom? It was known, but intended to be so; but for all that the children of Israel, as Jephthah showed, would not go against the word of God.

Now the moral importance of this was immense, for if they were simply doing the will and word of God, who could stand in their way? The object of the king of Ammon was to put the children of Israel in the wrong. Jephthah proves in the most triumphant way that the right was all on
And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place [Judg. 11:19].

They did not wish to quarrel with the king of Heshbon, Amorite as he was, unless he were actually in the holy land; but it was of God that these Amorites, to their own ruin, would not let them pass peaceably through. This again makes the case of Israel still more clear, because it might have been supposed that surely the Amorite must be put out of the way, seeing that that most wicked race was devoted expressly to destruction. But no –

Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. And Jehovah God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok [Judg. 11:20-22].

There was the plain and sure title of Jephthah. Israel had not taken these lands from Ammon at all. They had taken them from the Amorite. If the Amorite got them from Ammon in the first instance, as was no doubt the fact, this was an affair not between Israel and Ammon, but between Ammon and Sihon. It was the business of the Ammonites to have defended their claims as best they could against the Amorites. If they could not make them good, if they had lost their land, and could not recover it, what had Israel to do with their affairs? The children of Israel were in no way responsible for it. They had won the land by the provoked fight which the Amorite had drawn them into. They had sought peace, and Sihon would have war. The result was that the Amorite lost his land. Thus in fact Sihon had assailed the Israelites against their will, who had taken the land from him. The title of the children of Israel therefore to that land was indefeasible.

God Himself had ordered things so. He knew right well that the presence of the Amorites upon their skirts would be a continual snare and evil. He permitted that there should be no confidence in the peaceable intentions of Israel, for the very purpose of putting them in possession of the land. Thus the king of Ammon had lost his old claim, and had no present title to question Israel’s right of conquest.

So now, says Jephthah, Jehovah God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it?

The king of Ammon might assail the Israelites, and renew the arbitrament of the sword, but he was unrighteous in demanding the land from Israel.

Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whosoever Jehovah our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess [Judg. 11:23, 24].

After having thus completely refuted his claim over the land on the ground of its being Ammonite, whereas in point of fact it had been won from them by the Amorite, and as such had passed into Israel’s hand, now he gives them a warning from the blows that God had inflicted on a mightier king than himself.

Art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them, while Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aror and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? [Judg. 11:25, 26]

Thus was it proved that Israel had, in whatever light regarded, a valid title, not only from long-continued possession, but from a right founded on their conquest of one of the enemies devoted to destruction by God Himself, but an enemy who had wantonly attacked them, when they would have left him unharmed, as they would the Ammonite now. In every point of view therefore the ground taken by Israel was solid, and could not be disputed righteously. The king of Ammon had no just claim whatever.

Being thus proved to be in arms without right, the king of Ammon was only so much the more fierce, as is usual with people when convicted of a wrong to which their will is engaged.

Then the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon. And Jephthah vowed a vow unto Jehovah [Judg. 11:29, 30].

Here the rashness of the man enters the scene, the consequence of which is a display of what was painful in the extreme. We have had the power of God acting in deliverance, but man alone is incapable even of a safe vow to Jehovah; and who could fail to foresee the bitter fruit of rashness here? Man is as weak and erring as God is mighty and good: these two things characterize the book from beginning to end. So in this rash vow says Jephthah, it shall be that whatsoever, &c.

The same word means whosoever. There is no difference as to form. I do not myself doubt that it was put in the broadest way.

It shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me.

He could, if he had reflected, hardly expect an ox or a sheep to walk out of the house. It was quite evident therefore that Jephthah was guilty of the greatest rashness in his vow.
Whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be Jehovah’s, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering {Judg. 11:31}.

What came out we know too well. It was his daughter, and I do not doubt that he, in his determined unbending spirit, fulfilled his vow.

All are aware there are a great many who try to explain the difficulty away or soften it down. They need not be at the trouble. Scripture does not in any way vouch for the immaculateness of those even who wrought in faith. It does not throw a veil, as man loves to do, over that which is uncomely and distressing in those that bear the name of the Lord; especially as the very object the Spirit of God has here in view is to show the frightful results of a vow so little weighed before God, not at all drawn from His guidance. On the other hand, is there not real beauty in the obscurity in which Scripture treats a matter so painful? We know that men make it a question for ingenious minds to speculate on. The spiritual man understands how it was. As the vow was without God, so an issue was permitted most offensive to the Holy Spirit. We can easily therefore comprehend how the holy wisdom of Scripture avoids details on a fact so contrary to the mind of God, as a man dealing thus with a human being, yea, with his own daughter. It seems to me then that the reserve of the Holy Spirit is as strikingly according to God as the rashness of Jephthah is a solemn warning to man.

After this we find how the pride of the men of Ephraim takes fire at a person of such an origin as Jephthah, spite of the signal deliverance by his means for Israel, so that they come forth to fight (Judg. 12). Jephthah might little desire such a conflict; nevertheless, where do we see meekness, where patience? And be assured, brethren, that in an evil world patience is morally much beyond power. Thus we may find the most striking manifestations of power in men as disorderly as the Corinthian Christians; but the same persons are a plain proof that it is a far harder thing to do the will of the Lord, and harder still to suffer according to God, than to work any miracles whatever.

The truth of all we find in our Lord Jesus. He was the power of God and the wisdom of God; but what shall we say of His obedience on the one hand, and on the other of His patience? Others may have shown as mighty works, as great displays of power; nay, even the blessed Lord Jesus Himself said,

Greater works than these shall ye do {see John 14:12}.

But where was there such devotedness in doing His Father’s will? and where such a sufferer? Indeed, for Him to obey in such a world must have been suffering. It could not be otherwise. As long as the world is under the usurped rule of the enemy of God, the path of obedience must always be one of suffering, and this, I may add, increasingly, as we see in Him. Jephthah knew little if anything of this; so the result was, that the Ephraimites, in their pride, meddled with this rude warrior, who dealt with them, we may be very sure, not more mildly than with his own daughter. He not only turned with the grossest insults on their speech, but fell on themselves, and slew at the passage of Jordan forty and two thousand men of one of the chief tribes of Israel. Such then was the bloody crisis at which a deliverer of Israel arrives in his unsparing resentment. Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon follow.

In the next chapter (Judg. 13) we begin a new kind of instrument God raised up for His purpose; and in this case the state of the people was such that God severs him to Himself as a Nazarite. A stronger proof there could not be desired, that the people, as a whole, were far from God. In all ordinary cases a Nazarite was one who had taken a peculiar vow of separation to God, but lasting only for a short time. In the instance before us it was an extraordinary Nazariteship, stretching through the whole life. But what a Nazarite was Samson! Outwardly indeed he was separate. We have here one of the strangest and most humbling of histories recorded in Scripture, and withal singularly marking that very truth that we have so often before this referred to: how little moral strength keeps pace with physical power as it wrought in and by Samson. Of all the deliverers that grace ever raised up, there was not one who for personal prowess was to be compared with Samson; but of all those, where was the man who fell so habitually below even that which would have disgraced an ordinary Israelite? Yet was he a Nazarite from his mother’s womb! It seems therefore that the two extremes of moral weakness and of outward strength find each its height in this extraordinary character.

But we must look a little into the great principles of divine truth that meet us in weighing the history of Samson. His very birth was peculiar, and the circumstances too before it; for there never had been as yet a time when Israel had been so enslaved; and undoubtedly the deliverer, as we have traced regularly hitherto, so here again to the last, is seen to be according to the estate of the people, with whatever might or success God might be pleased to clothe him.

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of Jehovah; and Jehovah delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years {Judg. 13:1}. It was a long time, we might have justly thought, in the days of Gideon, to have known seven years’ subjection; but we hear of a far longer period in the case of the Philistines, the hottest and most pertinacious of the hostile neighbors of Israel, and so much the more galling as being within their border. For forty years the people groaned under their hard mastery. We shall find too, that Samson’s feats of power, great as they were, in no way broke the neck of Philistine oppression. For on the contrary after Samson’s days, the sufferings of the children of Israel reached even a higher degree than they had ever attained under Samson or before.

However this may have been, we may notice first the quarter whence deliverance was to come:
There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites {Judg. 13:2}.

It was ordered of God that it should spring from that tribe, which was more than any other marked, not merely by a weakness that portended danger to themselves, as we shall see, but by a moral laxity which would finally afford a suited subject, as indeed from the beginning it had been intimated prophetically in the last words of their father Jacob a-dying, for the fatal result of departure and apostasy from God. Of this tribe Samson was born.

The circumstances also were highly remarkable.

His wife was barren, and bare not. And the angel of Jehovah appeared unto the woman {Judg. 13:2, 3} with the promise that a child should be born, at the same time enjoining that she was to drink no wine nor strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; and that, when the child was born, no razor was to come upon his head.

For the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines {Judg. 13:5}.

There was another whom God would employ at a later date to destroy the power of the Philistines, a man of another spirit, and of a hand very different from Samson’s. I speak of course of David, the son of Jesse. Whatever might be wrought now was but the beginning of deliverance for Israel. God would magnify His power, but only as a witness now and then; nothing more. Anything like full deliverance must await that day, itself a type of the day of Jehovah.

The woman then tells her husband of the angel’s visit, and they both entreat Jehovah, Manoah particularly, that the man of God might be sent again. Jehovah listens, and His angel appears to the woman, who summons her husband, when both see the angel as he repeats his message with its solemn injunction. Separateness from what was allowed to an Israelite was not only commanded but made life-long in Samson’s case, as I cannot but believe it significant of what was due to God in consequence of the state in which the people of God then lay.

In due time the child was born, and the Spirit of Jehovah began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol {Judg. 13:25}.

His chequered history follows.

And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines, and he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife {Judg. 14:1, 2}.

His father and mother remonstrate in vain.

Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?

Samson was just as self-willed as he was strong.

And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well. But his father and his mother knew not that it was of Jehovah, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines {Judg. 14:3, 4}.

Now that the occasion calls for it, one may notice by the way the transparent boldness of Scripture, as wonderfully instructive as the reserve we have already remarked. If man had the writing of the story, would he have dared to speak out thus plainly? I doubt that any believer, without inspiration, would have felt it desirable to write that verse, and many more, as God has done it. If unveiling the fact at all, he would have apologized for it, denounced its evil to clear himself, spoken much perhaps of God’s permitting and overruling. Now I am far from denying that it is right for us to feel the pain and shame of Samson’s ways. But there is one thing that God’s Spirit always assumes -- the perfect goodness and the unswerving holiness of God. And this, beyond all doubt or fear, we are entitled always to keep before our hearts in reading the Bible.

Never then let the breath of suspicion enter your soul. Invariably, when you listen to the written word of God, range yourself on His side. You will never understand the Bible otherwise. You may be tried; but be assured that you will be helped out of the trial. The day may come when nobody appears to lend you a helping hand. What is to become of you then? Once allow your soul to be sullied by judging those living oracles, and real faith in the Bible is gone as far as you are concerned. If I do not trust it in everything, I can trust it in nothing.

So dangerous is apt to be the reaction against one ever so honest; the more you have trusted, when you begin to doubt, the worse it is apt to be, even with poor erring man, who knows not what a serious thing it is. Nor ought any one to allow a suspicion until he has the certainty of that which can be accounted for in no way save by guilt. And this, I need scarce say, is still more due on the score of brotherly relation and divine love, not merely on the ground of that which we might expect for our own souls.

But when God and His word are in question, it ought to be a simple matter for a child of God. How often it is ourselves who make the difficulties of which the enemy greedily avails himself against our own souls and His glory! For objections against scripture are always the creation of unbelief. Difficulties, where they exist for us, would only exercise faith in God. The word of God is always in itself not only right, but fraught with light. It makes wise the exercise faith in God. The word of God is always in itself

Undoubtedly there are many things in scripture of which we are ignorant; but then we are not entitled to interpret the word of God by ourselves. There is such a thing as to be taught of God. The Holy Ghost is given for
this as for other purposes. It may often be doubtless that we are obliged to wait, and a wholesome thing too for our souls it should be. It is well sometimes for all those who teach that they should be obliged to learn; well that they should be forced to feel that they do not know; an excellent moral lesson that they should confess it -- not only be conscious of it, but own it; for indeed the necessary claim of scripture is that it be confided in as the word of God, though it does not thence follow that we are competent to explain all. By the Holy Spirit only can we enter in and enjoy.

It is not here meant that there is any special difficulty in that which has been the occasion of these general remarks; still less is it implied that he who speaks makes any pretension, to know anything as he ought to know, more than those he sees around him. If through the unction from the Holy One we know all, it is equally true that we all are learners.

Again, it is not of course any attainment of mine that leads me to speak as I have done now. If I have spoken strongly, it is only, I trust, what becomes every believer. I have taken no ground beyond your own, my brethren; but surely this is a ground that calls you to assert the very same inestimable privilege that I boast as by grace a man of faith. It is not the vanity of setting up oneself as possessed of exclusive powers or special means of attaining or explaining anything; for I should distrust any one who pretended to anything of the sort, no matter who or where he might be. But that which does good to every saint and to every soul is the unqualified confidence in God and His word, which, if it does not reproduce itself in hearts purified by faith, at least deals with the consciences of all others till utterly blinded by Satan. Nor are you thus called to believe anything like an extravagance, though it surely would be so if the Bible were a human book, and so to be treated like any other, which after all even infidels de not: witness their occupation with it and zeal against it. Who troubles himself with the Koran or the Shastres, save their votaries?

But scripture claims always to be the word of God -- never the word of Isaiah or Ezekiel, of Peter or Paul (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Pet. 3:15, 16); for, whatever the instrument may be, it is as truly God's word as if the Holy Ghost had written it without a single instrumental means. If this be submitted to (and you might more consistently reject the Bible altogether, if you do not submit), one sees the hollowness and falsehood of sitting in judgment upon it; for who can question that to doubt that which comes directly from God Himself would be to take the place, not merely of an unbeliever, but of a blasphemer or an atheist? And if unbelief be probed home, it comes to this: it is a virtual denial of God's veracity, of His revelation, if not of His being.

But returning from this to the simple tale of Samson's life, I take it as the plain fact that God meant us to learn that He saw fit at that time to deliver by an unworthy instrument, by a man who showed how low he was, if only by the moral incongruity of an Israelitish Nazarite seeking a wife from the fiercest of Israel's uncircumcised enemies. The grossness of such conduct is left to tell its own tale; and yet God, by the man that was thus pursuing his own self-willed course, meant to overrule the occasion for His glory, snapping the more violently the ties which Samson's ungoverned passion and low thoughts induced him to form. The descent is great, when one bearing the name of the Lord slights His word and seeks a path of his own. If God permits him for a season to do his own will, what shame and pain he must reap before long! Meanwhile the man, morally speaking, is ruined -- his testimony to His name being worse than lost. Even if God interferes and produce the direct opposite of the fleshly enjoyment which self-will had sought, it is in no way to the man's praise if God effects His purposes by his acts, spite of wrong and folly. Never indeed is good the fruit of man's will, but of God's. This only gains the day; for it alone is as wise and holy as it is good. I take it therefore, that in the present case there is nothing to stumble the simplest believer, though no doubt there may be to one who knows not God and His word. Alas! how many there are in these days of audacious free-thinking who are disposed to sit in judgment on His word, and give His revelation no credit for telling us the truth as it was and is.

Whatever then might be Samson's motives and conduct, it was the Holy One, as we are told; who prompted him against the aggressors of Israel.

It was of Jehovah, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him {Judg. 14:4, 5}.

Thus there was an arrest on the road. We know that the spirit of ease and self-indulgence readily finds a lion in the way -- can make one where none is; but here was a real lion that roared against the self-willed youth.

And the Spirit of Jehovah
 – to some minds a marvelous fact under the circumstances – came mightily upon him.

It is the expression of the agent of divine power -- in no way the seal of redemption or the earnest of the inheritance, as we know Him dwelling in us now since the shedding of the blood of Jesus. It was the energy of His Spirit who thought of His people showing out by the way, as we have remarked, in that wayward man the fallen state to which they were reduced by their own sin, with the highest claims outwardly but morally in as low a condition as could then be conceived.

And the Spirit of Jehovah came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand {Judg. 14:6}.

Samson stands alone; of Israel none with him, as with the others before him. There was the plainest proof of what God could be, even where there was but one man to work
by; but this very fact showed to what a depth was Israel
now sunk. It was bad enough when Gideon had only three
hundred that God would employ. What was it when there
was only one, and such an one as Samson? In order to have
communion, we must have some good which is shared
together. There was, there could be, none any longer as
Israel was.

What a picture of the true state of things! Even his
father and mother knew nothing about their son’s
movements. Everything was out of course. Scanty honor
paid he to his parents, but ardently gave himself up to the
pursuance of his own plans. Yet was God behind and above
all; and God, deigning to employ even such a man, at such
time, and under such circumstances, to accomplish, or at
least to begin, the deliverance of His people.

Samson was afterwards about to put a riddle to the
Philistines from this lion. But did he heed the lesson
conveyed in the fact himself? Resist the devil, and he will
flee from you. Treat Satan as Satan when he betrays
himself; and what can he do against the name of the Lord?
Yet is the victory won by God’s Spirit, without anything in
the hand; but it is by direct antagonism to the enemy, not by
guilty connection with his instruments. Grave truth! Ah!
why did not the strong man learn wisdom in the fear of
Jehovah, as he again visited the place where his first lesson
was given? His victories had then been as holy as they were
brilliant; for he surely needed not to have defiled his
Nazariteship by an unholy marriage in order to have
punished the Philistines.

Alas! we next hear of Samson’s visit to the Philistine
woman who pleased him well: no small sin for an Israelite,
as it is worse for a Christian, to marry one of the world.

And after a time he returned to take her, and be
turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and,
behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the
carcase of the lion. And he took thereof in his
hands, and went on eating, and came to his father
and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but
he told not them that he had taken the honey out of
the carcase of the lion. So his father went down unto
the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so
used the young men to do {Judg. 14:8-10}.

Then follows the story of his companions and the riddle -- a
riddle which he was clever enough to put, but which he had
little faith to understand or appropriate himself. Is it not
evident that Samson feebly knew what God was teaching
him by the lion which he slew, and by the lion’s carcase
which he found with the honey in it? Carried away by his
uncurbed feelings (to whatever end God might turn all, for
He always governs), he was mighty to act; but as to
intelligence, little more than an unconscious instrument. Yet
did he propose a most instructive riddle, which set forth
justly the then condition of the people of God.

In that image we have the enemy in great power, but
God infinitely above him, able as well as seeing fit to use
the least worthy vessel of His power, and out of the slain
enemy to furnish the sweetest refreshment. How
triumphantly has it been done in Christ our Lord, but in
how different a way! Absolutely immaculate Himself, He
was made sin for us, that we might become God’s
righteousness in Him who for us by death annulled him that
had the power of death, and gave us out of that defeat our
unfailing comfort. Bright contrast between Samson and the
man that overthrew Satan on that cross where He Himself
reached the very climax of weakness! For He won by no
external strength but by suffering. He was crucified in
weakness, but rose in the power of God; but there, instead
of folly, instead of shame, instead of unhallowed alliance
with the enemies of God, how does unsullied perfection
shine in Him of whom we boast! The result in the type alas!
is that, whatever might be the victory over the lion, and
whatever the sweetness of the honey, the effort to connect
himself with the woman of Timnath turns out no small
trouble to the man of might, whose anger was kindled at the
treachery which sold his riddle, and, when his wife was
given to the companion he had used as his friend, issued in
such vexation for the Philistines as is known to us all
(Judg. 15:4, 5).

This again leads to a bitter vengeance of the Philistines
on those of Timnath who had served him so ill -- the very
fate befalling them at last, to escape which at first the
woman had lent herself to the basest treachery. (Compare
Judg. 14:15 with Judg. 15:6.) Now it was that God
wrought for His glory. He extricated failing Samson from
the direct consequences of his sinful association; but He
dealt retributively with treachery by the hands of their own
people. For

the righteous Lord loveth righteousness {Psa. 11:7};
and in its measure it is very striking to see the way in which
this came out even in the case of the worldly uncircumcised
enemy. We can all understand righteousness where the
ground is clearly sanctioned of God; but is it not also
strengthening to our hearts to find that, even where all was
dark and faulty, God knows how to give effect to His
principles? He has no doubt secrets of grace above all
difficulties and wrongs: of this we cannot doubt for a
moment; and indeed we have abundant proofs of it here.
The earth is destined to be the theater where God will
display righteousness reigning; but even now, while things
are out of course, and His enemy is in power, He holds to
His own character, owning and using all He can.

After this we see the Philistines the object of the severest chastisement from Samson, who
smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter, and
went down and dwelt at the top of the rock Etam
{Judg. 15:8}.

There he encounters a new trial, which sets before us the
state of Israel in the most painful light. Is it not increasingly
true that we can go no lower, whether we look at the people
of God or the last deliverer in the book of Judges? Is it
possible to conceive a conjuncture of its kind more
humiliating? Not till they desired a king like the nations.
But alas! even when God gave them one in a man after His own heart, we then trace greater abominations under the lines either of those who broke off in self-will or of those who turned the line of promise to nothing but corruption. We are arrived at the end of this sad history. Picture in imagination, if you can, how God could descend more to meet a degraded people; yet was it just then that the outward exploits against the foe were so brilliant. But if God’s people have got into subjection to the world, none are so heartless about if not bitter against him who breaks fully with the enemy.

Samson is now absolutely isolated on the rock Etam. There is not a man that sympathizes with him, not even in Judah; yet Judah, we know, was the royal tribe in the purpose of God from the beginning, as in fact its type followed in David. This makes their behaviour the more remarkable here.

Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi. And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us. Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? \{Judg. 15:9-11\}.

Judah! is this the tribe for the praise of Jehovah? is this the tribe that men praised? Could, at the beck of the Philistine, there be found at once three thousand men so willing and prompt to betray the champion of Israel? three thousand men of Judah! One could understand three thousand men of the Philistines; but to what a deplorable pass in Israel were things come, when three thousand men of the worthiest tribe were thus obedient to the Philistine, and joined against the strong deliverer to hand him over, bound a prisoner, to the enemy. It was His brethren who sought to lay hold on Him as beside Himself, His brethren who did not believe on the man Himself, the circumstances that had brought about the rupture with the foe, the mind of Judah, if not treacherous to the Israelite, cowering before the uncircumcised, and now the strangest of weapons for war.

And they said unto him; We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves \{Judg. 15:12\}.

What an opinion he had of them! And as naturally as possible too they take it. They have no shame nor resentment on their part at this accusation of treachery. Their moral condition indeed was the very lowest, below nature itself, toward their deliverer.

And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock. And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of Jehovah came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men \{Judg. 15:13-16\}.

Nor was this the only intervention of the Lord, but personal succour follows at His hand. For it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramath-lehi. And he was sore athirst, and called on Jehovah, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised? But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof En-hakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day \{Judg. 15:17-19\}.

We have seen before, from the earlier part of the book, the remarkable manner in which, either personally or in the weapons that were employed, God was acting mysteriously at this period of Israel's history. To those who discern what a witness it is that the people were far gone from Him, here the principle reappears in all its strength -- the isolation of the man himself, the circumstances that had brought about the rupture with the foe, the mind of Judah, if not treacherous to the Israelite, cowering before the uncircumcised, and now the strangest of weapons for war.
that Samson uses against them -- the jawbone of an ass.

Never was there failure of divine power with Samson against the foe; but moreover the pitifulness of Jehovah is marked towards His poor servant (for did He disdain when the thirsty man called on Himself, as he cried to God in his distress?). Bad as were the features we have seen, we have to see even worse still; yet he was heard and answered when he called.

We do not find in Samson the generous disinterestedness of grace that could suffer affliction with the people of God, and is willing to be a sacrifice upon that faith. We have nothing like a Moses in Samson. Not without faith, he was a combatant ready to fight the Philistines at any odds. No doubt it was a wonderful display of physical force on the one hand; as on the other those he vanquished were the unrelenting enemies of God’s people. Still the overt thing to Samson seems to have been that they were his enemies. This certainly stimulated him, though I am far from insinuating no better underneath. But the good was hard to reach or even to discern, the evil abundant and obvious.

And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years {Judg. 15:20}.

It appears to me that the Spirit of God brings in this little notice of his judging Israel here in order to show that this is the normal close of his history. Nor should we wonder at it. Not that God did not work mightily afterwards, and even more in his death than in his life. But it need surprise none that the proper history of this judge terminates according to the mind of God here; for what has the Lord to tell in the next chapter? We have seen how grace overruled, broke up an evil association before it was consummated, and gave him righteous ground to take vengeance on the Philistines, followed by his judging Israel for twenty years.

Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot; yet here, though fallen lower than ever, we find power put forth under these deplorable circumstances.

And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him. And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron {Judg. 16:2, 3}.

The man thus went forth in the confidence of his strength, and to outward appearance did things just to make the enemy feel what he could do, with as little exercise toward God as could well be found in one that feared Him.

But again,

And it came to pass afterward that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah {Judg. 16:4}.

And here we confront not simply the old offence repeated, and in the grossest form of fleshly corruption, but along with it an infatuation as extraordinary as his degradation. This indeed becomes distinctly the moral of the tale. Delilah sells herself to the Philistine lords to entangle the champion of Israel, now beguiled by his lusts: else the various efforts to seize him must have otherwise opened his eyes to her guile and their murderous malice. But the wages of transgressors are hard, and the guilty man falls under the strange woman’s spell again and again. Such is the blinding power of sin; for was he ignorant of her vileness or of his own danger? But the crisis came; and we see that at last, pressed by the harlot’s toils, he tells out the secret of Jehovah. On his unshorn locks hung his invincible might by divine will. There was but one thing really involved -- obedience. Alas! he fell, as did Adam at the beginning, and all since save one -- Christ. But how perfectly He stood, though tried as none ever was or could be but Himself! Do we know what a thing obedience is in God’s eyes, even though it may be displayed in the simplest manner? It is the perfection of the creature, giving God His place, and man his own; it is the lowliest, and withal the morally highest, place for one here below, as for the angels above. In Samson’s case, tested in a seemingly little sign but a sign of entire subjection to God, and this in separation from all others, it was obedience; not so in our case, where we have the highest treasure in earthen vessels, but obedience in everything, and this formed and guided by the Spirit according to the written word, now set in the fullest light, because seen in the person, and ways, and work, and glory of Christ. It is no mere external sign for us who know the Lord Jesus. But the secret of the Lord in our case involves that which is most precious to God and man. We are sanctified both by the Father’s word and by Christ glorified on high. But we are sanctified by the Spirit unto the obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus {1 Pet. 1:2}, and are called to obey, as the wife her husband. Therein are involved thus the very highest and deepest privileges that God could communicate to the souls of men on earth.

To Samson, as we see, it was far different. His secret was to keep his hair uncut, with all strength annexed to it. But if it was his hidden power, it acted also as a test; and now the enemy possessed it, disclosed to a harlot, who had wrung it for gold from his foolish heart. Whatever might have been his low state through unchecked animal nature, whatever his delinquencies before, so long as he kept his secret with God, strength never failed him from God, be the strain what it might. Jehovah at least was -- could not but be -- true to the secret. But now, as we know, the one whom he had made partner of his sin wheedled it from him that she might sell it to the Philistines.

Degraded to the utmost, Samson becomes their sport as well as their slave. But God was about to magnify Himself and His own ways.

And it came to pass when their hearts were merry that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us
Again we see the man, and his character in its weakness is before us, even at that solemn moment.

I am far from doubting that God wrought in him whom He had made the champion of His people. Let no man question that Samson was in prison or that he lost his eyes for nothing. I feel pretty assured that he saw clearer morally without them than he had seen in any sense with them. He had far too often made a wretched use of them in times that were past; and even now, in spite of the work of God in his soul; was there nothing weightier, was there nothing deeper, was there nothing to lament over more than the loss of those two eyes? It was Samson feeling for himself, yet not unpitied of the Lord; for there was one above Samson who heard. And this is the great point for us that we can and ought to count on. Let us not forget that we have got a nature exempt from nothing we deplore in Samson, and the person that does not believe it may live to prove it, especially if a believer, who should know himself better; while he who does take it home to his soul is thereby enabled to judge himself by the Spirit before God.

But what a God we have to do with, as Samson had! and how He magnified Himself in that hour of supreme chagrin and of his deep agony, when he was made to sport before those uncircumcised haters of Israel, and the witness, as they fondly hoped, of their idol’s triumph over Jehovah. Samson felt it easier to die for His name than to live thus in Philistia. But God reserved great things for his death. What a figure of, but contrast with, His death who only pursued to that final point His absolute devotedness to the will of God, not doing it only but suffering it to the uttermost, and thus righteously by His death securing what no living obedience could have touched!

Nevertheless, I have little doubt that, though the dying hour of Samson brought more honor to God than all his life, its manner was in itself a chastening in its character; and in this, too, may one discern a representation of the condition to which Israel had come similar to what was noticed in the life and person of Samson. For what can be more humiliating than that one’s death should be more important than one’s life? Such was the point to which things had come (an inglorious one it was for those concerned), that the best thing for Israel and Judah, the best thing for God’s glory and for Samson himself, was that he should die.

And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life {Judg. 16:29, 30}.

And his brethren, as we find, came up, took him away, and buried him.

He judged Israel twenty years {Judg. 16:31},
is the repetition of the word at this point.

The end of the book -- and it is important to make this remark -- consists of an appendix. It is in no way a carrying forward of the history. We have come to the close as far as the sequence of persons and of events is concerned. We could not go lower than Samson; but we have what was exceedingly necessary for us to learn -- the fact that the dismally wretched condition that we have seen throughout all the Judges was true even from early days; and therefore the Spirit of God giving us this as a sort of supplement, or a conclusion, but with such marks of time as show that it was of a comparatively early date (and this can be proved before we have done with the book), is, I think, of considerable interest and importance. I presume that the reason why these incidents are not given before in the order of time may have been that, if inserted earlier, it would have completely interrupted the course of the history, and the main instruction of the book of Judges. It is only another proof of what we have always to assume in reading the Bible -- that not only the things given are divine, but that the arrangement, even when they look somewhat disorderly, is just as divine as the communication itself. There is not a single jot in the Scriptures that God has written or ordered which is not worthy of Himself; nor is there the least possibility of improving either.

Here then we have certain facts, apart from the historic course, introduced in these words:

There was a man of mount Ephraim {Judg. 17:1}.
The great point of the preface is that
in those days there was no king in Israel
- the opening words of Judg. 18.
And in those days the tribe of the Danites
{Judg. 18:1}.
It is the Danites again; only the account of Samson is chronologically at the close, whereas the new tale, as we have remarked, was comparatively early.

There was then
a man of mount Ephraim whose name was Micah
{Judg. 17:1}.
who, not satisfied with carrying out the impiety of his mother in making a graven and a molten image of silver dedicated to Jehovah, for this purpose gets a Levite to be consecrated as his priest. What avails the show of Jehovah’s name, or form of consecrating a Levite to be priest? Ceremony is easy and attractive to the flesh, and there may be the more, as there usually is, where there is least power or reality. It is at least certain that the whole business was heinously evil, and none the less because Micah settles down with the persuasion, heinously evil, and none the less because Micah settles down with the persuasion,

Now know I that Jehovah will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest (Judg. 17:13).

Judges 18 shows that the moral condition, especially of the priest-Levite, was as bad as the religious state. His heart was glad of a better living and of a larger sphere (Judg. 18:19, 20), as he goes off from the house of Micah with the lawless children of Dan to blot out Laish with fire and sword, and call their new city after their own name, where the graven image was set up, and a succession that failed not till the day of the captivity of the land; for error takes root faster, and bears fruit more luxuriantly as well as permanently than the truth, 82 Yet there is little reason to suppose that the exile of the land means Shalmanerer’s, but rather under the Philistines; for it was merely all the time the house of God was in Shiloh. There being no king is in contrast with other lands which had kings, as Israel the spring of worship. There is nothing good without His name.

Is it then a matter of wonder that men went wrong in early days under the Christian profession? The danger was incomparably greater where the trial was to stand to the truth fully revealed and to walk in the Spirit, and not subjection to commandments and ritual observances. The ruin of Christianity was when two systems so distinct got confounded. And be assured that if the people of God fail in their responsibility to God, they are not to be trusted elsewhere. I am not speaking of what men of the world may be, for they may be conscientious and honorable in their own way; but it is different with God’s people. Never trust those that bear the Lord’s name, if they are false to Him. The case before us, in Judg. 17, 18, is one where God was openly, deliberately, and systematically dishonored.

82 It is possible that verse 30 may be one of those later additions which Ezra or one of the prophets was inspired to make in putting together at a subsequent epoch the books of Scripture. If this be so, the captivity might be the Assyrian, and not that of the Philistines. But verse 30 seems adverse to this view. There is no difficulty in principle either way.

But there follows a second tale of excessive atrocity in a moral way, which begins in Judg. 19 in terms expressly similar to the beginning of Judg. 18:

And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Beth-lehem-judah (Judg. 19:1).

The fact which comes out first is that Gibeah of Benjamin was scarce better than Sodom or Gomorrah, on which Jehovah rained fire and brimstone for their uncleanness. I need not dwell on the deplorable details. Suffice it to say that even in such a state the immediate feeling of the common conscience in Israel (roused, it is true, by an awful appeal to the twelve tribes) could not but reply that there was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day: consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds (Judg. 19:30).

So it was.

Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man (Judg. 20:1).

Be it remarked, that what drew out their unanimous condemnation was not an outrage done to God’s name. Where was the just horror at the idolatry of Micah? Contrariwise it was courted and continued down to the captivity. Men then, as now, feel not for a lie or a libel on God; they are sensitive when their own rights are touched. But He knows how to wake them up from such disgraceful insensibility. Therefore does the second part of the appendix (Judg. 19–21) find a place directly afterwards. And we see that those who cared not for the injured name of Jehovah have all their feelings drawn out when man was wronged. But God takes means to make them feel what such a state comes to. O what a mercy it is to have God to take care of our walk! But, in order for us to know the sweetness of that care, it becomes us to care for Him, His name and glory. Not as if He could not care for His own; but our strength, comfort, and blessing is in His name. In Him we may confide, who loves us to the end. Should we not then rejoice in the Lord? The truest deliverance from self is in that work where all was judged, and evil put away for ever. Then can we joy in Him, and it is our strength for all service, and is the spring of worship. There is nothing good without His name.

Alas! how the very thought of Jehovah’s name seems lost at this time among the children of Israel. Their keenest feelings were in favor of the Levite and his concubine, wounded to the quick by the abominations of the men of Gibeah; and therefore, whatever of human affection may be in evidence, we certainly learn how little faith Jehovah could then find in the land of Israel. As man then was so prominent before their minds, so also their revenge was
merciless to the bitter end. God was in none of their thoughts. They spread abroad the revolting tale; they readily respond to the call for their advice and counsel. The result is that

the people rose as one man, saying, We will not any of us go to his tent, neither will we any of us turn into his house. But now this shall be the thing which we will do to Gibeah; we will go up by lot against it; and we will take ten men of an hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and an hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to fetch victual for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel. So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man. And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you? Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel: but the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel {Judg. 20:8-14}.

Undoubtedly the iniquity was beyond measure on the part of the men of Benjamin, and an utter disgrace to God or even to Israel. But there can be no question that the course taken by the men of Israel was calculated to increase the difficulty a thousand-fold. It was purely human. Where was their humiliation and grief before the Lord? They decide on matters first, and the case becomes only another instance of man’s folly in dealing with evil. Having decided out of their own heads, they then turn to God, and ask Him to bless them in their efforts to exterminate Benjamin. Thus, after having made all their arrangements,

the children of Israel arose and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God, and said, Which of us shall go up first? {Judg. 20:18}

Is not this an instructive as well as striking fact? Still more is what follows; for God fails not to deal with us on our own ground. According to our folly He may answer us, as well as withhold an answer. But in the end He acts in His own way, which will ever be what we little expect.

Here God had to rebuke the people, even when morally right in the main, until the wrong their state and haste mixed up with it was purged out. In judgment He must have righteousness; but He remembers mercy. It is an instance of the same thing that we have often seen before in other forms. Thus He bids the men of Judah go; but the men of Judah were shamefully beaten, and were forced to weep before Jehovah. This, at least, was right.

Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up and wept before Jehovah until even, and asked counsel of Jehovah, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin, my brother? {Judg. 20:23}

another point, still more important, going along with it. When we really are found in sorrow, and circumstances that call for sorrow, before Jehovah, the heart is open to feel for the wrongdoer. They were filled with thoughts of destruction against Benjamin, and the remembrance that he was their brother had not even entered their minds before.

Now, broken down before God who had ordered their defeat, they are made to feel for their brother, guilty as he was no doubt. Still this became their relationship, yet the children of Israel have the answer from Jehovah,

Go up against him {Judg. 20:23}.

Nevertheless they were beaten the next day; for they must be disciplined before the Lord before He could use them to deal with their brother.

Benjamin went forth against them the second day, and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men; all these drew the sword. Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before Jehovah, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before Jehovah. And the children of Israel enquired of Jehovah, for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days {Judg. 20:25-27}.

Here is the proof of the time when all this occurred. It has been already said to have been an early fact in the history of the "Judges," and not chronologically near the close of the book. The evidence is stated here very clearly. Phinehas, we know, was alive during the days of the wilderness, being the leader against Midian before Moses died, and one of those that crossed the Jordan. Yet he is still alive when the tragic deed was done which had nearly uprooted the tribe of Benjamin in its results.

And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days, saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And Jehovah said, Go up; for to-morrow I will deliver them into thine hand {Judg. 20:28}.

They had been at length brought down to their right place before God; they had taken the shame to themselves; the Lord had chastised them, and they had needed and deserved it righteousness. Now they could deal with guilty Benjamin. We are not in a position to deal with another until God has dealt with that which is contrary to His name in our own soul; and so it was that the men of Benjamin were utterly smitten and well-nigh exterminated.

The last chapter of the book shows us the ways and means in which their hearts were drawn out, in order to repair the dismal gap which divine judgment had wrought in Benjamin, and indeed in Israel.
That the book of Ruth stands most fitly in the place where it is actually found must have been felt by the spiritual mind. Indeed it is apparent to every attentive reader of Scripture; for by outward marks it clearly belongs to the place where God has presented it to us. As to the time of what is brought before us, it belongs to the days of the Judges, as we are expressly told, and thus was clearly before the immense change which God was pleased to bring in and to have recorded for our instruction in 1 Samuel. Nevertheless, its character being singularly different from that which we find in Judges, none need wonder that it stands in a distinct book.

It is true that there is an old tradition that it formerly belonged to the book of Judges, but I doubt the fact extremely, being convinced on internal grounds that it forms a separate book, no matter What that will-o’-the-wisp may say; for we can never trust the traditions of men, though of course they may occasionally fall in with truth. There is nothing more certain than that God has shown us the tendency, even of apostles themselves, to fail whenever tradition was leaned on; for we know of a tradition that went forth among the disciples, and this too not before the Lord’s death, but after it; but even this, brief as it was, and heard by several witnesses, they failed to hold immaculate. For in consequence there went about a report that the disciple whom the Lord loved was not to die. Now the Lord’s death, but after it; but even this, brief as it was, and heard by several witnesses, they failed to hold immaculate. For in consequence there went about a report that the disciple whom the Lord loved was not to die. Now the Lord had said nothing of the kind. So strikingly does Scripture warn, not only as to the principle, but in fact. There may have been a certain difficulty on the surface of the words uttered, not only because of the immense depth of that which lay underneath the Lord’s intimation, but because He saw fit to present it in a form to exercise their thought in pondering His words. But it seems evident that God teaches us by such an instance the valuelessness even of primitive tradition; how much more of subsequent writers, who almost always show the grossest incapacity to understand the plain written word of God! Show another tradition which has such a character as this; and yet Scripture has itself given us here in the most striking way the warning that we are in no case to trust tradition, but only what inspiration has written. If it be found then that it was thus even among the disciples, we certainly dare not trust the Jews. The Lord made use of them, and we have every reason to bless God for His own care of the written word, though committed to man’s responsibility.

But while there can, to my mind, be no reasonable question that the book of Ruth fitfully follows the Judges, it is equally plain, I think, to such as give the matter a little reflection, that it appropriately forms a book to itself, and this as the natural and, one may say, necessary prelude to the book that follows. That is, we are here in presence of a wholly different line of truth; so much so that it could easily be proved utterly incongruous to piece on the story of Ruth to anything found in the book of Judges. Indeed, if there be a contrast, as it appears to me, complete and well-defined in this part of Scripture, it is between the real and proper appendix of the book of Judges (Judg. 17-21) and this book of Ruth, which man and tradition tell us once made another supplement. If they can be conceived as so put together, one certainly was the appendix of the most grievous disorders; the other, of the beautiful ways of divine grace. The one exhibits all lawlessness, when there was not even a magistrate in the land that might put them to shame in anything; the other is among the loveliest tales of genuine piety that God Himself has given us, and this not merely in the generous man who does the part of the Kinsman-Redeemer, but also in her who in unobtrusive faith served in love no less than faith where it could be the least expected. Thus does the grace of God meet us in the book of Ruth, clothing itself in its most attractive form, and so much the more giving evidence of its power, when we think of the material on which it wrought, in her at least whose name it bears.

Besides, the story itself is of very great importance, as preparing the way, not for David only, but for his greater Son. This, however, does not at all link itself with Judges, admirable as it is where God has given it to us. It is neither a part of Samuel on the one hand, nor of Judges on the other; though morally far more of a preface to the former than a supplement to the latter. It is just what God has made it, a most suitable transition scene between the two, but, in fact, a book to itself, on the gracious words of which it is our happy privilege to dwell for a little together.

What is that which we find here? It is not yet the day for royalty on the throne of Jehovah, not even in any imperfect form. Nor is it what we have been seeing -- the intervention of grace to deliver the people from time to time from oppression -- often in uncomely forms, as regards the men or measures employed; and I think that every one who has followed with attention the course of Judges must have recognized the truth, when pointed out, that one of the special lessons of that Book is that, although divine mercy
wrought in power, the human instrument was marked with some striking drawback.

In the Book before us we see grace working so as to secure promises. There was ruin in Israel; yet a Moabitish stranger engages our interest and respect singularly. For, above all, faith was there. It is not a drawback where one might have looked for much, but beauty morally where one could expect nothing. At the very time when even the deliverers that God gave His poor people partook of the utter weakness and of the painful failures then found universally prevalent in Israel, on the other hand He was pleased to magnify His own mercy in a Moabitess. Granted that she was one of those excluded according to law from the congregation of Jehovah. But if law is just and good, grace is better and the only means of rescuing the guilty and fallen from ruin. If the law is suited to break down and expose man in his sinful self-confidence, grace is God’s secret for the lost and wretched to bless and save them. Nevertheless, just because grace suits God’s love and glory, how admirably it suits us, when we are brought down, to renounce self, and to cast our souls on His Son!

In this shape very attractive to faith we shall find the principles of grace throughout the Book of Ruth, brought out as fully as could then be, conspicuously in Ruth, though not in herself exclusively. Even at that time, full of sorrows and of great humiliation for the people, Ruth was not alone. We greatly mistake when we so narrow the intimations of the word of God. We must leave room for what meets the eye or ear; and surely the day will tell what hidden beauties were even in the darkest times. What fulness of joy for our hearts when we know as we are known! But it is a joy to take in the hope, and assure ourselves of the largeness of grace now. Traces of this too we may find, unless I am greatly mistaken, in traversing the Book of Ruth.

What then is the great aim and object here? What does the Spirit of God appear to propose to Himself in this short but remarkably delightful book? The state of the people seems to have been one of great distress. There was a famine where least of all it ought to be felt, in the land where God’s eyes rested; a famine which surely could not have been but for Israel’s profound departure from God. But His mercy would employ it to exercise His people’s hearts before Him in self-judgment, as well as in looking to Himself, whose grace is ever above all failure. Sorrowful to have it brought in for their sins; but turned to good, as God knows how to use everything in His grace. So it was then that a certain man in Bethlehem-Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab {Ruth 1:1}.

It was not only distresses and oppressions and enemies that afflicted men in the land, as we see was the occasion for deliverance in the Judges throughout, and without exception. Here is the first pointed contrast between it and the Book of Ruth. The pressure is of such a character, at least its effect such, that this Israelite and his wife and sons are found outside the land of the Lord. The name of the man too seems clearly significant, Elimelech -- he to whom God is King. Yet was he an outcast for want! A strange and painful anomaly that so it should be; but so it was. Nor need we wonder that a false position in Elimelech is followed by the marriage of his sons with the women of Moab. It is no longer God shown as specially taking His place, and dwelling in the midst of the people, but now a result deplorable in His people and land.

Thus Naomi brings before us the condition of Israel, to be verified on a larger scale another day, but plainly enough shown in a little summary then; that is, not merely the enemies let loose on the people in the land, but the Israelites themselves, through sheer distress; are seen out of the land. This cannot be denied to have been a novel character of humiliation for Israel -- that any who were particularly and publicly identified with the government of God over His people and His land should be forced to quit it because there was no bread to eat there. Elimelech being now dead, all testimony that they had God to govern Israel, as far as he was concerned, is lost. She who ought to have been a pleasant one found bitterness, as she tells us in her desolation and widowhood in a strange land. Most vivid picture of the condition which was before long to befall Israel! And such we know has been their portion for weary centuries. No doubt their kings contributed to the result; but here it is most strikingly prefigured before they had kings. For great, and in the end gracious, purposes did the principle of royalty come in afterwards; but here God prepares us for the result, if we only look at the unfaithful people. Where was the faith to avail themselves of God’s presence?

Naomi then was left with her two sans:

And they took them wives of the women of Moab:
the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth {Ruth 1:4}.

And thus they continued to dwell for about ten years. After this the sons died also, when the woman Naomi, hearing that Jehovah had been pleased to give His people bread in His own land, turns back in her heart, lays the case before her daughters, and sets forth for the land. It was then that a most interesting difference comes out; for one of the daughters, though not without natural affection and hence unwillingness to leave her mother-in-law, lets us see that she had no faith in the God of Israel, and accordingly drops behind. Ruth for an opposite reason shines, and so much the more because of lowly unconsciousness of anything as to herself. The liveliest affection to her mother-in-law, and the faithful remembrance of the dead, were there, but above all the mighty attraction of the God of Israel. All these wrought powerfully in the heart of Ruth; and so she in the happiest manner tells out the purpose of her soul to her mother-in-law. Her portion is taken for ever with Naomi. As she said herself -- for there are no words capable of expressing the truth so well as those that her heart poured forth with God before her eyes

Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from
following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: Jehovah do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me {Ruth 1:16, 17}.

Out of the abundance of her heart did her mouth speak; and what so sweet as this devotion to the living God, not to speak of the dead, where it could be unlooked for? If Orpah shows us the failings of nature, Ruth certainly the power of grace.

This decided the mother; and they are next seen approaching Bethlehem. All the town was moved for Naomi; but, be sure of this, not less when they reflected on the strange sight of a Moabitess who turned her back for ever upon her gods and her land and every natural tie, come to take her part with a desolate widow, under the shadow of Jehovah.

That Naomi typifies Israel under the first covenant can scarcely be questioned by any one who admits the prophetic character of scripture; Israel who had experienced a famine in the land, who had lost husband, sons, everything out of it.

Call me Mara; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me {Ruth 1:20}.

And who then is pictured to us by Ruth? What can she be? There is a great difficulty to many minds in the fact that Ruth was a Gentile -- a Moabitess. This perplexes them, and it has often led persons in times past to think she must be the church. No doubt if Naomi had been seen clearly by the same principles to represent Israel, they would have been rather confirmed at first sight in their thought; but it is not really so. Ruth does not represent the church. That there is a life flow of the grace of God in this case, that the same grace has gone out beyond measure towards us and brought us in as the body of Christ, is most true; and if people mean nothing more by the church than the objects of divine grace, we can understand why to them it should seem a settled question. There can be no doubt that Ruth does set forth the grace of God towards a stranger who had no claims on His promise or covenant, as being a Gentile, and under the ban of the law expressly.

But I am persuaded that there is profound wisdom in the fact that Ruth does represent, spite of all appearances to the contrary, a Jewish connection. How can this be? For the simple reason that the Jewish people have lost their distinctive title, and are merged amongst the Gentiles. This is so true that even the prophet Jeremiah, who was called up at a time when God was about to bring in this great change, is distinctly ordained to be a prophet to the nations; and when the cup of trembling is put in his hand by Jehovah (as shown in Jer. 25), it is to give to the nations to drink. But who are these nations?

The very first of them is Judah and Jerusalem. This proves, then, that the judgment of God did put down judicially even His chosen people in the place where their sins had brought them morally.

When Israel ceased to preserve their separateness to Jehovah -- when the idols and false gods of the heathen came so to overshadow the true God as to attract their heart, so that, in point of fact, they abandoned the God of Israel, kings as well as people and priests -- it is evident that nothing could be more righteous than that God should sentence to public exile from Himself, and from all their old position of favor and comparative possession of His name in their land, those who had already gone away from Him morally, after all discipline had failed to recover them, and there was no remedy. Such indeed is invariably the way of God. He never sentences to a distance from Himself one who has not gone away in heart already. It is only therefore His judicial hand sealing them in the place to which their own unbelief had consigned them. Hence accordingly if it were wanted to indicate the quasi-Gentile position of the Jewish remnant in the latter day -- if this had been the object of the Spirit of God -- I cannot conceive how it could have been done more effectually or with more graphic power than in the very manner in which the Holy Ghost has here brought the story before us.

Had Ruth been a strictly Jewish woman, or widow, if you please now -- had she been of the chosen people rather than of Moab -- she could not have set forth the peculiar circumstances out of which the Jewish remnant will be called; for when God begins to work with them in the latter day, in what condition will they be? Lo-ammi -- not my people {Hos. 1:9}.

Indeed it is the sentence of God on Israel ever since the day of the Babylonish captivity. They were His people before, but not His people from that time; and the evidence to all the world that they were not is given in this, that God handed over imperial power to the golden head of the great image, as we know; that is, to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. When the whole case is thus looked into, it confirms the accuracy of the type, instead of being a difficulty.

The same principle is in other parts of scripture. Take, for instance, a familiar chapter in the New Testament, where the apostle sets forth doctrinally our relation to the Jew. I purposely refer to Rom. 11 now as the first example, because there are persons who own their difficulties about the prophecies, but who feel them much less in the epistles. The truth is, they have allowed a false principle to guide them in looking at the prophecies. They there endeavour to turn aside Israel, and Judah, and Zion from their regular meaning to other objects quite distinct, the effort being to make all, at least what is bright, apply to the Christian or the church in some form or another. But Rom. 11 resists such a diversion from its true channel. For the object of that chapter is to show that the Jewish branches were broken off their own olive-tree because of unbelief; that the Gentile who had been a wild-olive (ourselves, in fact, who had no meaning to other objects quite distinct, the effort being to make all, at least what is bright, apply to the Christian or the church in some form or another. But Rom. 11 resists such a diversion from its true channel. For the object of that chapter is to show that the Jewish branches were broken off their own olive-tree because of unbelief; that the Gentile who had been a wild-olive (ourselves, in fact, who had no
claim and no privilege previously) became the object of the
divine favor expressly and distinctly, in consequence of
Israel having rejected the Messiah and afterwards rejected
the gospel. And to what end has God done this? A most
merciful one as well as marvelous and wise. He means to
bless Israel fully; but when the day is come for it, He will
bless them strictly and solely on the ground of mercy. When
they repent in truth of heart before God, when they take the
place of being no better than the despised Gentiles -- that is,
when they are broken down to feel their need of mercy, and
of nothing but mercy -- then are they to become objects of
God’s restoring grace;

for the gifts and calling of God,
as we know,

are without repentance {Rom. 11:29}:

God will hold them fast and apply them in his faithfulness.
They are indefeasible.

Now, it is precisely this that Ruth, I believe, is intended
to set forth. The peculiarity of her origin and of her national
condition, the very fact that she was not of the Jews by birth
but a Gentile, fitted her to represent the condition of the
Jews in the latter day, because, although they had been
really of Israel at the beginning, they had lost their place for
that falls in with the same thought, but often misunderstood,
the very ground of being “Not-His-people,” will the mercy
of nothing but mercy -- then are they to become objects of
the time, and He had designated them Lo-ammi; so that, on
the place of His people, never to forfeit His favor more.

There is a remarkable expression in the prophet Micah
that falls in with the same thought, but often misunderstood,
where he says,

Then shall the remnant of his brethren return to the
children of Israel {Micah 5:3};

that is, instead of as now having a sort of Gentile place,
mixed up with all the other nations (even at best the olive-
tree having a Gentile character for the present), the remnant
of those whom the Judge of Israel is not ashamed to call
brethren will return to the children of Israel. Thus the whole
scene is brought briefly out in the most vivid way before us;
and, remarkable to say also, in connection with Bethlehem,
the very place that comes before us historically. For the
Judge of Israel is seen struck on the cheek; He is put to
shame; He is smitten in the house of His friends. And in full
accord with other scriptures He is here shown to have a
double character. He springs as man from a family in this
little village, on the one hand; on the other hand,

His goings forth are from of old, from everlasting
{Micah 5:2}.

He belongs to the seed of David, the lineage of the king, as
we all know, from many prophecies; but, besides that, He
has a divine character which none but Himself could possess
among those who ruled Israel.

Thus the Judge of Israel here predicted -- this singular
ruler, who stands alone marked out from all others -- is
smitten by His brethren; a fact which, after the parenthesis
of so momentous a nature just discussed, is followed up by
the words,

Therefore will He give them up {Micah 5:3}.

Therein we have their anomalous or Gentile phase since the
cross --

therefore will He give them up,
because the distinctive privilege that makes Israel to be
Israel is that God owns them as His people; but He who has
been thus shamefully rejected by them gives them up, and
God puts the seal upon that rejection. They are given up,
not only on the ground of idolatry, but here on that of the
rejection of Christ the Messiah (the two counts pressed in
the later chapters of Isaiah); for after their past
unfaithfulness and grievous idolatry He was willing to have
taken them up, and made good all the promises, had they
received Him. Instead of this they rejected the Judge who
would have been their deliverer. They refused the God of
Israel by going after idols. They refused the Judge of Israel,
who deigned, though Jehovah, to be man of their own flesh
and blood, of the stock of David:

Therefore will He give them up till she which
travaileth hath brought forth {Micah 5:3};

that is, till the accomplishment of the purpose of God which
is constantly set forth by a travailing woman.

The abandonment of the Jews as a people by God must
be till the man-child is born that will bring joy into the
world. This clearly cannot here, and in a few other places,
refer to the birth of Christ; for the scripture before us
supposes that He had already come and been rejected. The
attempt to apply it therefore to His birth, as has been done
in a learned book which has recently appeared, and which I
was reading only a day or two ago, is evidently fallacious;
for Christ must have already come if He be already
rejected, and smitten on the cheek. Consequently, according
to the context itself, He must have been born before this
travail, and the birth there referred, not to the literal nativity
of the Messiah, but to the development of that purpose of
blessing God will bring out of Israel’s last sorrow. It is
clearly the joy that will follow the unparalleled and final
tribulation of His people.

Hence when this long-looked-for purpose of God has
come to the birth, then, as the prophet puts it, the remnant
of the Judge’s brethren shall return unto the children of
Israel, instead of being taken out of Jewish relations to form
the church, as at Pentecost and since. Whenever a Jew now
believes in Jesus he leaves his nationality, and merges his
old earthly hopes in higher and heavenly things; but in the
latter day it will not be so. Then only will the type of Ruth
be realized. Up to that time they will have long been, as it
were, Gentiles, in point of forfeited privileges; but then,
instead of being left in so dismal and desolate a condition,
they will return to the children of Israel; they will take up
the ancient national hopes for which God is waiting, and
which depend on His chosen people being put in living
relationship with their long-despised Messiah for the glory
of the latter day.

This, I think, tends greatly to clear the Book of Ruth for any one who desires to have no system except God’s, but would understand it as it is, without warping it to bear on our own circumstances or comfort. The truth is, brethren, that we Christians are so blessed of God, so met in all the fulness of His grace and glory in the Lord Jesus, that in the measure in which we believe it we are capable of understanding His word; but where there is the predisposition to divert scripture to ourselves, we are in the same proportion turned aside from the just interpretation of scripture. In short, the one constant, blessed, and blessing object of scripture is Christ; and where the single eye looks to Him and is filled with Him we shall certainly have the whole body full of light; where, on the contrary, anything of ours is the object that we are searching for in the word of God, so far we are in danger of being a prey to our own thoughts or those of other men.

It appears plain then, that Ruth most naturally was a Gentile, in order filly to show the condition of the Jewish remnant in the latter day -- perhaps, one might say, she must have been one, if the previous Lo-ammí state was to be marked. At the same time we may observe that she was not simply such, but nearly connected with the Jew, where again we see an element of propriety for the purpose in view. For thus the two things that must have been thought quite heterogeneous and unlikely to be found in the same person seem exactly required to meet in order to give an adequate type of that which was before God in respect of person seem exactly required to meet in order to give an adequate type of that which was before God in respect of the Jewish condition of those that will form the remnant: and where the source is human, and evil cannot be denied or hidden, you will always find an excuse for this thing and a palliation of that, the result being altogether beneath the dignity of real inspiration. There, on the contrary, God is moving in His love, holiness, and righteous ways, and hence does not require to make apologies. To expect otherwise is an entire forgetfulness that scripture is not the work of the writer, but the word of God. This sort of unbelief is the root of ninety-nine out of a hundred of the difficulties commonly felt.

Ruth then lets us see what I have ventured to call the quasi-Gentile condition of those that will form the remnant: Jews undoubtedly, but Jews that have been out of their land, and dispersed among the nations, where they will have learned their ways, in whom God will begin to work. He will attract their heart and face towards Himself; He will decide them to turn their back upon the Gentiles’ pride and idolatry; He will use the frightful evils of the last days, the antichristian times, to produce true repentance and a cleaving in faith to the God of Israel, and the Branch He has made strong for Himself. This will be the work which grace will then carry forward in the godly Jewish remnant, of whom Ruth, it appears to me, is so clear a prefiguration.

As once by birth and in all her natural associations Ruth had been a Gentile, it was the more clear now that her heart was firmly devoted in love and honor for Jehovah; and this soon brings down the blessing of God upon it; for

Naomi had a kinsman of her husband’s, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech. And, behold, Boaz came from Beth- lehem, and said unto the reapers, Jehovah be with you. And they answered him, Jehovah bless thee [Ruth 2:1-4].

And Boaz, perceiving the stranger, enquires,

Whose damsel is this? And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: and she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she carried a little in the house. Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hkest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens: let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged them? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn. Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger? And Boaz answered and said unto her, it hath fully been showed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy mother and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. Jehovah recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of Jehovah God of Israel, under whose wings thou art to trust [Ruth 2:5-12].

Thus we see that where the heart is simple and the eye towards the Lord, He knows how to make it a testimony for Himself. We are apt to mistake by making testimony our
God who had even thus, had it been all, looked upon Naomi all. How it must have filled her heart with thankfulness to bless the result! In its own sphere of relations affection is sorrow with it. Naomi looks for more -- for all.

The blessing of Jehovah it maketh rich, and He addeth no wings of the God of Israel. Why should we ever care for ourselves? Had Ruth sought her own things, she had never found them so well, nor even so fast. How deeply err those who make character their idol, lowering it just as they are self-occupied! Still farther off are they who seek things beneath, like the Gentiles who know not God. It was God before her eyes that gave Ruth such moral weight and value of testimony is in the self-forgetfulness that is occupied with Christ; and this is beautifully exemplified in the conduct of Ruth. There was nothing more evident in all her conduct than that she gave herself up to the path of simple duty. Nevertheless that duty had an immense dignity stamped on it, because, while it was bound up with love to Naomi, it was not in her mind separated from the glory of the true God; and when those two qualities unite, how blessed the result! In its own sphere of relations affection is admirable; but when it springs from, and is guided by God Himself, what a reality it is in such a world as this! And this won the heart of Boaz, who had already heard her good report. Little thought she that a poor and stranger damsel could have had her history brought fully before what man would call the lord of the soil, Boaz -- a man, it clearly appears, of admirable character, of good position, and of unsullied honor in the land of Israel. It was strange to the Moabitess to hear that such an one so knew and estimated her conduct than that she gave herself up to the path of simple duty. Nevertheless that duty had an immense dignity stamped on it, because, while it was bound up with love to Naomi, it was not in her mind separated from the glory of the true God; and when those two qualities unite, how blessed the result! In its own sphere of relations affection is admirable; but when it springs from, and is guided by God Himself, what a reality it is in such a world as this! And this won the heart of Boaz, who had already heard her good report. Little thought she that a poor and stranger damsel could have had her history brought fully before what man would call the lord of the soil, Boaz -- a man, it clearly appears, of admirable character, of good position, and of unsullied honor in the land of Israel. It was strange to the Moabitess to hear that such an one so knew and estimated her. Naomi, it was not in her mind separated from the glory of God and man, which assuredly shines here in both mother and daughter.

So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother-in-law {Ruth 2:23}.

Now gradually comes to view a purpose which faith seizes deeper than the apron full of corn from day to day. Then Naomi her mother-in-law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshing floor (Ruth 3:1, 2).

Thus she gives directions, and Ruth acts on them. We need not pursue the minute history of all. No doubt it is familiar to almost every hearer in this room. Suffice it to say that God was with the course suggested by Naomi. It might have seemed bold to some, it was really a believing one with love to Ruth also; but when God is with us, if there be on the one hand the attractive grace of a chaste conversation, coupled with fear, there is also on the other the boldness of faith, which is just as remarkably blessed of God. Ruth 2 shows us the one as Ruth 3 does the other. It was possible that the course that Naomi directed her daughter-in-law to take might have turned away completely the heart of the great man from the Moabitess; but God ordered otherwise according to faith, and therefore difficulties disappeared one after another. God would have us confide in Him, dear brethren; for He is not more mighty than simple in His ways. It is we who are not, and how much blessing do we not lose from the lack of it? Let none doubt that the place of finding His blessing is in what some despise ignorantly, the path of duty. This is always right, though grace gives us occasions in that path which leave room for higher things, suffering not only for righteousness’ but for Christ’s sake. In such cases faith does not fail to see that which suits His name, and is not a mere question of duty. In short righteousness is in itself good, but grace is better; only it is not grace where righteousness is either sacrificed or not respected. Grace therefore will not fail to honor righteousness while rising above it. Thus, in Ruth 2, Ruth is in the path of what we may call righteousness; certainly of

Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest. And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field {Ruth 2:20-22}.

Nothing can be more genuinely charming than the artlessness of Ruth’s character; nothing more in keeping with the mother-in-law than the looking out for her daughter, and such a daughter. At the same time faith gives a sense of propriety which, in my opinion, we none of us can afford to neglect. By this I do not mean the human prudence which seeks its own objects and in its own way. Not so; but that strong sense of what is comely in the sight of God and man, which assuredly shines here in both mother and daughter.

Suffice it here to say that her return and its supplies astonish her mother-in-law.

Where hast thou gleaned to-day? And where wroughtest thou? {Ruth 2:19}.

The blessing of Jehovah it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it. Naomi looks for more -- for all.

Blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she showed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man’s name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz. And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of Jehovah who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen. And Ruth the

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relative comeliness and propriety, which was not forgotten of God. In Ruth 3 we find her taking a bolder flight by faith, wherein God led and honored it too.

Nor again was this faith unappreciated by Boaz, however desirous he may be that the Moabitess should not by the boldness of her faith jeopardize the smallest atom of that which had drawn out to her the confidence of all who loved Jehovah’s name. Hence, in jealousy lest the breath of suspicion should blight or wound such a one, he gives her directions quite as carefully as the mother, if not more so, and hides not from her the difficulty which the law placed in the way.

Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman’s part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as Jehovah liveth {Ruth 3:13}.

Thus the woman rests with implicit confidence in the Lord who had wrought in His servant Boaz. When she rejoins her mother, there was more to praise Him for than the measure of barley. There was a tale to tell, delightful to her mother-in-law’s heart.

Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day (Ruth 3:18).

Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down (Ruth 4:1).

There is not a finer picture in the Bible of the ordinary rural habits of an Israelite in the olden time; and here again we are let into the ways of their civil life in that day. The Book of Ruth may be little, but it furnishes us with a great deal.

And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down. And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech’s: and I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee (Ruth 4:2-4).

The kinsman was ready enough for property and its purchase.

And he said, I will redeem it {Ruth 4:4}.

Boaz next tells him the condition that goes along with the redemption of the piece of land.

Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance (Ruth 4:5).

This was quite another matter, though God’s mind in the law could not be doubted. The kinsman at once draws back with the words of excuse,

I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar my own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it (Ruth 4:6).

What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh {Rom. 8:3}.

The law fails not because itself is bad, for it is good, but because man is bad -- the first man, be his advantages what they may; and this is precisely what is set forth by the kinsman. It is the impossibility for him of raising up the name of the dead; the impossibility to Israel of having their blessing according to the purpose of God in connection with the law and the first man. No doubt this was the nearer kinsman; for first is that which is natural, afterwards that which is spiritual. What was natural must first be tried; and this is the near kinsman who simply furnishes room for the display not only of the goodness of God, but of His power; and indeed this is involved in the very name of Boaz. There was strength in him.

No doubt therefore we have in Boaz the type of Christ, but I suppose not so much of Christ coming in order to atone for man; the first man, but -- after the settlement of every moral question before God was over -- of Christ when raised from the dead by the power of God and the glory of the Father, when the forlorn remnant is received back in grace and the inheritance made good in every way by the Kinsman-Redeemer. In short, Boaz represents Christ risen, as the vessel of power to come in and bear fruit for God where there had already been death, ruin, rejection, and completeness of desolation, as we have already seen in the history of him (Elimelech, God the King) who had a pleasant purpose in Naomi. He was dead, she changed to bitterness, as all had failed in both sons away from the land of Jehovah; till on the good news of divine mercy to Israel there is a return, and the widowed one is united to him who is strength (Boaz), and the royal line appears in due time. It is Christ risen who makes the mercies of David sure.

Thus then, as it appears to me, the whole case opens out as simply as possible; that is, we see here the Redeemer, but this by power rather than by blood, the Goel or Kinsman-Redeemer. Such Boaz was, and such Christ will be to Israel; but this is not the way in which we know Him; far, as the apostle says so forcibly in 2 Cor. 5,

Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more {2 Cor. 5:16}.

To us it is all an entirely new creation and circle of associations; not sin only, but old things passed away, and
all things become new. Israel will not be called on to see the change so absolutely great as it will undoubtedly be. But He is and will be then known as their Kinsman in a way which does not so apply to us of the Gentiles, and less, if possible, as the church His body, another and far more intimate relationship. What we see in Ruth is most surely in connection with Israel.

In truth, God magnifies His grace towards us, inasmuch as we have no claim, nor link with Israel. We cannot in any way take the ground of kinsmanship with Jesus. Think not that we lose by this. No doubt in principle it is true that, because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He likewise partook of the same; but then you will remember that this truth is laid down for the seed of Abraham in the Epistle to the Hebrews. With striking propriety it is addressed to the Hebrew Christians, though no doubt the general truth pertains to all others.

Let none suppose that it is meant that we have not all the blessing revealed in that epistle, for I believe we have thoroughly, and that it is very precious. Indeed I should not like to give the right hand of fellowship to any one so enamoured of his crotchets as to allow of doubts that we have a living portion in that scripture as in the rest. Such theorising is highly to be deprecated and dangerous, any brethren; and the more we value the mercy which has given back to us the truth in all its definiteness, as honoring the Lord and confiding in the word and Spirit of God during this dark and evil day, the more are we bound to theorising is highly to be deprecated and dangerous, any brethren; and the more we value the mercy which has given back to us the truth in all its definiteness, as honoring the Lord and confiding in the word and Spirit of God during this dark and evil day, the more are we bound to discontinue all such trifling with the scriptures as would blunt their edge in dealing with those souls, no matter who or what the theorists may be; for they are men that allow their minds to run riot with the precious word of God.

Nevertheless, affirming this distinctly, I think that there is special propriety in the epistle to the Hebrews referring to this, and hence it will be observed that we hear of the children here:

> Behold, I and the children which God has given me {Heb. 2:13}.

There was a natural link between the Israelite and the Lord Jesus, though it all came to nothing in His cross. But then, grace having intervened, we find them taken up where we Gentiles can be met equally on the new ground of resurrection; and thus the force of this and other kindred scriptures is made manifest by the Spirit.

Does this then detract from us who were outside? Our real and proper relationship to Christ is founded on death and resurrection-life, not on flesh. Even those that had natural relationship are, after all, obliged to come into the same place. All that is connected with flesh has met its end; so that it would be an altogether inferior ground even for a believing Jew now to found his connection with Christ on anything short of that which is equally open to us as to them. In connection then with the term “Kinsman-Redeemer” I merely make this remark, that it has a beauty and a force in speaking about Israel in which, as far as I am aware, it is not applied in any part of the direct scriptures which speak of us Gentiles that are brought in now in the infinite grace of God.

The rest of the story is then brought before us. The man who failed had to bear a mark of his failure which was very significant.

Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbor: and this was a testimony in Israel. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe. And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech’s, and all that was Chilion’s and Mahlon’s, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance {Ruth 4:7-10}.

Thus two of the features of God’s dealing with Israel rather than with us are brought before us here; for it is plain that the earthly people and the land go together. This has no application whatever to the church of God. You may, no doubt, use the figure; and I am not in the least saying that you should not employ the moral truth both individually and corporately if you will; only it requires a delicacy of touch which I think is apt most of all to fail where the practice is most common. I grant you that there are those that could handle the type of Ruth the Moabitess, and gather, so far as it goes, all the spiritual blessedness in the truths of the book which would apply to a Christian man or to the church of God; but employed, as it usually is, with a rough and vague indiscriminateness as being a distinct type of the one or the other, I am persuaded that it is an error, and must have mischievous consequences, as indeed is notorious. For the distinctive character of the Christian and the church is lost thereby, or rather was never known to those who thus teach.

Here then the land and the widow went together; and Boaz in the most solemn manner takes both, as the Lord will another day.

> And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. Jehovah make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel {Ruth 4:11}.

> In the latter part of the chapter we are told that Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife {Ruth 4:13}.

A son was born;

> and the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be Jehovah, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel {Ruth 4:14}.

But how sweet that things should have come down to the last pass perhaps found in any house in Israel! If there was a woman whose condition seemed not only calamitous but hopeless, it was Naomi, as she confessed herself. Her
appeal to Orpah and Ruth was founded upon the impossibility (humanly speaking) that deliverance should come, or the name of the dead be raised upon the inheritance. But impossibility is a word never to be named with God, save indeed that He should lie or act below Himself. It is a good thing that we should feel our utter weakness; it is intolerable that we should ever limit Him. No doubt it is just, and may be turned to profit by grace, that we have been brought utterly low; and so it was with Naomi. But now what joy filled the heart of the aged mother-in-law, once so forlorn, when she took the child of Ruth, Moabitess though she had been (for all this was now merged in her husband Boaz), and the women said for her,

He shall be a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women her neighbors gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed; he is the father of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 4:15-17).

And will it not be so, beloved brethren, in that bright day when the Lord Jesus will come, and when He will take the long widowed Israel, and when every trace of shame and want, as well as of death and sorrow, will have passed away for ever? Then the mighty course of God’s grace will flow, not only in old channels to the overflowing of their banks in goodness, but when the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah will fill all the earth as the waters the sea. And this is what we know will be the fruit of Christ’s assumption of the inheritance, the true Heir of all things.

For as the women felt and said, so will it be yet in the goodness of God. The welcome Seed of promise, the Messiah, will be

a son born to Naomi,

to Israel, but on a new ground of grace, as set forth by her who had no title to promise.

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The Father of the age to come, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6, 7).

Let us then rejoice that He has given us such a prospect, even as regards the earth and not merely Israel and their land. When we look at the world now, and at the madness and infatuation of men; when we hear how they glory in what is really their shame; when we see insubjection to God put forth in the proudest and most frantic forms, we may in some little degree realize what a deliverance it will be when Jesus will take the reins. We know well now that the best men are those that most of all feel their powerlessness, and theirs is the truest judgment of that which is found upon the earth where it is followed with sadness and sorrow and sighs and groans. These are not fruitless, as some men count them, nor is it in anywise according to the will of the Lord, that we should shirk this confession of our weakness, or our sense of total ruin here below. I am persuaded that when all the efforts of those who value themselves on their energy have come to nothing, and the attempts to stem the tide of evil will have only increased it, even by the most well-meant endeavors, then the prayers, the tears, the groans that have gone up to the Lord of glory will be answered, and the Lord Himself will prove that He alone can fill the void of this earth, as He only fills the heavens to the praise and glory of God the Father.

May the Lord then, soon to be the exalted and confessed of all on earth, give us to delight in all that He has revealed to us in His precious word, having a heart for each and every part of it for His name’s sake. So blessed are we as members of His body, as of His flesh and of His bones, that it becomes us to share the outgoings of His love to Israel ungrudgingly. And if we are to be with Him on high, it is meet that He should have a special object of His affection on earth; and who is this to be but the people who had been called out from the nations, but alas! slipped back again like a deceitful bow; who in that day will return penitently and in faith, and find plenteous mercy and redemption. Thus will the grief and shame, bitter though it was, be forgotten in the joy and glory of her who will then lay aside for ever her Gentile proclivities and belongings only to be a true and enduring channel of divine blessing to all the families of the earth as long as it endures.
The Earlier Historical Books
Lecture 7
1 Samuel 1–8

The first Book of Samuel (or of Kings as with some) brings before us that great change for which the Book of Ruth was a preparation, and in order to which the Spirit of God closed it with the generations until they come down to David. It is sufficiently plain to the simplest reader that Saul only came in by the way; for, in fact, the people’s wish for such an one was a dishonor to God, although he might be used providentially, as God is wont to do for His own glory. But we find here, as everywhere else, that God, while He knows the end from the beginning, goes onward with astonishing patience and consideration of all things and persons; for He who is mighty despises not any, but acts according to His holy nature, and yet is slow to wrath. Nevertheless, as being the only wise God who has His own purposes of glory before Him, He brings in on every great occasion a distinct promotion of it, negatively or positively; but this too by slow degrees, marking the immensity of the occasion a distinct promotion of it, negatively or positively; but this too by slow degrees, marking the immensity of the change that we may take heed to what He is doing. This seems to be a principle throughout scripture. We must remember that it is not only what God does but the display of Himself, which always contributes -- yea, insures -- blessing to the soul. There is the fruit not merely of His power, but of His will, and His will is ever good and holy and acceptable. And if we only heed what He marks for our instruction -- what our attention is drawn to, not only in the result, but on the road that leads to that result -- we shall not find ourselves without the blessing of the Lord.

There was a distinct and great change then in progress, and, as we have seen, a suitable and great preparation for it, the Book of Ruth as a whole the preface to those of Samuel; but the first Book of Samuel itself only slowly opens to us that which was in the mind of God to introduce. Hitherto the people, as such, were the object of divine dealings. Nor is it that His people ever ceased to be an object to Him; but in the unfolding of His ways He was now about to establish a principle which should in due time prove the turning-point of stable blessing. And what is particularly to be remarked is this: it is the turning-point of your blessing just as much as of that which awaits the Jewish people, of all nations, and of the universe. Although it be a principle quite new in its present application, it is really the oldest of all. At first sight it might seem difficult to bring all these truths into a small compass or focus of light, if I may say so; but this is what God does. Need I say where that concentrating point of all blessing is to be found? Is it not in one single name -- the name of Jesus? And who can adequately count up what varied blessings God has stored up in that one person -- what infinite fulness of wisdom and of goodness? I shall endeavour to show how this applies to the present subject.

In the past we have seen the people of Israel, and in the midst of them one person more particularly who was the sign of the blessing for the people, and the means of maintaining their relationship with God. This was the priest. We are familiar with the shadow of the great high priest. But the time was now come for God to bring in another and a yet grander principle; but this, as is always the case in this world, is invariably brought in by the failure of man, every successive step of it only manifesting God the more. The Book of Ruth prepared the way for this. The genealogy there had nothing to do with the priest; yet it was not by any man known distinctly (though it might have perhaps been gathered by an eye exercised in the things of God and versed in the prophetic word) that something greater than the priest was at hand. But I doubt much whether this had been actually understood by any until it became a fact. Nevertheless God had it from the very beginning before Him, as He later made it known in His word; and it is important for us to take notice of this. For we must remember that what happened to them is written for us -- not written for them merely, but for us specially; and we can see from the very beginning that God had something more than priesthood in view for His people. Why otherwise did He particularly mention the tribe of Judah, of which nothing was spoken concerning priesthood? None the less was Judah to have a place of honor, but a singular one. So, if Christ takes up the function of heavenly priest, He for other reasons did not belong to the house of Aaron nor to the tribe of Levi. It pleased God that He should be born of Judah; and of the family of David, as all know, the true Son of David in Solomon’s line. Therefore was the genealogy given at the close of the preceding book; but in the beginning of Samuel we have not the direct preparation for the Christ, nor the family noticed of which He was to be born in due time, but rather indirect and moral circumstances that would make it necessary if God was to bring in glory and man to be truly blest.

Thus 1 Samuel presents a scene of transition. Here we have not a man of Judah, but first of all one who clearly belonged to a Levitical family. The interest however is on one of his two wives, childless to her great sorrow. What she was made to taste was that which the people of God should have known; if they felt not, she enters into the
distressful condition in which they lay. The wife who had children knew little what it was to have sorrow. But Hannah whose heart was towards the Lord was the especial object not merely of deep affection, but of one too in which there was a divine element; and without this be assured that, as far as concerns the people of God, all else will be found to fail sooner or later. Is it meant that there should not be a genuine affection? God forbid! But there was more here than any bond of natural feeling. It is plain that Hannah looked to the Lord. And her faith was put to the test; and during the trial her way and spirit could not but win respect, as well as sympathy, on her husband’s part. But the best of all was that she knew the secret of the Lord before the answer appeared.

Now Jehovah will yet bring down His people to this very state. For the question here is of His ancient people Israel. And we must remember that, although we may apply every principle of truth, and thus as Christians gather profit from this book as from all others in scripture, the great subject of the kingdom as a fact awaits them under the Messiah. This is no reason why we should not understand and enjoy this part of the Bible, using its light for our path. For assuredly it is a truth we can not too much ponder, that, no matter who the subject may be, the church or the Christian is entitled to draw near in communion with Christ, and enter into the depths of God’s wisdom as it were more deeply than the very persons who are destined to be the object of these counsels of God. The reason is certain, and simple enough. Christ treats us as friends, and makes us share His plans and mind. It is not the fact of being ourselves those who receive a particular blessing that ensures the deepest understanding. The true means of entering into the revealed counsels of God is, first of all, that Christ fills the heart. Where He is the object, the eye is single, and the whole body full of light. The Holy Ghost takes of His things, and shows them to us. This ought to be the place of the members of His body. To this end among others was the Spirit given.

Hence therefore we ought to know what is reserved for the people of God by and by in the millennium, even better in very important respects than the people themselves. They will behold and enjoy the fruits of that glory which will shine on Zion; they will be in the actual possession of its privileges. But the heavenly sources of it ought to be plain and clear to our souls as between the Lord and us now. It would be better understood if we valued more our relation to Him as the Bride of the Lamb, the confidant of His secrets, no longer hidden but revealed, if I may use such an expression; and indeed we have the mind of Christ; so that it is only unbelief that robs us of its joy and brightness. But if so, the Lord keeps back nothing from us. It is a part of His great love towards us, that He tells us what concerns all the earth as the sphere of His kingdom, and especially Israel, His earthly center, and not ourselves only. For this is not the best proof of love. It may be and is necessary in the first instance; but it is not so much the communication of what we want that bespeaks intimacy, as the opening of the heart to another about that which does not concern himself. You tell a servant (perhaps a stranger, if you are kind) what concerns his own duty or advantage; but to tell out to another everything which is nearest to your own heart supposes the utmost possible confidence in and intimacy with that other.

Now this is the place that grace has put the Christian in; and therefore we can readily understand, as it appears to me, why all this becomes of real profit to our souls, though not by what people call spiritualizing, which is often really to lose the definiteness of the truth by the vain and selfish desire of appropriating everything to ourselves. Be assured that this is not the way to receive the best blessing from scripture, but by seeing its connection with Christ. It is only so that we can be sure of the truth; and apart from the truth there can be no real grasp of divine grace. Nor does it really take away anything, but gives everything solidly, though not all all about us. At the same time we see that what is special favor to the people, the earthly people, is surely also intended to bring before our souls His grace generally, as well as that which the Lord has specially for us. If I know, for instance, the faithfulness of the Lord’s love to Israel, am I not entitled to be very sure of His love to me and you? Does the revelation to us of His name as Father take anything from the grace He is showing to ourselves?

Hannah then, conscious of her desolation as a wife without a child (which we know to a Jewess was an immense loss, and by her justly felt as such), was led by grace to cast her care on the Lord without judging Him hard towards her, and spreads her soul’s desire and grief before Him. And so it was that this came out in the presence of God where the high priest saw her. Others went to worship there with their thank-offerings; she drew near with her tears, and there too she felt none the less the provocation of her adversary. But the remarkable feature of the tale is, that God calls our attention to the fact that the high priest himself had not the communion of His mind. He that ought most of all to have entered into the greatest difficulties of the people of God was certainly in this case among the last to appreciate the case. I have no doubt that Peninnah, bad as she was, knew more of the secret of Hannah’s grief than Eli; certainly even she did not think her a drunken woman as the high priest did. It was clear therefore that what God lets us see at the starting-point is the failure of him who up to this moment was outwardly the appointed means of communication both from God to the people, and from the people to God. At least such the priest was meant to be, and such he was officially. Here was the fact. Nor was this the only feature to be deplored in the priesthood then, as we shall find afterwards. But here it suffices to draw attention to the first patent fact -- the sorrow of a righteous one in Israel -- the absence of that which she might normally have looked for from the Lord, the lack of which He caused her to feel in order to spread it before Himself at the very moment when she was misjudged by him who above all in Israel ought to have pleaded for her, bearing up her cry as her intercessor before Jehovah. At length, convinced by her
meek endurance of his reproach, Eli bids her go in peace, with the prayer that the God of Israel might grant her the petition she had asked of Him. In due time the answer came from Jehovah, who remembered her.

And it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel {1 Sam. 1:20}.

It will soon be apparent that great importance attaches to the birth of Samuel, and to the function he was called to fulfill in Israel as contributing to the great object of the Spirit of God in this book. And Hannah goes up in due time when the child was weaned -- not till then -- and told her husband,

I will not go up until the child be weaned; then I will leave him that he may appear before Jehovah, and there abide for ever {1 Sam. 1:22}.

Here was a true heart. To such an one blessing from God was only the occasion, as it was the means, of returning that blessing to Him. Jehovah was the object of her soul. Who can suppose that there was any lack of affection for Samuel? Samuel to her was clothed not merely with all the affection her heart could give a child, and a child so born, but with a special sense of what the Lord had proved Himself to her in respect of him. Well she could gather (and she was right; for the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him) that such a child was not born for nothing -- that hers was a son given for the purposes of God in Israel. Faith sees clear, and always in the measure of its simplicity; and the only thing that secures this is Christ before us as we rest on His work. Then the power of the Spirit of God delivers us by grace, but in self-judgment. Thus do we see clearly.

When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him into the house of Jehovah in Shiloh: and the child was young. And they slew a bullock {1 Sam. 1:24, 25}.

There was openness of heart: did anything seem too good for the Lord?

They slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto Jehovah. For this child I prayed; and Jehovah hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Therefore also I have lent him to Jehovah; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to Jehovah. And he worshipped Jehovah there {1 Sam. 1:25-28}.

His faithful goodness draws out praise.

Next comes a fresh outpouring of her heart, but indeed in that prayer a wonderful stream of confidence and exultation in Jehovah (1 Sam. 2). And this, I think, we shall find has the closest connection with the great object of the Holy Ghost in the book.

My heart rejoiceth in Jehovah, mine horn is exalted in Jehovah: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as Jehovah: for there is none beside thee:

neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for Jehovah is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength {1 Sam. 2:1-4}.

No doubt this flowed out of her own experience. She knew what it was out of weakness to be made strong. What the intervention of divine power was she knew in her own soul; but the Spirit of God never stops at experience. It is as truly an error on the one side to suppose that He does not produce experience, as on the other that his own experience can be the just measure for the saint. He who does not know what experience is can scarcely be conceived to have a real knowledge of God; but he that stops short of God’s object is in danger of being either clouded or self-satisfied. The fruit of faith becomes, precious as it may be in itself, where it is rested in, a snare to the believer. Yet offered up to God, how sweet in every little service and suffering for Christ’s name sake, though one would refuse absolutely any resting-place before God, or any object but Christ! What is it then which keeps the soul firm, and fast, and free? Nothing but Christ, who is also the proper object of the Holy Ghost, and not that measure of reproduction of Him in the soul which we call experience. This principle you will find throughout scripture. There cannot be a connection with the circumstances and the necessities of our souls, for God takes care that we shall be blessed; but He never stops short there, or with any short of Christ Himself.

Hence the Spirit of God is clearly launching out here into a much greater than Samuel, and into consequences far deeper than the blessing of Hannah’s soul, though it need scarcely be said that for this very reason what was immediate was so much the better secured. The bright vision of a Christ and of His kingdom as superseding the failure of man had thus a vital link with what she then had passed through. Hannah was much more rightly guided than Eli. The Holy Spirit deigns, in the wondrous love of God, to incorporate a poor simple woman’s experience in Israel about a child that was born to her with His own glorious counsels in Christ as to Israel and all the earth. And does it not give dignity to the believer to know that a little cup of trial we have here may be thus filled with the grace of Christ Himself?

They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble {1 Sam. 2:5}.

The barren hath borne.

Hannah has her own circumstances before her; but the language even here goes out beyond her experience. Literally indeed she did not bear seven; but we see how far the Spirit of God can linger over the actual one whose birth awakens all the rest to faith. The seven means clearly divine completeness, which we never can
have on this side of Christ.

Jehovah killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. Jehovah maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are Jehovah’s, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of Jehovah shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: Jehovah shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed {1 Sam. 2:6-10}.

It is clear to the spiritual mind that the Spirit of God is going a long way beyond the child of Hannah here. Samuel was to be among priests; he was not destined for the throne. But had he been, there is a strength and height of purpose here which far transcends an ordinary sovereign. In fact nothing but Christ can meet what is here in the mind of the Spirit of God.

He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail.

Hannah had learnt her lesson from God; but the lesson was yet to be taught in a still more impressive and ample manner, never to be forgotten.

The adversaries of Jehovah shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them.

It is clear that this looks onward to a greater day, even to the day of Jehovah Himself.

Jehovah shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.

Only Christ can meet what is required by all the words.

Further, we have here the key to the books we are entering on: they are the introduction of the king. It is not the priest now, but the king according to the counsels of God. Just as heretofore the high priest was the great center of the whole Levitical system, so henceforth must be the king. But we shall find why morally it was that the Holy Spirit brings in the king here. We have only a little preparation for it; but there is much more to be brought out yet. It is comparatively late in the book that we find the true king even in type; but here the Spirit of God shows us that such a personage was before the mind of God, whatever might be the guilt of the people about one after their own eyes and in their self-will.

After this another scene opens to view. It is not now Eli in his feebleness; but his sons in their ungodly course and dissolute profanation of Jehovah’s name. Eli feared the Lord; but he certainly knew not that calm sense of the presence of God which enables one to judge accordingly. This has been plainly before us in the first chapter. What about his sons? They were sons of Belial; they knew not Jehovah. So was it now in Israel, the chosen people of God. And those who had been set for the very purpose of presenting God to the people, and the people to God, were now the sons of Belial.

I will not dwell on the melancholy picture which the Spirit of God here appends in proof of it; on the intense selfishness of these men, who made the offering of Jehovah to be despised; on their still worse iniquity before Jehovah, which led the people not only to despise but to abhor His offering. But the Holy Ghost, along with this appalling picture of the wickedness of the priesthood in Israel, now shows us Samuel ministering before Jehovah, a child girded with a linen ephod, and the parents blessed too. So Hannah, if she had not what she spoke of prophetically -- seven sons -- at any rate has three sons, and two daughters besides. Fulness, perfection, will never be short of Christ.

But

Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel {1 Sam. 2:22} in their iniquity with but feeble remonstrance, which was in vain.

But the child Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with Jehovah, and also with men {1 Sam. 2:26}.

And now comes a testimony; for God never judges without a warning.

And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith Jehovah, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh’s house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? {1 Sam. 2:27, 28}.

It was so. Eli was the representative as the high priest in Israel.

Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honorest thy sons above me? {1 Sam. 2:29},

Can it be Eli? It was really so. For God does not judge by appearance. Why was his effort so feeble to maintain the honor of God in his children? Why did his remonstrance fail so decidedly? The occasion was serious, the sin flagrant, and Eli knew it well. Alas! he humoured his sons.

A solemn thing to say this of a saint, as Eli was: -- Thou honorest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people. Wherefore the Lord Jehovah of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now Jehovah saith, Be it far from me; for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me.
shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father’s house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them {1 Sam. 2:29-34}.

Now mark the words which let us into the plan of God. And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind {1 Sam. 2:35}; for Eli did not belong to the branch of the priesthood with which the Lord had made an everlasting covenant. It may be remembered that, of the two surviving sons of Aaron, one of them was singled out for an everlasting priesthood; but, as usual in the ways of God, flesh seemed to prevail against spirit, and the one that had not the promise of the everlasting covenant takes advantage of the other that had it. The line of Phinehas sank into abeyance for a season. His brother came forward with various successors, Now that Eli and his sons made the offering of Jehovah to be offensive, the sentence of Jehovah comes into effect: the branch of Phinehas returns to the place that God had determined and given him hundreds of years before.

There are few things more instructive in scripture, and peculiar to it, than the way in which, on the one hand, moral evil is allowed to work out its way, and on the other a promise is given, as here, because of zeal for His name, before the moral iniquity came in which brings down God’s judgment on the guilty. Then He accomplishes His promise at the same time that He judges the iniquity of those that had taken the place of a blessing which did not belong to them. This will be found to be the case often in the revealed dealings of God. If His own word cannot but be verified by His grace, at the same time Satan is not inactive till Christ reigns and judges his efforts and those of every instrument which may arise to oppose His will. Thus the two things are accomplished by the Lord in His own perfect wisdom and goodness.

But there is much more than this which we would do well to note here,

I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind.

We know that God had counseled it entirely apart from all this sad and humiliating history long before:

I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever {1 Sam. 2:35}.

Now this is exceedingly striking. We have seen (1 Sam. 2:10) the anointed brought in for the first time, who was clearly the king. Now we have the further intimation that the faithful priest is to walk before God’s anointed. In the early books of the law such language as this would have been perfectly unintelligible. The reason is plain. In the law the anointed one always means the high priest. Now, for the first time in God’s dealing with Israel,

his anointed,
or

the anointed,
is not the high priest, but a greater personage before whom the high priest is to walk.

In short the high priest is no longer the immediate link of connection with God, but falls into a secondary place, there being another

Anointed greater than he. Who can that be? It is the King, in full purpose the Messiah, the Lord Jesus in relation to Israel. This Anointed One therefore comes more and more into prominence as not only the people but the priesthood sink into the sad but just place of moral censure and of divine judgment, not yet executed but pronounced. And thus, beloved friends, it always is, and we must never be satisfied with finding simply judgments in scripture. I believe this is the reason why the study of prophecy is frequently so unprofitable. Surely no believer would say that prophecy in itself, if taken up and pursued in the Holy Ghost, ought to be or could be aught but edifying. Why is it then that the study of prophecy is so often a thing which rather dries up the springs of Christian affection, while it gives scope for mind, intellect, fancy, and imagination? The reason is simple. First it is severed from its moral roots, and scripture on the contrary never gives prophecy except as God’s dealing with the ways of man morally. But the greatest of all reasons why it ceases to be profitable is this, that it is severed not only from what is moral but from the grand divine object, Christ Himself.

On the other hand, when taken as God gives it, prophecy has a blessed place, though not the highest one in scripture. Take the very case before us. The New Testament, as we know, particularly speaks of prophecy as beginning with Samuel. It is not meant that no prophecy had been given before Samuel, for clearly there was; nor yet either that the fullest outburst of the Spirit of prophecy was in Samuel’s days, for it was considerably later. Still scripture does particularly signalize Samuel in this respect. Acts 3 is a proof of this, where the apostle Peter introduces his name in this very connection. He says there that all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken have likewise foretold of these days. Why from Samuel {Acts 3:24}?
What was the great propriety, and wherein lay, as already hinted, the moral reason why the Spirit of God connects it with this place of Samuel? The people had failed completely long before. The priests were now just as manifest a failure. What was to be done then, if the people of Israel and if the priests had alike failed? And what failure could be more complete than that which this chapter has just now shown and pronounced on? What remained to be done? There is none holy as Jehovah; He is One who never fails. But how does He act? Samuel and the prophets that follow after are just the very epoch when the announcement of His Anointed as king is first caused to dawn upon Israel. It is here that the king is spoken of, not now indistinctly, not merely under the name of Shiloh, nor under the figure of a lion, and so on. Now comes forward the purpose of the anointed King, with a faithful priest walking before Him for ever.

As we proceed in the book, the immense importance of this very truth will be shown; but it is enough to remark in the first instance its connection with Samuel, and the reason why the Spirit makes him to be a commencing epoch of prophecy. He was really a Levite, as such having to do with the service of God in the temple; still that he was called to a higher task is plain from the words of Samuel and the prophets that follow after him {Acts 3:24}.

Here was the great crisis, when the priesthood was manifestly the means of increasing the iniquity of the people, instead of being a stay in the downward progress of Israel. Thereupon God brings in something different and better, pointing to the anointed King -- the Anointed in another and a higher sense, before whom the priest must take a subordinate place. This is the remarkable introduction to the book.

In the next chapter (1 Sam. 3), on which we must not think of saying many words now, Samuel is put forward and shown to be marked out for a most serious place as the herald of the change in progress. He was to be the intermediate link in preparing the way. If the king was coming, there is a forerunner. Before the advent of Messiah, John the Baptist prepared the way. So in this book Samuel stands in a similar relation to the king. In these days the word of Jehovah was precious {1 Sam. 3:1}. There was no open vision.

Eli’s eyes were waxed dim, and he could not see -- in more senses than one how true!

Ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of Jehovah where the ark of God was, Samuel was laid down to sleep. And Jehovah called Samuel {1 Sam. 3:2-4}.

He called him again and again, so that Eli instructs the youth whose voice it was, perceiving that it was Jehovah. And then comes the appalling sentence which that child was caused to hear, and which as surely was executed at no distant date.

The chapter next following (1 Sam. 4) lets us see how God brought forward His servant as the vessel of His mind.

And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to do battle, and pitched beside Eben-ezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek {1 Sam. 4:1}.

Thus was the battle arranged when the people, finding that they were smitten before the Philistines, think of the ark of Jehovah’s covenant and throne, not as the emblem of His presence, but as a charm to rescue them in the face of their enemies. There was thus a superstitious hope in the ark of Jehovah, but no faith in Israel. It was no better than an amulet; and they were no better than heathens in their employment of it. Where was the reverence for God that became His people? Where was the sense of the blessedness of His presence? They thought of themselves; they feared the Philistines. The ark would surely prove a defense for Israel. This is what they had now sunk down so low as to make their one and only thought. And, my brethren, have we not to beware of the same thing? The less we suspect ourselves, the greater our danger. There are few things more natural to the heart when in danger than making use of the Lord, not believingly, but selfishly. This in the worst form the children of Israel were now blinded by the enemy to do.

On the other hand, faith, where real, ever thinks of the glory of God morally, whatever may be its own appropriation of blessing in the hour of need. But it would not dream of sacrificing the honor of God. Here Israel, in the hope of shielding themselves, exposed to the enemy the most intimate and holy and glorious sign of the presence of God in the sanctuary. They never contemplated that the God of Israel might give over His ark to the Philistines, judging their selfish unbelief, and would there singlehanded undertake for His own name and praise. What the godly soul does, just because he has faith, is to spread the difficulty before God, and, in the certainty that He will hear and appear on his behalf, waits that he may learn the needed lesson of God’s end in the trial, as well as to be shown His way how each danger and difficulty is to be met, and every foe overcome. This did not enter into the minds of the elders of Israel. They thought of the ark simply according to their own wishes and a thoroughly carnal judgment. Their sole anxiety was to deliver themselves from the Philistine, the then imminent danger. It does not seem to have entered their thought to consult His will; still less was there the smallest trace of humiliation. They did not even ask God why He had allowed the Philistines to threaten or attack them. Their first thought was self; their last resource, when pressed at this time, was the ark of the covenant of Jehovah, but this only valued as a means of security against the Philistines. What plainer proof of their utter degeneracy from God!

So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of Jehovah of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God
They received it with insensate shouts of triumph.

And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of Jehovah was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid {1 Sam. 4:6, 7}.

It was precisely the same superstitious fear, the opposite of faith, that produced panic in the Philistines, and short-lived confidence in the Israelites. In both it was total ignorance and unbelief. (Compare Rom. 1:18.)

Accordingly God acts in a way altogether unexpected by either. The reasoning of the Israelites assumed that God would never permit any harm to happen to that ark before which Jordan had fled away, least of all for uncircumcised hands to capture it. Why not then get behind the ark, and thus be safe? God will surely interfere for those who have His ark. How little they knew His mind! for what they counted an impossibility was precisely what He intended. The throne of His presence, in Israel was to go into captivity. Why keep up the sign of His glory in the midst of those who could stake it against the Philistines? What were Hophni and Phinehas, who accompanied it, but the gravest misrepresenters of the true God in Israel? And what the state of the people? Like priest, like people. The time was fast approaching when God must put humiliation on Israel.

And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain {1 Sam. 4:10, 11}.

Thus the word of Jehovah was accomplished; and poor Eli sits on the wayside watching, and his heart trembled for the ark of God. One cannot estimate very highly the spiritual apprehension of the high priest; yet it was just enough for him to know that God would be no party to His own dishonor, and least of all at the hands of His own people. The Philistines might be wrong in fearing that the mere bringing down the ark into the field would settle the fight; but the Israelites were a hundredfold more guilty who flattered themselves that the ark so brought must prove their deliverance.

And when Eli heard the noise of the crying {1 Sam. 4:14},

and was hastily told, not only of the fleeing of the people and of the death of his sons, but of the ark,

it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years {1 Sam. 4:18}.

The heart of Eli, after all, beat rightly towards God. There was truth in the inward parts, though during his life it had been sadly overlaid by not a little that was of nature. But His death lays bare the real feeling of his soul Godward. And so too his daughter-in-law, when she heard that the ark of God was taken, and that her father and husband were dead, came prematurely into travail.

And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast borne a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken {1 Sam. 4:20-22}.

How precious to find, even in that dark and feeble day, that grace did not cease to produce a witness for God, though sorrow might fittingly accompany it!

All this prepares the way for the King. It is now, one may observe, not only the sentence executed on the priesthood after proof of their guilt, but the compromise of that central seat of Jehovah which the priesthood surrounded; for what could priesthood do without the ark? What was the high priest to minister before the sign of God’s presence, if it had somehow vanished from Israel?

But next we have another great truth dawning through the clouds. It will show how little reason there is to fear for the honor of God: He will not fail to take care of it, and so much the more where He only remains. Supposing it be the fact that the faults of His people have let slip His honor in any way, it is no longer a question of their fidelity. What then? Are we to doubt the resources of God? We may count with assurance on His faithfulness, assured that He will appear when there is no one else to appear for Him. This He did now with the enemy. He had permitted that the Philistines then should overcome the Israelites, whose state and ways were wholly evil.

And now another side of the question begins to open. The Philistines having taken the ark were no longer troubled with fears, but self-confident, and boastful {1 Sam. 5}.

And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Eben-ezer unto Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of Jehovah {1 Sam. 5:1-3}. 

{1 Sam. 4:4}.

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But they would try another time. It might have been an accident.

And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of Jehovah {1 Sam. 5:3, 4}.

Now the blow was far more complete.

And the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him.

God is always sufficient for His own honor.

Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, as we are told,

nor any that come into Dagon’s house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day {1 Sam. 5:4, 5}.

Thus it became a standing mark of the victory of the God of Israel over Dagon.

Nor was this all that was wrought.

But the hand of Jehovah was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof.

And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god {1 Sam. 5:6, 7}.

And so they carry about the ark from one place to another. And then the hand of Jehovah is stretched out in every place among the enemies of Jehovah, and we are told,

he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts. Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people {1 Sam. 5:9, 10}.

What could be a more illustrious testimony to the living power as well as to the truth of the God of Israel than this very fact? Granted that Israel ought to be in the dust; granted that they were incapable of striking a blow; granted that they were smitten most heavily when they most dishonored the ark of Jehovah. But God watched over His own ark, which Israel’s sin had so wantonly betrayed and lost; and the fact was that so marked a destruction went forth that all the lords of the Philistines could not but feel their utter weakness in the presence of the God of Israel.

And the cry of the city, we are told,

went up to heaven {1 Sam. 5:12}.

Thus the captured ark of Jehovah was there long enough to bring judgment upon the various lands and cities of the enemy.

And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of Jehovah? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place {1 Sam. 6:2}; and so they devised according to their own thoughts. It is a very notable and instructive fact, that God meets men in their state, though He refuses to meet His own people, save according to His word. How good, yet how holy, is He! This I consider an important truth in having to do with the men of the world. Had the Israelites devised for the ark of Jehovah a plan after their own thoughts which slighted the word of God, He would have surely judged it instead of healing; but when these poor heathen, who had not the lively oracles, merely did according to that which they had, He showed his pitiful mercy. Jehovah is not indifferent to the needy and distressed among men; He despises not any. Doubtless those that have the word of God among them, as men have all around us here, stand in a different position. Still the principle is true, as a general one, that where souls are outside the positive knowledge of the truth of God, the tender mercy of God meets them in conscience with astonishing compassion. But conscience will not do where there is the knowledge of the word of God, however important it may be in its own sphere where there is nothing else.

These Philistines then propose a new cart and kine, on which there hath came no yoke {1 Sam. 6:7}, as a test of the Lord.

Take the ark of Jehovah, say their advisers,

and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return Him for a trespass-offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us {1 Sam. 6:8, 9}.

And the Lord deigned to meet them on their own test: Surely this was very gracious; and shows what a God we have to do with, not only for ourselves, but even for those that know Him less.

And the men did so: and took two milk kine; and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home that is, that the cry of the calves and the natural instincts of the dam might lead it to go forth towards its young. Instead of that, the kine leave their young, go in a totally opposite direction, and take a course that they had never taken before, contrary to all the instincts of their nature in the brute creation.

And they laid the ark of Jehovah upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods. And the kine took the straight way to
the way of Beth-shemesh, and went along the highway, bowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Beth-shemesh {1 Sam. 6:10-12}.

Thus God met the thought of the heart where there was but the working of conscience, without the light of revealed truth, not the knowledge of God, but the instinctive feeling of His hand, in order that there might be a voice in their conscience. If they hardened themselves against it, or forgot it, so much the worse would it be for them.

And they of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it. And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Beth-shemite, and stood there, where there was a great stone: and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt-offering unto Jehovah. And the Levites took down the ark of Jehovah, and the coffer that was with it, wherein the jewels of gold were, and put them on the great stone: and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto Jehovah. And when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day {1 Sam. 6:13-16}.

But this is not all. It appears further that he smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of Jehovah {1 Sam. 6:19}.

Why this? There was no smiting the Philistines because they had looked in. They had meddled with the ark, and they had given their offerings according to their own mind, and not according to His word; but because the men of Beth-shemesh looked,

he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because Jehovah had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter {1 Sam. 6:19}.

These are the ways of God with His own people. Oh, let us never forget it, beloved brethren! There was no such slaughter even for the Philistines.

Jehovah shall judge his people {Deut. 32:36}, and the fact that He judges is a proof, not that they are not His people, nor that He does not love them, but that He resents irreverence. Let us not read it unimproved. The grace of God always produces one of two effects -- a spirit of worship where the heart bows, or a habit of irreverence where grace is trifled with. The familiarity of His love either makes us nothing before Him, and Himself everything, or it emboldens the natural heart to a kind of levity and self-confidence, which I think of all things to be among the greatest hindrances to the truth of God, and this sometimes as far as it can work in those that know Him. We have to be jealous of ourselves as to this. Even real Christians may not be unconscious of it; but you may depend upon it that, instead of our being those that least of all need to watch against it, it is the very knowledge of His grace, the very familiarity with His truth, unless there be the real and sustained enjoyment of His presence, that will always expose us to this; for there can be no real sense of His presence unless there be along with it self-judgment and watchfulness. Failure in this is no proof at all that a soul wants the knowledge of His grace and truth, but it betrays our low state. Rather it is the effect of grace known when our nature has been feebly judged. On the other hand, never can we be kept in constant judgment of self, but in communion with Him and His grace.

The men of Beth-shemesh furnish no doubt a very extreme case. There was a certain sort of joy of heart when they saw the returning ark of God. Was not this right? It was assuredly not wrong; but then there ought to have been another and a humbling feeling when they saw it come from the Philistines. If God’s part was full of mercy, what had theirs been toward Him and even it? And ought there not to have been lowly prostration before the God of Israel? This would have cut off all thought of prying into it. Was the ark desecrated because Israel had been faithless? Justly did that one look into the ark of God cost Israel more than all the swords of the Philistines.

And the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Jehovah God? and to whom shall he go up from us? {1 Sam. 6:20}

But if this panic was but natural, it was not the cry of faith. They ought to have judged themselves instead of thus giving way to a feeling of alarm before the solemn judgment of God. Nor is it thus that evil is really corrected. Where there has been levity and disrespect to God, not a reactionary distance can be the true remedy (if possible worse than the disease), but a better knowledge of the grace and truth of God. This, if received by faith, will correct it, not by curtailing a spirit of bondage, but by employing the certainty of grace to apply the truth to ourselves. Distance and uncertainty are man’s way; but God brings home His word in the Spirit to judge nature so much the more because of the fulness of His grace and the clearness of the truth. Thus judging self goes along with grace.

The next chapter (1 Sam. 7) tells us of the men of Kirjath-jearim who fetch up the ark. Then Samuel reappears and Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto Jehovah with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you {1 Sam. 7:3}.

There is the secret. They were in a condition that made them light, because along with a certain natural joy at the return of the Lord, there was that which always interferes with His own honor. So says he, Prepare ye hearts unto Jehovah, and serve him only {1 Sam. 7:3}.

And Samuel gathers them together and says, And I will pray for you unto Jehovah. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and
poured it out before Jehovah {1 Sam. 7:5, 6}.

This is very instructive. It is not, I suppose, that one can find a prescription of God for this solemn act in all the five books of Moses -- if any of us were asked why it was that the people of God gathered together and poured out water before Jehovah, one might hesitate to say. Are we, therefore, to judge that the act was wrong? Not so. In a broken state of things, while holding fast the grand central truths and duties attaching to our relationships, the mere return to that which was originally formed is by no means the truest way of meeting the difficulties which sin brings in.

On the other hand, we are never free (need one say so?) to take up human inventions; and certainly the act in question was not such an invention. But I repeat that the remedy for a ruined state of things in the church of God, just as here in Israel, does not consist in going back to each form which existed at the beginning. One looks first and foremost for brokenness of spirit -- for the sense of where we have all got to -- in the dishonor done to God; then we begin to see more clearly our place of obedience in all that remains. But without the judgment of self and of the church’s state in the presence of God nothing can be right; whereas, if this be wrought in us, His grace will surely show us from His word what suits such a state of confusion and weakness. Yet it affords a door to dark and self-willed souls, who adhere to words and appearances, actually flattering themselves as if they alone are right, and censuring most these who are most truly obedient.

Supposing for instance, at the present time, the church of God awakened to feel its long-continued departure from God, what would be the first and natural resource? Why to set up twelve apostles, and to yearn after tongues and miracles, if not to imitate the circumstances of the Pentecostal Church in the community afterwards. But what would be the spiritual judgment suited to the present state of the church? Setting up apostles? No such presumptuous dream, but to sit down ourselves in dust and ashes before God, taking on us the shame and sorrow of the church reduced to ruin by the sin of those whom God had so deeply favored.

Such a taking the sense of ruin upon his soul before him seems to have been expressed in what Samuel did. The pouring out of water before Jehovah was an act, in my judgment, most suitable and appropriate. It was not an effort to patch up appearances, but rather the confession of utter weakness before God. Such at any rate we all know is the force of the figure applied in the very next Book of Samuel: –

As water spilt on the ground {2 Sam. 14:14}.

It was appropriating the truth of their own condition before God. But was there any lack of confidence in His grace? The very contrary.

And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before Jehovah, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against Jehovah. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh {1 Sam. 7:6}.

At once Satan bestirs himself and rouses the Philistines; he if not they could not bear to hear of any souls, least of all of the people, gathering thus before Jehovah in confession of their sins. It is possible that the Philistines might think Israel’s object in gathering was political -- a mere mustering for battle; and an effort for independence. But Satan knew better its import, and could not rest; and of this I am sure, that had they, his Philistine instruments, known the meaning of such an act as that which broke Israel down before God, this would have been something far more terrible for the enemy of Israel than any gathering for martial purposes. There is nothing so alarming to Satan as the people of God humbling themselves in real prayer and confession, where there is also a believing use of His word. Whatever the difficulty or the distress, there never can be a reason for distrusting God. It is the point of honor that we owe the Lord that, whatever we have to own about ourselves, we should never doubt Him; whatever failure we may confess, at any rate let our first confession and our constant confidence be Jesus our Lord,

God over all, blessed for ever {Rom. 9:5}.

And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto Jehovah our God for us {1 Sam. 7:7, 8}.

This, to my mind, is beautiful. They had begun neither with sin-offering nor with burnt-offering. They had already taken the place of penitence before God as to their sin; they had solemnly owned their ruin in the water poured out; and Samuel prayed as they confessed. They were entitled to look to the Lord with assurance that He would appear on their behalf. There is the sign of acceptance now; as we read that

Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering wholly unto Jehovah: and Samuel cried unto Jehovah for Israel, and Jehovah heard him. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel {1 Sam. 7:9, 10}.

Ah, how little the foe knew what was preparing for them! Did they dare to interrupt Israel when that sweet savor was rising up to God for them? It was no longer a question between Israel and the Philistines, but between Jehovah and the Philistines.

And Jehovah thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel {1 Sam. 7:10}.

And the men of Israel had the easy task of pursuing.

The children of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Beth-car. Then Samuel took a stone,
and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath Jehovah helped us. So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of Jehovah was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath {1 Sam. 7:11-14}.

And it is repeated

Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life {1 Sam. 7:15}.

But the next chapter (1 Sam. 8) brings out the failure, not of Eli’s sons; but of Samuel’s. The intermediate person, however blessed, fails to meet the depth of need. The seer is not Christ; the herald is not His master. The sons of Samuel then perverted judgment, and took bribes; and the children of Israel say,

Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations {1 Sam. 8:5}.

Thus, you see, two currents are flowing on. But let us mark that God divulges His plan before man as the enemy seems to bring it in. So in the Book of Job, it is not Satan that begins the action, but God. It is He that has Himself a purpose of good for Job. Satan no doubt tries to spite Him, as he has plan after plan of mischief; but God is before Satan in good — very comforting thought for our souls. As God is before Satan, He will certainly be after him. The good that God has then is the first thought, and the good that He at the beginning has at heart will be accomplished, even though it may be late, if not last. Thus good is before evil, and abides when the evil is gone. We may see similarly here. Who was it that raised the hope of a king? Who was it that saw fit, if not to pronounce death on the priests, as on the people before, at any rate to set them aside from the place they once had to make room for a better thing, the true secret of Israel’s blessing, as will be shown another day? It was God. But here may be found the undercurrent; not a blow from the Philistines, but an effort to undermine Israel by Satan’s craft.

Thus the thought of a king was not from man, but from God; yet the desire for one like the nations was rebellion against God on man’s part. The purposed king would be a rich blessing from God, and it was His purpose to give them a king before their wicked heart desired it to get rid of Himself. It was an evil in man to be judged; it was grace in God to purpose as He surely will also accomplish it. Both are true; but man’s mind often sets one against the other, instead of believing both. Here we have man’s heart. They desire a king. Samuel feels it deeply, not because it was against himself so much as it was against God, and so he tells them the thing displeased him.

And Samuel prayed {1 Sam. 8:6}.

Oh that we might in this take pattern by so true a servant of the Lord! that when things displease us, we might pray, and not fret or fume or scold! It is not that Samuel did not feel Israel’s state; but he prayed to Jehovah.

And Jehovah said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee

(what a God of patience so to speak and act!),

but they have rejected me {1 Sam. 8:7}.

Yet was he to hearken. How God moves in love above all man’s evil, and accomplishes His own blessed plans!

They have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly {1 Sam. 8:7-9}.

There was no doubt about the evil involved. Still, if their lie would only bring out the faithfulness of God, what can do but love?

And Samuel told all the words of Jehovah unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of the king (they are warned):

He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards {1 Sam. 8:10-14}.

This is man’s king, and such an one can scarcely be any more. It is impossible in the nature of things that it could be materially different. We shall find on another occasion the perfect contrast of God’s king in every particular. But now it is simply a question of their responsibilities, though Samuel warns them fully.

It was in vain.

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel, and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations {1 Sam. 8:19, 20}.

Their heart was getting farther and farther away from God. Every word they uttered, though they little suspected it, condemned themselves the more. It was self-will active against God, and more, in deliberate renunciation of their own highest privilege.

And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of Jehovah. And Jehovah said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice,
and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city {1 Sam. 8:21, 22}. 
The Earlier Historical Books

Lecture 8

1 Samuel 9–15

We have already seen that the desire and deliberate decision of the people for a king was a direct blow at the government of God in Israel; but the time was come to permit the will of the people to have its way. On the one hand God, though not without the prophet’s expostulation, would let them learn what the king of their choice must come to. On the other hand I have already shown fully that, even before the desire of the people for a king was expressed, God had manifested His purpose to bless by an Anointed One before whom the priest should walk. He meant to give them a king. His love is always before the hatred of the enemy. Man shows out no doubt what he is in his desire to get rid of God; but Jehovah has His own plans, and gives us the great comfort of knowing that, although the execution of them may be contingent on man’s sinful failure and ruin, His purpose and end of blessing man is ever before His own mind. These counsels of God are of course altogether independent of man. They may take into account fully the means of the creature’s blessing, and they must; for He is the only wise God, who needs no after thoughts to correct or supplement His first design; and it is in man that God glorifies Himself most. But at the same time, for that very reason, God blesses man most when He lifts man out of his thoughts into His own counsels.

Now, in looking at this chapter, nothing can be more striking than the manner in which God causes everything to further His own end. Man had expressed his guilty will. A trial is about to be made. God after due warning does not put difficulties in the way, but helps in every conceivable manner, that the trial of man’s chosen king should have every advantage. Can anything of this sort be a more wholesome lesson for us, my brethren, let me observe, than this very principle on God’s part? How often, when disapproving of a measure, are we not apt to try and counteract it in every possible way? We are unwise thus to press our wishes or judgments; and we show further how little faith we have in God’s own will about it; for, if simply confident in His will, we may rest assured that He knows best how to reduce others to subjection, and carry out all to His glory. I am not supposing it to be a question of our own duty, but where others are in question. Possibly too we may ourselves be mistaken through one cause or another. But even granting that we have the certainty that we are not, we may but provoke the more where it belongs to others to act, and too keen an opposition might precipitate what we most desire to see averted. But it is best in any case to cultivate calm confidence in God. And if others will push a wrong measure, let it be allowed all opportunity, and its true character will only the sooner and the more plainly be shown out. On every ground therefore, as those having faith in God, and desiring not our own will, our wisdom is that we should commit things much more simply to God than we are apt to do.

This seems to me beautifully manifested in the Lord’s guidance of Israel during the circumstances which led to Saul’s coming to the throne of Israel. No one could have anticipated that the search after his father’s lost asses would put him in connection, not merely with the prophet Samuel, but with the throne of Israel. Yet so it was. In the journeyings of Saul and his servant they come to the land of Zuph, in which was the city where Samuel dwelt. Consulting him, Saul’s anxiety as to his errand is set at rest, and he is himself informed that all the desire of Israel is on him. The details of the servant’s counsel, the young maidens’ direction, the seer, the secret chamber, &c., are wonderfully graphic. Suffice it to say that the company were invited to dine, and the reserved shoulder set before the chief guest of the day. Before their return home, Samuel gets Saul alone, and finally anoints him captain of Jehovah’s inheritance. Beforehand God communicates His mind to His servant. On the one side He orders circumstances that Saul should come forward; on the other, He singles out the very person that men of that day most of all delighted in. He was precisely such a man as nature would desire for a king. If the whole people had been, in modern language, polled, was not Saul the man that would have commanded at any rate the great majority? On His part, then, there was no opposition or hindrance from the time that the prophetic remonstrance was refused. Israel was allowed in every possible way to have his own will. On the other hand too, what can be more affecting than Samuel’s part? He had protested against it. Now there is precisely where, if we are not very watchful, we may throw obstructions. Samuel might have thrown obstructions in the way. Not so, the Lord had spoken in his ear. This was quite enough. And here was the person come. It was unquestionably a supplanting of Samuel’s own place in Israel as well as of Jehovah’s; but all now is left quietly with God, who will have the people’s choice fairly tested. The trial is to proceed. God has settled that they are to have a king like others; and when He does, you will notice, not only here but everywhere else, that everything is put favorably, so that there should be a complete experiment of man’s king before Him, without the smallest pretence, for example, for
Israel to say that there were disadvantages which hindered the due trial of their king. Quite the contrary; the mouth of Israel was stopped. Saul therefore is brought before the prophet, and anointed without delay.

To another thing it may be well to call attention. At first Saul appears to shine. Wherever was a better sample of man’s king at the beginning? He speaks modestly; he seems to have no ambition whatsoever, as far as people could discern. We have every proper feeling on his part for his father; we see further that there was no lack of affection or desire on the part of his father towards him. Thus all looked favorable; for when a man is called to public office, it may be of interest and importance that we should know what he is at home; and this accordingly was fairly given. We see clearly that on both sides there was family affection and interest: whether from Saul or from his father Kish, the people need not suffer from ill report on such a score. All this augured well for the future prospects of Israel to the eyes of men.

Again, not only was there this working in providence, but God was pleased to give tokens for the purpose of helping Saul. If there had been an ear to hear, if there had been any measure of spiritual perception, there were special signs put in his way. These are brought before us in the beginning of 1 Sam. 10. Thus, before these, two men announce the recovery of the object of their search; and this by Rachel’s sepulchre, a spot of singular interest to Saul: at least it ought certainly to have been so (1 Sam. 10:2). It was the place, as is well known, where the foundation of his family had been laid. His father was sorrowing for Saul, not for his property, which indeed was found. But Saul had no eyes to see, nor had he ears to hear, according to God.

Again three men, as we are told in 1 Sam. 10:3, 4, were to meet him as he went to the oak of Tabor, and they were on their way up to God at Bethel. That is, they were brought before the place; not of Rachel’s sepulchre only, but of God at Bethel. One man was carrying three kids, and so on; and these saluted him, and gave him loaves of bread. Did he not thence gather a proof that God was at work in Israel? that the famous scene where God had pledge the accomplishment of His purpose to their father Jacob was not forgotten? A remnant was there; a sufficient, yea, ample testimony; not merely two but three men. There was a more than adequate testimony to the reality of faith in Israel still.

Along with this, no doubt, the state of Israel, terrified by Philistine masters, was truly deplorable; but what of that if faith wrought? Circumstances should never frighten the believer. The question then was whether God was the God of Israel? and as far as His people were concerned whether they had faith in Him? Now this we may see here -- the three men going up to God at Bethel before the token of the condition, the practical condition, of Israel at this time; for this was a fresh point.

After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy (1 Sam. 10:5).

What an encouragement to one who could hear according to God! The worst of times to faith only the more calls us to make melody to Him. There was no lack of the testimony of joy and praise in these prophets, and yet God would have His people fairly to confess the circumstances. There is no good to be had by blinding ourselves to the actual condition whether it be of the church now or of Israel then. It is always right, wise, and lowly to own the truth.

So it is with our souls, and in all our Christian experiences. There is many a man that tries not to think of all that he has been. Many a person when first converted to God essays to look only at what is bright, joyous, and encouraging. His eye quickly finds out all the comforting passages of the word of God. He slips over what tries and searches the heart. It is all quite intelligible, but is it really wise? It is not the mode in which the Spirit of God works to form the saint. Not that there is not abundant comfort in all the ways and word of God from first to last; but be assured, my brethren, that the best wisdom is when grace strengthens us to look at the truth, and the whole truth, whether about God or man, at the church, or our own souls; and hence it is that many a person who, if I may so say, staves off the full view of what he himself is when brought to God, has to repeat the lesson another day under more painful circumstances. Far better to face at the very starting-point what we are, as well as what God is in His nature, counsels, relationships, and will; else perhaps, when we have been following the Lord for five or ten years, we may need to be broken on the wheel for some grievous unfaithfulness, and this mainly owing to the folly of refusing to look at the full reality of what we were from the very beginning.

Now, it is evident that God’s character as represented by us is far more affected by our having to go through a perhaps painful and humiliating process some years after starting on our course, than by our learning what we are when the full flow of divine grace confirms our souls as we learn of the Lord Jesus. Thus only can we well afford to judge all that we are naturally.

This too was expressly a sign to Saul. The first sign was personal, connected as it was with Rachel’s sepulchre, a place of death to the mother, but where Benjamin was born, the head of Saul’s own tribe, and the type of Messiah in His mighty victories for His people on the earth. He was not that son of Jacob who was separate from his brethren and exalted in another sphere, but the son of his father’s right hand, who represents the Lord Jesus when He rises up to put down all adversaries in His kingdom by and by; for such is the particular blessing that was vouchsafed when the Spirit of God by Jacob pronounced the blessing of Benjamin. The second sign should have intimated the reality to faith of a more than sufficient witness that, as surely as three men were going up to Bethel, God could not fail, be
the state of Israel what it might. Then followed the sign of that present state. The promises attached to Bethel were far from being as yet fulfilled. If he hears of the hill of God {Psa. 68:15, 16; 1 Sam. 10:5} there is the garrison of the Philistines {1 Sam. 10:5}. Undoubtedly, then, the actual condition of Israel and their land when man desired a king was as low as could well be. Had there only been faith to enter into these signs, taking them from God, there would surely have been the more blessed an opportunity for the working and triumph of God, who never fails to answer to living faith; but this was exactly what Saul had not. There was no lack of a fair show in the flesh. Saul looked at first most amiable to father, to servants, to everybody in short, as we find. In all this there was the brightest natural promise for man’s king; but was this all? There was another and higher privilege too, one may notice in passing: God was even pleased to invest him with the power of the Spirit of God -- externally, of course.

And the Spirit of Jehovah will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man {1 Sam. 10:6}.

Does it not all show us that God was giving every possible succour and every conceivable advantage to man’s king entering on this new phase in the history of His people? This I conceive to be the unquestionable lesson of these two chapters: a wiser and more needed one under the circumstances who could devise?

Then we have the accomplishment of these words; but there is more than that. Saul comes to his home, where they are anxiously seeking to learn all that had passed with the prophet.

And Saul’s uncle said, Tell me, I pray thee, what Samuel said unto you. And Saul said unto his uncle, He told us plainly that the asses were found. But of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, he told him not {1 Sam. 10:15, 16}.

Thus all as yet looks lowly and promising, as far as Saul is concerned. Flesh may go very far in the imitation of what is of God, but very soon circumstances occur which show that it is wholly on the surface.

Samuel called the people together unto Jehovah, to Mizpah {1 Sam. 10:17}; and then he sets before them the case. They had asked for a king.

Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands. And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken. When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken {1 Sam. 10:19-21}.

This also was a very notable circumstance. For here God puts the choice of Saul to another test, in every possible way therefore stopping men’s complaints; for it might have been said, “Ah! the people were not allowed to choose after all; neither was there a fair leaving the thing to the Lord. It was all arranged between Samuel and Saul.” Not so. The prophet arranged nothing: it was God undoubtedly that acted; but this does not in the smallest degree set aside the fact that He was simply meeting the wish of man. Thus here the lot was in opposition to and setting aside of His own government of Israel -- the well-known plan according to the law put in force, as we know, about the division of the land, and to be used again when the land is again redistributed. This was meanwhile now employed for the king, and with the very same result. It was impossible thus to impeach the conduct of Samuel; and if on one side there could be no doubt that man was allowed the freest possible choice, it is remarkable on the other that God was helping man in every way so that his choice should be fairly carried out.

Accordingly then

Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom Jehovah hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king {1 Sam. 10:24}.

But the children of Belial, it is added,
said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace {1 Sam. 10:27}.

This is another remarkable feature in the case; for it might have been supposed now, inasmuch as the choice of the king was, as far as the people was concerned, a sin against God, that this relieved the godly from allegiance. Not in the smallest degree! It might have been men of Belial first of all who joined with the rest in wishing for a king; but when the king was chosen, anointed, and solemnly invested, it was the men of Belial who refused to show him respect. We shall find, not only that Samuel paid Saul allegiance in the fullest way, but even David, the true anointed of Jehovah, though he was not chosen for the people and from the people according to their choice, as God could do and did with a perfect knowledge of all their thoughts and motives; yet he, the king that God chose according to His own heart, as long as Saul lived, cheerfully abode his subject and servant.

Again, not only does Saul show singular moderation at the beginning of his reign, holding his peace in presence of these men of Belial that opposed him, but, further, when the Ammonite comes up and encamps against Jabesh-gilead, Saul was not wanting to the occasion.

And all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee {1 Sam. 11:1}.

And so there is very soon a blow struck at Israel. But then you must remember the dealing with the Ammonite was not the object that was before God, either by man’s king or
God’s king. The Philistine was not the Ammonite. Indeed under the law the Ammonite was expressly to be exempted from destruction, and spared. This did not mean that if the Ammonites attacked the people of God, they were to be left unpunished; but it did not come into the direct plan of God to subject the Ammonites to the yoke of Israel.

And the Ammonite here strikes Israel.

Give us seven days’ respite,
say the elders of Jabesh,
that we may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel: and then, if there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee. Then came the messengers to Gibeah of Saul, and told the tidings in the ears of the people: and all the people lifted up their voices, and wept {1 Sam. 11:3, 4}.

Saul is moved, and the Spirit of God comes upon him.

His anger was kindled greatly. And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of Jehovah fell on the people, and they came out with one consent {1 Sam. 11:6, 7}.

The result was a mighty victory, and indeed a rout so complete that, as we are told, no two of the Ammonites were left together; and the people in consequence were now filled with indignation at the disrespect that had been before shown to the king.

And the people said unto Samuel, Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death {1 Sam. 11:12}.

Saul again shines remarkably.

And Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel {1 Sam. 11:13}.

All therefore was in favor of the king. It might have seemed now that Samuel’s fears were vain -- that the choice of the king was most happy. Here was one that knew how to use victory over the enemy with moderation, just as much as he had shown patience before it with the unruly in Israel.

But 1 Sam. 12 may prepare us for something very different.

First come Samuel’s words to Israel.

And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grey-headed; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day {1 Sam. 12:1, 2}.

He challenges them as to his own integrity, and the people confess it without hesitation.

And he said unto them, Jehovah is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness. And Samuel said unto the people, It is Jehovah that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. Now therefore stand still that I may reason with you {1 Sam. 12:5-7}.

Thus having stood completely and formally acquitted of everything that could trouble the conscience of a single upright soul in Israel, he appeals to them in the name of Jehovah. He reminds them how deliverers had been raised up; but be adds,

Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, Jehovah hath set a king over you. If ye will fear Jehovah, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of Jehovah, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following Jehovah your God: but if ye will not obey the voice of Jehovah, but rebel against the commandment of Jehovah, then shall the hand of Jehovah be against you, as it was against your fathers. Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which Jehovah will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest to-day? I will call unto Jehovah, and he shall send thunder and rain {1 Sam. 12:13-17}.

It need scarcely be explained, that if at Samuel’s call Jehovah sent at once what was entirely out of season, proof would thereby be given of the manifest answer of God in their midst. His ears are open to the righteous.

So Samuel called unto Jehovah, and Jehovah sent thunder and rain {1 Sam. 12:18}.

But what was all this to attest?

That ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of Jehovah, in asking you a king {1 Sam. 12:17}.

The prophet’s judgment (and this formed according to God) was the same as ever. He nevertheless might have seemed to help on, and in a certain sense had really helped on, the appointment of the king as no man in Israel beside himself had done. For who among those who listened to his words in general could have gathered from Samuel’s conduct, and from his spirit, that his heart did not go thoroughly along with it? If some would misjudge the man of God in this, my conviction is that his conduct was lowly, and guided by God so that he should not slip where it was hard to avoid it. For one may have to act in a state of things which sin has brought about; and in such a complication one may easily mistake the mind of God if not content with simply doing one’s own duty. The judgment may be clear as to what belongs to God, which others have compromised. On the other hand suppose a duty to be incumbent on ourselves of another kind. In such a case we should have it so settled in our own souls as to be able to go forward calm and
unmoved, discharging our duty whatever it be even in spite of the strongest conviction of what the actual state of things will all come to. This was the case with Samuel.

There was in Israel a total want of the confidence which a good conscience enjoys; for at this point we find that all the people now cry to Samuel, and say,

Pray for thy servants {1 Sam. 12:19}.

But though they may be in a measure convinced of their folly, the choice had been made, and the trial must proceed.

Pray for thy servants unto Jehovah thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king. And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following Jehovah, but serve Jehovah with all your heart; and turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For Jehovah will not forsake his people for his great name's sake {1 Sam. 12:19-22}.

The same principle holds good under all circumstances. When people have put themselves wrong, and come to see they have done so, it is not always possible to reverse it. But God is an invariable resource, and will not fail those who truly humble themselves. It becomes a question of doing His will where we are. The consequences of what was evil to have done may continue even when the person is brought to judge the evil thing; and God may hold one to its humiliating effects when one has confessed and renounced the evil itself. It is not only possible, but absolutely needful, to have done with the evil, though there may abide as a fresh trial certain outward results that flow from it. And then the true resource is not the seeking to get back to the position in which we were before the evil was done, but acknowledging the evil thoroughly, humbling ourselves in the sight of God, and looking to Him to see what His will is now concerning us. Evidently this supposes faith, which was precisely the want, and this not merely of Saul but also of the children of Israel. So says the prophet:

Only fear Jehovah, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king {1 Sam. 12:24, 25}.

How true these words proved in the result is known to every reader of the Bible.

Then comes, the first distinct crisis in Saul's history (1 Sam. 13).

Saul reigned one year.

It was not long.

And when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose him three thousand men of Israel; whereof two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in mount Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin: and the rest of the people he sent every man to his tent. And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba {1 Sam. 13:1-3}.

In Jonathan was faith. It was not merely a chastisement inflicted on the offending Ammonite which the Lord would surely execute for His own name's sake; but the Philistines were a more formidable enemy, though God meant to purge them in due time out of the land. What business had they there? The garrison of the Philistines then was smitten in Geba;

and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew a trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear {1 Sam. 13:3}.

What a summons from the king! Why call them Hebrews? Was this all that Saul had to say? Where was God in it? Entirely forgotten! It is exactly such language as a Gentile would use. Was Saul sunk to this? Had he never heard of Jehovah, the God of Israel? Had he never weighed His promises to the fathers, His counsels for their children, the chosen people, poor as they might be? They were Hebrews, no doubt; but what had God made and called them? They were descended from Abraham the Hebrew, the one that had crossed over; but when he had crossed over at the call of God, were they only Hebrews still? In the eye of the world this might be all; but was Saul reduced to the feelings of one who looked upon God's people according to the unbelief and scorn or indifference of the heathen? Did Saul regard them merely as his people?

This is what unbelief always did, and does now. “Our people” -- “Our church!” Such phraseology betrays the fatal vice of connecting things with ourselves instead of with God; and I do not know a more misleading thought, nor one that shows how thoroughly the heart is gone from the living God. Most perhaps never had the real sense of what is meant by being born of God, still less of being bought with a price; so that one is not one's own, but His. Not to feel this when pointed out would prove how the poison insinuates itself and vitiates all judgment. It is not possible to treat a Christian rightly unless we bear in mind that he is a child of God; nor can one feel, speak, or act toward the church aright unless it is believed to be the church of God. I may act freely with what is my own, and may naturally resent an infringement of its rights; but I must take care what I do to that which is not mine nor yours, but God's. This has been forgotten where men speak of their church. So with the people of Israel here. If they were merely regarded as Saul's people, the Hebrews, or something of this nature, it is evident that all must go wrong, for the starting-point was false: God was left out, and Israel's relationship to Him.

This then was the first proclamation of king Saul:

Let the Hebrews hear.

And all Israel
And all Israel heard say that Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines {1 Sam. 13:4}.

Thus Saul got all the credit; yet it was entirely through Jonathan’s faith; but the Lord would detract nothing from the king, unworthy as he might be.

And that Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines {1 Sam. 13:4}.

It was all right. God does not intend that His people should be other than this in the eye of those who hate them. They may respect or dread a people, which is natural enough; but the thing that the world cannot endure is the claim of God. If you are only hoping to find for yourselves a portion from God, the world would little mind it, because they are not without fears, yet at any rate hope that He may have mercy; but the thing that offends the world is when you calmly and humbly -- and you cannot be too humble about it -- but withal firmly, hold to it that God Himself has called and blessed you; not only that you hope to have Him, but that God has you now, and you belong to Him now, and live here for His will and purposes and glory, even while you are going through the world. Now Saul had not the sense of this in his soul; and this was the unbelief which no doubt unconsciously expressed itself in his calling the Hebrews to hear.

And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude: and they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Beth-aven. When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits. And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead {1 Sam. 13:5-7}.

I can conceive some worldly scholar at once saying, “Now, there you are wrong, as the later verse makes it quite evident that the two words, Hebrew and Israel, are interchanged, and substantially all the same, and only a difference of phraseology.” It is true that first, no doubt, he says Hebrews;

then we hear of Israel; but now we come back to Hebrews {1 Sam. 13:7} again. I am not sorry to caution you against all reasoning of the sort. Why is it then that, while the Spirit of God is so careful to call them not Hebrews but Israel, these men are not called Israel but Hebrews in 1 Sam. 13:7?

The reason is not hard to explain, nor without its importance.

And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead {1 Sam. 13:7}.

They had left the ground of God; they had forfeited that precious name. They might possess it really; but they had abandoned the ground of faith; and the consequence is that the Holy Spirit shows His own sense of the wrong that was done to Jehovah. At a critical time when the enemy was intruding in force into the land, and got into a place that menaced all there, some of the Israelites left God’s land, and got into an utterly false position. Thus on both sides a great dishonor was done to the Lord. There were Philistines that had possessed themselves of God’s land, more or less, and there were Israelites who had left it. Which was the more sorrowful it might be hard to say.

As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal {1 Sam. 13:7, 8}.

This is another remarkable lesson for our souls. Always must patience have its perfect work; but this was what Saul could not afford. He had hoped, no doubt, that Samuel would come in good time. He waited and waited, and it seemed as if it was all but complete; but there was precisely the point of trial where he broke down. The time was not yet run out, and the flesh can never wait it out. It seemed all but expired, and the king would wait no more; for the first man never does become perfect. He may make a fair show, but perfection there is not thus. Not only does the law make nothing perfect, but the flesh never attains it either. Thus he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him {1 Sam. 13:8}.

No doubt therefore it seemed to the king necessary that there should be no more scattering for the people. Necessary? There is nothing necessary except the will of God. The people might have been scattered ever so fast, but God was able to gather them back again. God’s word was plain. Saul knew it perfectly well, but he had no faith in Him. At last then, fairly tired out and frightened at the people leaving him, says Saul,

Bring hither a burnt-offering to me, and peace-offerings. And he offered the burnt-offering. And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt-offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto Jehovah: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt-offering {1 Sam. 13:9-12}.

It is no uncommon thing to hear good reasons for a bad thing. The course he took sounded fair. The grand fault of it was that God was not in the matter. It was Saul’s policy; and this because of Saul’s fears. Faith always looks to God, and does His will. Little did Saul know the fatal
consequence of his unbelief. The prophet lets him hear.

Samuel said to Saul
– and this was a severe word for the prophet to say to the king of Israel –

Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of Jehovah thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would Jehovah have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: Jehovah hath sought him a man after his own heart, and Jehovah hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which Jehovah commanded thee [1 Sam. 13:13-14].

But mark this. The same Jehovah that showed His own sovereignty, as if independent of circumstances in choosing Saul before the lot was cast, and anointing him, even that same Jehovah would not express His choice of another man until Saul had fairly exposed his unfitness for the kingdom over His people. So

Samuel arose, and gat him up from Gilgal unto Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people that were present with him, about six hundred men.
And Saul, and Jonathan his son, and the people that were present with them, abode in Gibeah of Benjamin [1 Sam. 13:15, 16].

Then the end of the chapter shows the interior condition of the people. It was wretched now after the king had been reigning for some time, but quite sufficient for faith to have proved its efficiency. It is said that they had not even an instrument for self-defense. If they wanted to sharpen a mattock, they had to go down to the Philistines for the instrument for self-defense. If they wanted to sharpen a mattock, they had to go down to the Philistines for the

So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found. And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the passage of Michmash [1 Sam. 13:22, 23].

And this brings in another scene. We have the failure of flesh, not yet perhaps complete, but sentenced, and the end shown. The Lord will make still more manifest the unfitness of the king, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established. The first witness has spoken clearly enough, but we shall have more witnesses still. Meanwhile it is a most comforting thing that the Lord does not heap together His testimonies to evil without giving us some little of joy and comfort for faith to refresh itself upon. Thus between the twofold witness of the failure of king Saul we have the beautiful activity of faith in his son Jonathan. Man might not have looked for such an exhibition then or there; but God neither sees things nor acts according to our thoughts.

Now it came to pass upon a day, that Jonathan the son of Saul said unto the young man that bare his

armour, Come, and let us go over to the Philistines’ garrison, that is on the other side.

This was certainly bold;
– but he told not his father (1 Sam. 14:1).

No, if Saul had his own nature which led him to keep silence, Jonathan had faith. There was One to whom he did tell; but it was not to his father. All the history shows his dutifulness even to the close of his life; but this only the more enhances his silence on such an occasion as this. Jonathan was as estranged in spirit from his father as he clave to him in nature. Probably without staying to account to himself for his silence, he was not led to say a word to him of that which lay on his heart for Israel.

And Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron: and the people that were with him were about six hundred men [1 Sam. 14:2].

The secret of God is not with the king nor with the priest. The people knew not that Jonathan was gone any more than either.

And between the passages, by which Jonathan sought to go over unto the Philistines’ garrison, there was a sharp rock on the one side, and a sharp rock on the other side [1 Sam. 14:4].

The Spirit of God notices for our instruction the immense difficulties in the way.

And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised [1 Sam. 14:6].

It was only so that he looked upon them. He did not call them even Philistines, but these uncircumcised.

This was right. His eyes saw them as God saw them; for him it was no question of their strength or weakness, but they had not the sign of the good-for-nothingness of the flesh. There was no circumcision, no form even outward of the relationship with God. Hence he says,

Let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that Jehovah will work for us: for there is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few [1 Sam. 14:6].

Genuine faith speaks with simplicity, and God uses it to act on the souls of others as here on the armourbearer.

And his armourbearer said unto him, Do all that is in thine heart: turn thee; behold, I am with thee according to thy heart. Then said Jonathan, Behold, we will pass over unto these men, and we will discover ourselves unto them [1 Sam. 14:7, 8].

There is thus not only the courage of faith, but there is also the counting on God.

If they say thus unto us, Tarry until we come to you; then we will stand still in our place, and will not go up unto them. But if they say thus, Come up
unto us; then we will go up: for Jehovah hath delivered them into our hand: and this shall be a sign unto us. And both of them discovered themselves {1 Sam. 14:9-11}

– the very last thing that nature would have led them to do.

And both of them discovered themselves unto the garrison of the Philistines: and the Philistines said, Behold, the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves {1 Sam. 14:11}.

The language in which the Philistines spoke of Israel was the same as that which Saul had employed before, and as God used for those who basely left their true ground through fear.

And the men of the garrison answered Jonathan and his armourbearer, and said, Come up to us, and we will show you a thing. And Jonathan said unto his armourbearer, Come up after me: for Jehovah hath delivered them into the hand of Israel {1 Sam. 14:12}

– not of Jonathan, but

into the hand of Israel.

Here we see not only faith, but the largeness and unselfishness of faith. It is a man whose heart was set on God’s blessing His people; and this was the right thing.

And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet, and his armourbearer after him: and they fell before Jonathan; and his armourbearer slew after him. And that first slaughter, which Jonathan and his armourbearer made, was about twenty men, within as it were an half acre of land, which a yoke of oxen might plow. And there was trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people

{1 Sam. 14:13-15}.

Thus it was not merely that strength was given by God to these two faithful men, but there was a mighty work of God independently of them or of any which goes along with it, and this is a thing that we can count on. Do you think such faith in men or power of God in answer to it is done with, beloved brethren? Not in the least. The God who then employed Jonathan and his armourbearer to mow down the Philistines in their garrison has quite as grave a task to accomplish now. Accordingly He is at work in the hearts of the people; He prepares in one way or another. He either gives the conviction that strikes terror into the heart of the adversary, even when he looks ever so bold, or He works savingly according to the circumstances of the case. So here there was trembling in the host over the field. It was not merely a question of man’s fear. This certainly would not have made the field itself tremble.

And the earth quaked

as we are told;

so it was a very great trembling {1 Sam. 14:15}.

And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked; and, behold, the multitude melted away, and

they went on beating down one another. Then said Saul unto the people that were with him, Number now, and see who is gone from us. And when they had numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armourbearer were not there. And Saul said unto Ahiah, Bring hither the ark of God. For the ark of God was at that time with the children of Israel. And it came to pass, while Saul talked unto the priest, that the noise that was in the host of the Philistines went on and increased: and Saul said unto the priest, Withdraw thine hand. And Saul and all the people that were with him assembled themselves, and they came to the battle {1 Sam. 14:16-20}.

After all, the priest and the ark gave the king no sufficient light. He could not get satisfaction as to the cause of the mysterious trembling. It was very evident that the light of God did not shine there; so he betook himself to another resource. As we find afterwards, lots were cast.

But first of all observe that it is said,

Moreover the Hebrews that were with the Philistines before that time {1 Sam. 14:21}.

Here again how wonderfully accurate is the scripture? The secret of it is quite plain. These men were with the Philistines. What business had Israelites there? We could understand the Philistines coming in among them, but it was an act of treachery or guilty weakness when the Israelites went with the Philistines. Their enemies might be sent as an infliction, and allowed to come into their midst to their sore trouble; but what could possibly justify Israelites going in among the Philistines? And if they did so, did they not deserve a better name than that of Hebrews? Thus the Spirit of God calls them. And what makes it more striking is, that in 1 Sam. 14:21 it is said,

Even they also turned to be with the Israelites.

The Spirit of God evidently treats them as most unworthy, yet

even they also turned to be with the Israelites.

It is not now with “the Hebrews,” but with

the Israelites that were with Saul and Jonathan {1 Sam. 14:21}.

Likewise all the men of Israel,

which similarly is most striking. –

Likewise, all the men of Israel which had hid themselves in mount Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines fled, even they also followed hard after them in the battle {1 Sam. 14:22}.

Mark the difference. God is so righteously measured in all His ways that the men that had gone thoroughly wrong were called the

Hebrews.

As long as they played a false part, they had forfeited the name at least if not the relationship of Israel. But if these had no longer the recognition of that blessed name, the
people who had merely yielded to terror regained it when they resumed the ways which became the sons of Israel. No doubt they had been unworthy in the past; nevertheless now they are called by the name of divine honor.

Again we read (1 Sam. 14:24) that the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man.

How sorrowful in such a day of blessing and victory to see the king thus spoiling it! Here we see what the king did. The only part he contributed was to afflict and vex and hinder the people of Israel, and most of all him who deserved best of all. Such is the effect where unbelief meddles in the day that faith reaps good things from God.

Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies {1 Sam. 14:24}.

There is not a word about the Lord’s grace. His feeling is, That I may be avenged on mine enemies.

This was what Saul’s heart was set upon. Where was his old modesty now? Thus acted the man that seemed of old the humblest person in all Israel. Now that he had been but a little while in power all thought of God was gone. The people were no longer even in outward name connected by him with God; and when grace had wrought outside him to work this great deliverance, it was merely Saul being avenged on Saul’s enemies. Where was God then in his thoughts? He was in none of them, we may boldly say.

And this very thing gave occasion to a most instructive incident recorded in the rest of the chapter. Jonathan was in the secret of the Lord, but he was not privy to the oath with which Saul had bound the people. As Saul knew not what was between God and his own son, so Jonathan was a stranger outside to his father’s adjuration, and hence unwillingly transgressed.

Jonathan heard not, as it is said, when his father charged the people with the oath: wherefore he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand, and dipped it in an honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes were enlightened. Then answered one of the people, and said, Thy father straitly charged the people with an oath, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food this day. And the people were faint {1 Sam. 14:27, 28}.

With all his love and respect to his father, Jonathan could not but feel the deep injury that was done.

Then said Jonathan, My father hath troubled the land: see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely to-day of the spoil of their enemies which they found? {1 Sam. 14:29, 30}.

The true reason for the introduction of this remarkable incident seems to have been to show how Jonathan was found thus completely at issue with his father. Now Jonathan is the object of the Spirit of God in the passage. He was indeed a man filled with the Spirit of Christ, acting in the power of faith, delivering Israel as the great instrument of God, the vessel of faith at that moment in Israel. Yet here we have a solemn fact. In the chapter before, Saul stood convicted and abashed before the prophet. Here he receives a holy rebuke of his own son, who alone was in the secret of the Lord -- rebuked therefore as himself the wrongdoer who put a Savior of Israel under sentence of death on the very day that he had saved them. I am not speaking, of course, of any actual expostulation at that time directed to his father: this would not have been becoming; but the circumstances of the case wrung it out of the reluctant heart of the son. Clearly therefore the people’s choice of a king was only a distress to the choicest among the people, to the faithful son of Saul himself.

In what follows we find the heart of Saul, and what it was even to his own son. We know what it cost the people. The people flew upon the spoil, and in consequence of the restriction he had made were guilty of a real sin; namely, eating the blood contrary to the law of Jehovah.

They told Saul, saying, Behold, the people sin against Jehovah {1 Sam. 14:33}.

It was the natural consequence of his own misguided oath. It began with a curse on Jonathan, and it ended with dragging the people into a sin against Jehovah.

And he said, Ye have transgressed: roll a great stone before, Saul stood convicted and abashed before the prophet. Here he receives a holy rebuke of his own son, who alone was in the secret of the Lord -- rebuked therefore as himself the wrongdoer who put a Savior of Israel under sentence of death on the very day that he had saved them. I am not speaking, of course, of any actual expostulation at that time directed to his father: this would not have been becoming; but the circumstances of the case wrung it out of the reluctant heart of the son. Clearly therefore the people’s choice of a king was only a distress to the choicest among the people, to the faithful son of Saul himself.

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It was the natural consequence of his own misguided oath. It began with a curse on Jonathan, and it ended with dragging the people into a sin against Jehovah.
Son of man, ye have no life in you {John 6:53};
but this was when He came to save. When it was a question
of the law and the first man, blood must not be touched on
peril of death. When grace gives the Son, and God’s
righteousness is established by His death, it is ruin and the
proof of no life if we drink not of His blood.

Saul then, after he had done this mischief, busies
himself to find out how the sin had been committed.

Then said the priest, Let us draw near hither unto
God. And Saul asked counsel of God, Shall I go
down after the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them
into the hand of Israel? {1 Sam. 14:36, 37}.

But there was no answer from God. Saul therefore, knowing
thence that a positive hindrance stood in the way, only
thinks of himself and seeks to ascertain who was the guilty
soul. And God, being righteous, even though it was a
wrong thing so to have brought in an oath which obstructed
the effects of the victory, did not refuse to make manifest
the person that had sinned against the oath.

And Saul said, Draw ye near hither, all the chief
of the people: and know and see wherein this sin hath
been this day. For, as Jehovah liveth, which saveth
Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall
surely die {1 Sam. 14:38, 39}.

Little knew he what his rash vow had brought on his son.
The consequence was that the lot fell on Jonathan.

Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast
done. And Jonathan told him, and said, I did but
taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was
in mine hand, and, lo, I must die. And Saul
answered, God do so and more also: for thou shalt
surely die, Jonathan. And the people said unto Saul,
Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great
salvation in Israel? God forbid; as Jehovah liveth,
there shall not one hair of his head fall to the
ground; for he hath wrought with God this day
{1 Sam. 14:43-45}.

This witness was true. But clearly the authority of the king
was broken, and God’s name was not to be profaned, even
unwittingly. Though he knew it not, yet was Jonathan
guilty. Saul had in the most solemn manner pledged his
word for the death, even if it had been of Jonathan his son
on the one hand, and it was perfectly certain on the other
that the lot fell on Jonathan his son. But it was only the
more manifest on that day that the king of their choice was
not only a useless incubus, but a distress to Israel and a
dishonor to Jehovah. He had openly disgraced the law and
Jehovah’s champion, his own son, not to speak of the
people.

Lastly his ruin comes out in the plainest manner in the
next chapter (1 Sam. 15).

Samuel also said unto Saul, Jehovah sent me to
anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel:
now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the
words of Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, I
remember that which Amalek did to Israel
{1 Sam. 15:1, 2}.

He would have a fresh trial. There was a new opportunity.
If peradventure he might remove the stain and the sentence,
the Lord would give him another trial. So says Samuel,
Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all
that they have, and spare them not; but slay both
man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep,
camel and ass. And Saul gathered the people
thence that a positive hindrance stood in the way, only
assembled together, and numbered them in Telaim, two
hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of
Judah. And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and laid
wait in the valley {1 Sam. 15:3-5}.

And so the Amalekites came down; the people were
defeated; the king Agag was taken; the mass of them were
utterly destroyed by the edge of the sword.

But Saul and the people!
– how strikingly the Holy Spirit here associates them –
Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the
sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the
lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly
destroy them: but every thing that was vile and
refuse, that they destroyed utterly {1 Sam. 15:9}.

The flesh profiteth nothing. However tried by God, it fails.
God’s word was plain, His will decided; but the king and
the people were alike disobedient.

Then came the word of Jehovah unto Samuel,
saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be
king: for he is turned back from following me, and
hath not performed my commandments
{1 Sam. 15:10, 11}.

How could he lead the people? How could he that was thus
rebellious at every fresh trial -- how could he that had
compromised the victory of Israel when another had not
failed to win it -- how could such a man be a shepherd of
God’s people?

And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto Jehovah
all night {1 Sam. 15:11}.

– a beautiful feature in the prophet. He felt it all, knew it
all, but still it grieved his heart.

And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the
morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to
Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is
gone about, and passed on, and gone down to
Gilgal. And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said
unto him, Blessed be thou of Jehovah: I have
performed the commandment of Jehovah
{1 Sam. 15:12, 13}.

And what did the grieved heart of Samuel reply?

And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating
of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the
oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They have
brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto Jehovah thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what Jehovah hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and Jehovah anointed thee king over Israel? And Jehovah sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of Jehovah, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of Jehovah? {1 Sam. 15:14-19}.

All the excuses of Saul were vain, or worse. As Adam did with Eve, so the king put forward the people to shelter himself. For what was he raised up if it was not to lead the people? Was it for the king to repress lawlessness, and not they to entangle him in disobedience? On his own showing, what was he for if it were not to command them in the name of Jehovah? Was it come to this, that the people commanded him? There could be only one effect of such a confession. His kingship was gone. The truth however was, “Like people, like king.”

And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed. For Saul keeps up his hypocritical pretence.

And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of Jehovah, and have gone the way which Jehovah sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto Jehovah thy God in Gilgal. And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. {1 Sam. 15:20-23}.

Let us weigh it well, my brethren: Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and we know what that was even in Saul’s eyes.

And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou -- {1 Sam. 15:23}.

No indefiniteness is found now, no mixing him up with the people. The guilty king is convicted and singled out for the fresh sentence from the Lord.

Because thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah, he hath also rejected thee from being king. {1 Sam. 15:23}.

Mark what follows: And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned. {1 Sam. 15:4}.

It is not always a good sign when a man is quick to confess his sin. Have you not seen it in your children? It is matter of common observation that the child who is always ready to confess his wrong never feels much about it. It is not that the opposite of this is not a fault, or that it is a happy thing to find a child stubborn; but one likes to see a little exercise of conscience; to know that a child weighs the fact and considers his conduct and motives, bowing to what his parent says: then it may be after a sorrow that does not come out to us very articulately. The heart gains confidence, and the conscience too casts off its burden, and tells out its wrong. But the quick and hasty owning, is always suspicious; and is what may be found in even worse than Saul. Judas said just the same thing. The readiness to own wrong, in general terms at least, may be even where there is a seared conscience, the state being utterly bad. Even of old a principle was taught which made its worthlessness manifest.

This appears to me to have been a great point in that remarkable institution of the law -- the ordinance for dealing with defilement. The water of separation was never sprinkled on an Israelite at the beginning of the term. The man must abide under the sense of his defilement until the third day. When he had fairly and fully felt his case before God, when there was an ample witness on the third day, and not before was he sprinkled. It was repeated on the seventh day, and the whole process was complete according to the law. The seventh day’s sprinkling would have been of no use without that of the third. But there was no such thing as sprinkling on the first day.

The reverse of what is taught by this we find in Saul. He sought to disencumber himself of all the burden of his failure by the most rapid confession. But no: such a confession is good for nothing.

I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of Jehovah. {1 Sam. 15:24}.

What a man who had been just boasting about his doing some great thing? and that the beasts were kept to sacrifice to Jehovah? Clearly there was no good conscience there.

I have sinned, said he when he was convicted, and not before.

For I have transgressed the commandment of Jehovah, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. {1 Sam. 15:24}.

What a king!

Because I feared the people.

He did not fear Jehovah. Without this there is nothing right.

Because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship Jehovah. And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah, and
Jehovah hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. And as Samuel turned about to go away he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent \{1 Sam. 15:24-27\}.

Alas! Saul’s sorrow was no more godly than Esau’s. Both felt for themselves, as both afterwards hated the man of God’s choice. What could the importunity of either bring out but the sentence of their loss? So we see that here the act of the king only furnishes another opportunity for Samuel to warn the guilty king:

And Samuel said unto him, Jehovah hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou. And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent. Then he said, I have sinned; yet honor me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship Jehovah thy God \{1 Sam. 15:28-30\}.

It was too late. But what a thought at such a time!

Honor me now, I pray thee, before the people.

To have felt and confessed his dishonor of the Lord and misleading of the people would have been a far different attitude. Of this he did not think. Samuel turned again after Saul; Saul worshiped the Lord; but it was to no purpose. At any rate Agag was brought forward, from the delay thinking, from what we can gather from the account, that mercy was in store for him. Surely the prophet would have no less compassion than the king for a forlorn captive!

And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before Jehovah in Gilgal. Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house to Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and Jehovah repented that he had made Saul king over Israel \{1 Sam. 15:32, 35\}.

But this is the moral close of Saul’s history; and we have had sufficient for the present as to man’s king. We shall next have the opening of the history of a better man, his neighbor.

It may be profitable to compare the two in their mutual relations, when we are shown God’s king reigning over Israel after that man’s king had passed away. But there is another and an extremely solemn truth which runs side by side: the awful truth that the exhibition of righteousness and grace in one who serves God in faith always provokes and exasperates to the last degree of wickedness and hatred him who, while professing to serve the true God, is really serving his own belly. No amiability, no nearness of natural relationship, no struggles of conscience can ever deliver from this downward career to ruin into which Satan precipitates him who, not being born of God, finds himself in such circumstances in collision with a man of faith who walks with the manifest power and favor of God resting on him. There is but one way of escape -- that repentance unto life which is the portion of the soul that rests only on Christ before God, and can afford therefore to renounce self, judging it as only and always evil, so that the life one henceforth lives may be Christ and not self, though it be there to be ever treated as vile.

For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me \{Gal. 2:19, 20\}.

Saul knew nothing of the principle of this, as David did. Whatever righteousness he aimed at was exclusively by the law, which, as it frustrates the grace of God, so it ends in disappointment and death. All such have this of the Lord’s hand -- they lie down in sorrow, as we shall soon see to have been the actual close of king Saul.

Samuel here shows us out the mind of God both in the slaying of Agag, and in mourning for Saul. It was according to His law to spare not the deadly enemies of Israel. Had He not sworn to war with Amalek from generation to generation? Samuel had not forgotten this, if Saul had. On the other hand, the tenderness that mourned after the king, guilty as he was, is a fine trait of that affection which is only strengthened by the faith of God’s solemn judgment.
Now that we have heard the prophet’s judgment of king Saul, there follows next the choice of Jehovah. The chapter gives us in a very striking manner the manifest sentence of death on all the thoughts of man. Then can lessons be more solemnly instructive than the contrast between Saul, universally admired and chosen because of outward appearance, and David, who even by his own father was entirely forgotten, and this when the question was raised by the prophet? He was of no account in the eyes of a single member of the family; yet this was the man destined to the throne. And indeed we have not to put our own construction on the incident; for God Himself has given us His. It is expressly and in this connection said,

Man looketh at the outward appearance; but Jehovah looketh at the heart {1 Sam. 16:7}.

Thus the true king was now anointed; but it pleased God that the manner of his ascending the throne should be as peculiar as the choice. There never was such another since the world began, always excepting the One who in all things has the pre-eminence. Who ever trod such a pathway to the throne? Some, no doubt, have gone through trials severe enough; others have known what it was to suffer in their measure from enemies within till they reigned, from foes without afterwards. I do not speak now of those only whom God was pleased to select at various times for the special purpose of reigning over Israel; but even among men, as is known, it is no such uncommon circumstance. The like has happened at various times, and in almost all countries; but there was more than this with David. It is not merely that he who had rendered the greatest services to the king and the people was set aside and persecuted unrelentingly without any just cause; but the truth is that God ordered it so that he who had been chosen by the prophet at His own bidding, and already had the anointing of Jehovah, should be sustained for a considerable period for the express purpose of bringing out those most worthy qualities which were the fruit of His grace, tried as he was after a fiery sort, and put to the proof before all Israel, not so much in great feats as in dependence on the manifest intervention of Jehovah’s care and wisdom and goodness.

There was another way we have to notice in which David was tried, and I believe still more difficult to the spiritual judgment, and of greater price with God -- that delicacy of consideration in which his heart was formed in the presence of his worst foe in one who was still the king of Israel, whom he of all men respected most, not even excepting Jonathan; for as there was more love in David’s heart than in Jonathan’s, so, I doubt not, he had even a keener sense of allegiance, and a deeper consideration of what was due to the king; and yet all the while Saul was a doomed man, and, as we have seen, before David was called he had been proved and found wanting. It will be made evident, as indeed scripture furnishes ample proofs, that, after the call of David and his designation to the throne on God’s part, Saul did not remain the same man as before. We shall find that he comes under the power of Satan from the moment that God had set apart David to Himself. We must not confound as a rule or principle the fact of man’s corrupt nature on the one side with Satan’s power on the other. They are distinct. At the same time, what is of man corrupted always paves the way for Satan to enter in. Here, nevertheless, we may see the working of the principle plainly enough. We shall find also that it is not only that Satan enters from this point, but that he acquires increasing power over Saul. Just as God on the one hand brings out His servant David, and shows his fitness for the great and honorable task to which he was called, making him to be very specially before Himself, and in the eyes of those who love Him, to be the witness of Christ as sufferer as well as king; so on the other hand Saul falls more and more deeply under the power of the adversary. This then we shall look at a little in the present lecture.

In the very first chapter where the point of change is brought before us we read –

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren; and the Spirit of Jehovah came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. But the Spirit of Jehovah departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from Jehovah troubled him {1 Sam. 16:13, 14}.

It is plain therefore that there is pointed out to us the awful counterpart when the Spirit of Jehovah departs, and an evil spirit troubles the one in the presence of divine blessing and favor resting on the other. The same thing may be in principle always true; but it will be verified in Christendom on a gigantic scale, and the time is fast hastening for that catastrophe. For the flesh having long despised the testimony of God and the grace of the Holy Ghost, there will be a marked change when the power of Satan will be let loose from such restraint as now hinders (2 Thess. 2). And indeed it must always be so. For it is impossible that Satan
could work in his full energy till the full power of good had first come, and next, we may add, is gone.

Accordingly the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we know, was the signal for an immense step in the manifestation of the power of the devil. He is never called the prince of the world {John 14:30},

or the god of this world {2 Cor. 4:4},
till after the advent of our Lord. And so I have no doubt at all that the truth of the gospel and call of the church of God have furnished an occasion for Satan, not for such displays of demon activity as confronted Him who is the power of God, but to bring out that which is for the present his masterpiece in spiritual deceit and poisonous error. The reign of ordinance and tradition, the antichurch, owes its idea to the church of God, but of course corrupted so as to dishonor God and destroy man; as again, when the Lord is about to bring in the first-begotten into the world, Satan, knowing right well what is coming, will try to anticipate in Antichrist, and so carry the world into his final delusions.

There is an incident before us in the end of 1 Sam. 16 much to be weighed, and I think highly instructive. David, although he had not yet exhibited a single sign before man of that to which he was separated by God from the midst of his brethren, is nevertheless put forward for a remarkable service. Saul, as we are now told, was troubled with an evil spirit.

And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me. Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and Jehovah is with him. Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep {1 Sam. 16:17-19}.

This is the first circumstance which brings the anointed of Jehovah into the company of Saul. It appears to have been but the most passing acquaintance that was formed with the king.

But the Lord takes care not long after, as we learn in the next chapter (1 Sam. 17), that a far more urgent need, not merely personal but connected with the whole people, and in opposition to the power that the enemy put forward at this very time, should bring David publicly and permanently on Israel’s behalf into the king’s court.

Was not this a very suggestive fact? It was a part of the dealing of God that David’s circumstances should entirely change; but, you will observe, this he did not seek himself. It is not by the will of the one chiefly concerned that the Lord brings to pass His plans. See how He wrought in Joseph’s case. Yet we know that Joseph at thirty years of age became prime minister of Egypt. Now I ask any man, what could have brought about such an issue so well? Granting all the ability with which God had invested Rachel’s son, granting all the wisdom and faith and integrity to be appreciated as they were shown in his conduct and ways, if his whole life had been bent on becoming the greatest man in Egypt (even supposing now for God’s glory, and to seek the good of his brethren), could it have been done otherwise as well, or even as rapidly as God did it? This ought to be a great comfort, and not least surely to those who do not seek great things. Where the eye is bent simply on doing the will of God, which is the only thing of price in this world, how happy it is to leave everything with God! So we find in David’s history. Had David sought to be a courtier, he could scarcely have gained it; but without one thought on his part, the Lord in a simple and suited way brings him to the presence of the king. This is the first move.

But there is another thing that I should remark upon for a moment, before we pass on to the great and signal circumstances of 1 Sam. 17. Saul very quickly lost all thought, all memory, of David. He no doubt profited by him, but he soon forgot him. This is the more remarkable because in the end of 1 Sam. 17, as we shall see, the king is all bewildered, and makes inquiry of those around who the stripling is. I shall notice it there, only calling attention to the fact that on this occasion, when David came to Saul and stood before him, he loved him greatly; but his affection was evanescent: we shall see why before long.

But if God was moving in the scene, the enemy was too, and this in particular by those whom Saul had been raised up to put down. For if king of Israel, he was responsible to be the servant of God; but he was not. He was the creature of man’s choice, however God might move sovereignly above all. Morally speaking, Saul accomplished in nothing the end for which he was chosen; he only showed the futility and fruitlessness of man. Sentenced now, though not yet gone, he gives occasion for the mighty and gracious power of God to form His chosen one to accomplish His work.

Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh, which belongeth to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and there was a valley between them. And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had a helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver’s beam; and his spear’s head weighed six hundred shekels of iron:
and one bearing a shield went before him. And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together {1 Sam. 17:1-10}.  

Here was his ruin –  
I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.  

He left God out.  

For this was just the question that was coming to speedy and solemn issue; whether God indeed had a people on earth in Israel, whether the name of Jehovah bound up with that of Israel is a truth or a falsehood, a living power or a sham. The Philistine took the side of nature, founded on appearances. And indeed there was little to show that Israel were the people of God. Their condition deplorable, their degradation all but complete, the Philistine could find abundant reasons to believe it was all the merest assumption. What could their past deliverance from Egypt and passage through the desert, not to speak of the conquest of Canaan, be but the lying legends of their priests? There might have been great men and circumstances to favor them in times past; but as to that spiritless race of slaves being the people of God in any practical sense, it was folly to think of it. It is thus that unbelief usually reasons from appearances.  

On the other hand there was nothing more melancholy to one judging by faith than to see how little Israel took their stand on God -- how they too had forgotten even the mercy that had been vouchsafed not so long before by Jonathan. I grant you there was a vast difference between the circumstances of that day and of this. It was a great deliverance wrought in faith; but no Goliath had then, appeared to challenge all Israel and defy Jehovah.  

Now that David is about to be brought to the front on God’s part, Satan stirs up the enemy.  

When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid. Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem-judah, whose name was Jesse; and he had eight sons: and the man went among men for an old man in the days of Saul. And the three eldest sons of Jesse went and followed Saul to the battle: and the names of his three sons that went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next unto him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. And David was the youngest: and the three eldest followed Saul. But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem {1 Sam. 17:11-15}.  

He was again in the plain path of humble daily duty. No road is really so good as this, and none where God’s honor will be more found when His time comes. It was there that God anointed him for the throne; it was thence that God called him to the court of Saul; and it was now from the same tending of his father’s flock that God wrought so as to bring him into the great field of action where the question had to be decided between the Philistines and the living God.  

David, then, sent by his father on a simple errand of duty, was to be in the grace of God the instrument of His victory:  

And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days {1 Sam. 17:16}.  

What astonishing patience on God’s part! Every day, of course, increased the self-confidence of the uncircumcised champion. Every day added to the dismay of Israel. There was one heart at least that knew no such unworthy fear; but what shame and grief!  

And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren; and carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge. Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle. For Israel and the Philistines had put the battle in array, army against army. And David left his carriage in the hand of the keeper of the carriage, and ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren. And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistines of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard them {1 Sam. 17:17-23}.  

And once more  
all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid {1 Sam. 17:24}.  

Indeed it is evident from the description that the terror of Israel was visibly increasing.  

And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up: and it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel. And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? And the people answered him after this
David could scarcely understand it. He is amazed that there should be such a reward held out in what to him was such a simple business.

The reason of David’s calm confidence is evident. It was not that David measured himself against Goliath, but that he perceived it to be a question between God and the Philistine. This therefore was what filled him with astonishment, as he beheld the abject terror of the men of Israel, and as he talked to them and heard all again and again; for he required to be really assured that they were serious in such statements. His elder brother overheard, and, as one can understand in such a case, his anger was kindled against David. He may have had some suspicion probably before this, although time enough had elapsed since Samuel had anointed David with oil for the circumstance to make but comparatively little impression upon the minds of others; for Samuel’s words were few. There was not much said on that occasion. The act itself was most important and significant; but the meaning of it was little explained. Nevertheless there is always in those who think of themselves a disposition to take offence at others; and even the nearest relationship will not hinder this, but rather give opportunities for it. Eliab therefore, full of displeasure at David, asked him,

**Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle** {1 Sam. 17:28}.

Indeed he was there present for much more; he was come down to fight the battle; but Eliab did not know this any more than the lowly faith of David’s heart.

And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause? And he turned from him toward another, and spake after the same manner: and the people answered him again after the former manner {1 Sam. 17:29-30}.

And thus the fact of one man walking in quiet and simple confidence in the Lord gradually forced itself on the host of the Israelites, so that news came to the king of that one soul whose heart of faith was unawed by the Philistine.

And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed them before Saul: and he sent for him. And David said to Saul, Let no man’s heart fail because of him {1 Sam. 17:31-32}.

David is not content merely with being above fears personally, but would cheer every one with that reliance on Jehovah which gave him assurance; he wants to fill them with the same simplicity of looking to God which was no new thing to his own soul.

**Thy servant,** said he,

will go and fight with this Philistine {1 Sam. 17:32}.

The king is astonished; he too looked to appearances: David knew in whom he believed. He had proved it good already.

And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father’s sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God {1 Sam. 17:33-36}.

This was humility, because there was self-forgetfulness. It was a genuine thing, and not a mere desire after it, because God was present to the spirit of David. And unless there be these two things, beloved brethren, depend on it that we deceive ourselves in this weighty matter. There is nothing that really ensures such simplicity in acting for the Lord as that lowliness of mind which is the fruit of faith. This, I need scarcely repeat, is precisely what breathes in David’s words. He counted on the fidelity of God to Israel spite of all circumstances.

But, further too, it is very notable that the Spirit of God has not said one word about these facts before, as also it would appear that David himself never spoke about them even in his family. The time was come now. He mentions them not so much to show why he himself looked for victory, as why Saul should have confidence. It might well remove the difficulties of king Saul, who was inclined to think as a Gentile, with no more faith than a Philistine. The answer was simply an unstudied and divinely-suggested testimony to the king when the right moment was come. It was God that had been the strength of David’s heart and hand. Was He not just the same now as ever? This was the way in which David reasoned; and he was right. God gave him wisdom.

But moreover he declares,

**Jehovah that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine** {1 Sam. 17:37}.

There is not a thought of himself in the matter. He is God’s object of care, for so faith always reasons; he is His object of interest, and so much the more as his only desire was the glory of Jehovah.

And Saul saidunto David, Go, and Jehovah be with thee {1 Sam. 17:37}.

He was struck by the young man’s answer.

And Saul armed David with his armour {1 Sam. 17:38};
but this was of no use. David essayed to go, but soon found out that the pieces of armour were but hindrances, and in no way a help to him.

And David put them off him.

He had not proved them, as he told him.

And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd’s bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand {1 Sam. 17:39, 40}.

They were the well-proved weapons of his warfare; they were the weapons in which he had often looked up to Jehovah in the course of his ordinary work day by day.

And he drew near to the Philistine. And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him. And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field {1 Sam. 17:40-44}.

David’s answer was most worthy of one who knew what and who Jehovah is to His people.

Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of Jehovah of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will Jehovah deliver thee into mine hand; for faith has no difficulties, and sees clearly in the hour of danger according to God -- I may say, the end from the beginning.

And I will smite thee, says he,

and take thine head from thee;

a word most punctually and quickly fulfilled.

And I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines

− for his faith rises higher still −

I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God,

not with David only, but

in Israel {1 Sam. 17:45, 46}.

There was faith; and there was along with it too, not only the strength, but the self-forgetfulness, of faith. He saw and held fast the bond between God and Israel. There is a larger and higher faith in this than that which sees no more than a bond between God and me, though it is freely granted that it is no use to talk about faith in God’s feeling toward Israel until I know what He is to myself. The wrongness is in stopping here. We must begin with it, however, and in fact may well distrust the language of a so-called faith that tries to leap into great doings all at once. It is not so that the Lord leads; but the truth is that David was no such raw soldier of faith. He was a young man, but a greater veteran in the path and conflict of faith than any man in the armies of Israel. There was not a man there that knew so much of God or of the power that opposes God and His people, not even Jonathan, although Jonathan had been already tried, and although he had won too in the battles of the Lord. Yet even Jonathan himself had never yet acquired that simple confidence; but David had. David, I say, had proved what the Lord was in the hour of difficulty and danger repeatedly; and he proved it also most distinctly when all other hearts failed through fear. Confidently could he add,

And all this assembly shall know that Jehovah saveth not with sword and spear. And this he counts on. It was not only all the earth in general, but his confidence and his delight was that God would bless His people by it.

And all this assembly shall know that Jehovah saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is Jehovah’s, and he will give you into our hands {1 Sam. 17:47}.

And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled.

And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines {1 Sam. 17:48-52}.

They won the victory according to the faith of David.

Then comes the further triumph of David when he takes the head of the Philistine and brings it to Jerusalem.

And when Saul saw David
(he saw David go forth against the Philistine indeed even before),

he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son is this youth? And Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell. And the king said, Enquire thou whose son the stripling is. And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. And Saul said to him, Whose son art thou, thou young man? And David answered, I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite {1 Sam. 17:55-58}.

This has often perplexed worldly scholars, who find great difficulty in adjusting the passage with the previous chapter. And at first sight it sounds exceedingly strange that David should have been already employed to soothe the king when under the affliction of an evil spirit from Jehovah, and Saul should have to make such an inquiry. David had indeed formerly and not long before ministered to his necessities; but his disordered state might well confuse his memory; and a great captain might be excused for never giving a look or thought to a minstrel boy brought in for such an occasion to play on the harp to the king. And my opinion is that, so far from this being a just stumbling-block, so far from its being legitimate to dislocate the fact previously named from the place where it stood, as some learned persons have suggested, there is to my mind no small beauty in the incidents being recorded exactly as they are. Indeed it would be false to take out these latter verses and to transpose the end of 1 Sam. 16 to the end of 1 Sam. 17, or even to transpose the end of 1 Sam. 16 to the end of 1 Sam. 17 as has been proposed.

The truth is that one may be employed by God to minister relief to him who is carried away by the power of the enemy, without the least communion of spirit; and such a servant may be soon forgotten: as man says, “out of sight, out of mind.” There is no real knowledge of the person who walks with God on their part who are far from Him. There could not but be a sense of the relief ministered and enjoyed. Saul perfectly well knew at the time when he was soothed by David’s playing on the harp that so it was; but David, although he was then loved of Saul, left no impression whatever on his spirit. There never was a real bond between them. Saul loved David in the sense of valuing the one who relieved him, and felt gratitude for it at the time; but there was no real basis of sympathy between the king and David.

Hence it is that when David, as we read here, now comes forward in the service of Jehovah, he is a stranger to king Saul, whatever he may have been in the service of the king. He may have been known passingly, but now that he comes forward in the service of Jehovah, he is an unknown stranger to the king. It is familiar to us how perfectly true this was of Jesus. We know how the Lord Jesus ministered to the men of this world; how they partook of His bountiful provision for their wants, were relieved in their bodily distresses, and delivered from the frightful power that Satan exercised over them by evil spirits. The Lord Jesus proved the supremacy of divine grace moving in and out among the multitudes that were thus healed; but they were of the world, and He was in the world who made it, yet the world knew Him not. Was it not on account of the self-same principle? though no doubt there was a mighty difference in the depth of the case: but the principle was the same on which the world knew not Jesus, and Saul knew not David.

There was one, however, who from that day learnt to know him, and this was Jonathan; and what was it then that made the difference? Why was it that Saul, who had such far more abundant reason to remember David, should have so quickly forgotten him? How comes it, on the other hand, that Jonathan’s soul was at once knit to David? The reason was the faith of Jonathan, which wrought by love consequent upon his heart, and thus left him free to appreciate the excellent fruit of the grace of God in David. Nothing was lost that day on Jonathan, whose soul was knit with David’s when he ceased speaking to Saul. How much there was in David that stamped him as a man after God’s own heart, and made him an object of the deepest interest and affection to Jonathan! Had it not been for this divine link, David must have seemed, for Jonathan’s interests, a dangerous rival and interloper. Granted that this too was precisely the reason for which we shall find Saul allowed a feeling to arise in his heart which at length gained complete mastery over him. But this very fact shows Jonathan’s delightful spirit the more, and the disinterestedness which grace produces. For it is plain that the more Jonathan’s soul realized, not only the qualities of his friend, but the destinies to which God had assigned him, David grew day by day in the love of Jonathan’s heart. The Spirit of God dwells for our instruction on this attractive tale. How differently fare an incomparably greater than David! Deserted when He most needed sympathy, yet Himself cherishing the most gracious appreciation of those whom He had watched over with unfailing love! Yet He says,

Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations {Luke 22:28}.

And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father’s house {1 Sam. 18:1, 2}.

This gave opportunity for Jonathan to know more of him; and very soon indeed the Spirit of God records an act which marks precisely both what was so lovely in Jonathan, and what was so suitable to David.

Then Jonathan and David, it is said,

made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to
his girdle {1 Sam. 18:3, 4}. This then was the corresponding fruit of the divine Spirit in Jonathan. Those are greatly mistaken who suppose that it was merely a question of personal affection. This there was; but Jonathan was a man of faith, and there is no affection for character, power, or permanence such as that which has faith for its animating principle.

Further, we learn that

David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely {1 Sam. 18:5}.

He had shown himself to be a man whom Jehovah had girded with strength in a most remarkable manner; but I think that the gracious and prudent wisdom of David, as for instance with Saul, is even more astonishing. The prowess with which Jehovah had clothed his arm was but a passing thing, comparatively speaking; at any rate, the calls for it were only now and then. The dependence on God on which it depended, one cannot doubt, was ingrained in his habitual character; so that it was only occasional, the transient expression on what was in fact always true of David. But his going in and out from the king, the prudent, delicate, truly refined, and admirable part of David at the court of Saul, is a most instructive lesson for our souls.

David went out then;

whithersoever Saul sent him.

He had been called to be a servant in a new place altogether. He had not had the smallest experience of the court, excepting his forgotten service with the harp in early days. But this makes little difference to the Spirit of God.

It is well to remember that our habits and our natures make a vast difference for the temptations of Satan, but very little indeed to the Spirit of God. Thus when we go wrong, when we fall into a bad state, Satan always suits himself to our characters and ordinary ways, and thus acts on our nature in short, as well as on what may have been formed by a long course of conduct. There it is that Satan shows what he must particularly take into account, because he is a creature after all. On the other hand the Holy Spirit, we must always remember, is God; and, whatever people may say of the force of character and habit, it is to my mind a divine truth of still greater moment to remember that the Holy Ghost is supreme. It is not the fact that He merely takes up a character or habits in order to give them another direction, and thus fit them for the service of the Lord. He loves to impart a fresh character; He can give altogether new qualities. It is granted freely that the old tendencies are there still; but they are there, not to be yielded to, but to be mortified, to be watched against, to be treated as a part of that flesh of man on which the oil cannot be poured; still less can it be presented to the Lord.

In short, we ought most particularly to look for in a saint of God, and we ought especially to be jealous as to ourselves, that the very traits we may have shown naturally in this or that direction be still most sedulously watched against when we are children of God. It would be perfectly hopeless if there were not the Spirit of God; but for our comfort, as well as admonition, let us remember that God has already given us a new and divine nature, which nature, as it is Christ in whom we live, has the Holy Ghost to work in and by it.

David by grace was enabled to walk in this wisdom. He had none of the habits of a court. This made only the better opportunity for the Spirit of God. The reason is simple. What is the spring of a believer’s lowliness, of his obedience, of his generous kindness, of his unflinching courage? It is not at all a question of what the man was of old in the flesh, but of what God makes Christ Himself to him by faith. All else, depend on it, my brethren, however esteemed among men, is good for nothing in the sight of God; and this shows us that for us the absolute necessity of our spiritual being, if indeed there is to be well-being, is dependence on God. Otherwise we merely manifest what we are, instead of being witnesses of Christ.

David then

went out whithersoever Saul sent him {1 Sam. 18:5}.

This was his duty now. He had been before where his father sent him, and there Jehovah had blessed him and put honor on him. Now he was in a new position; but it was the place, not that he chose, but that God had given him in a sphere that he had never sought. He therefore went out, as it is said,

whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul’s servants. And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth {1 Sam. 18:5-8}.

The sense of the great service that David had wrought faded quickly away from Saul’s spirit. And why? Because his object, his idol, was himself, and David’s name that day interfered with it.

Saul had slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands.

The women, having more particularly sensitive spirits, according to their nature, seized and uttered the simple truth. It was not that they failed to honor the king, but certainly they paid honor to the one to whom honor was due. They felt who was the instrument of the mighty deliverance in Israel. This roused the jealous susceptibility
of the king,

and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward {1 Sam. 18:8, 9}.

Yes, and it was an evil eye, nor did Satan fail to take advantage of what the occasion furnished.

And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand.

But mark, the old remedy that soothed the king, music, had lost its effect now. When the evil spirit first came upon him, it yielded to the sweet sounds of David’s harp and hand. It was no longer so. The progress of evil in presence of the good it hates is apt to be rapid and deep.

And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice {1 Sam. 18:10, 11}.

The king not merely disliked David, but was afraid of him, because Jehovah was with him, and was departed from Saul. Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people {1 Sam. 18:12, 13}.

But God took care that every step that Saul took to humble David, or to show his own ill-feeling, or even worse, should be only a means in God’s hands to fit David the more for the kingdom.

David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and Jehovah was with him {1 Sam. 18:14}.

Jehovah was with him in the house of Saul and preserved him; Jehovah was with him out of the king’s house, and there he approved himself before the people as his servant, the better because he was Jehovah’s servant.

Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them. And Saul said to David, Behold my elder daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife: only be thou valiant for me, and fight Jehovah’s battles.

This was a mere pretence.

For Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him {1 Sam. 18:15-17}.

It only furnished David opportunity for fresh victories.

And David said unto Saul, Who am I?

– for he was unaffectedly humble -- still God wrought on his behalf in fresh ways.

Who am I? and what is my life, or my father’s family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king? {1 Sam. 18:18}

But there was no truth nor conscience toward God in Saul any more than care for David or regard for the plighted promise of a king.

But it came to pass at the time when Merab Saul’s daughter should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife. And Michal Saul’s daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him {1 Sam. 18:19-21}.

In order to ensnare David to his destruction, the king demanded a fresh price for his other daughter’s hand.

Wherefore Saul said to David, Thou shalt this day be my son-in-law in the one of the twain. And Saul commanded his servants, saying, Commune with David secretly, and say, Behold, the king hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee: now therefore be the king’s son-in-law. And Saul’s servants spake those words in the ears of David. And David said, Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king’s son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed? {1 Sam. 18:21-23}.

Not a word about the previous wrong that had been done him -- not a syllable about Merab given to Adriel -- or of the king’s having failed in his royal word during the hour of peril, so solemnly pledged in the valley of Elah, or personally renewed later still for fresh services.

The fact was that David looking to God was far more jealous of the king’s honor than the king himself; and so it always is and should be wherever there is faith. As long as God sustains even that which is altogether unworthy of Himself or His people, faith bears with it, and pays frankly all worthy respect. This is not folly, my brethren; nor is it cringing; though it be far from this generation. It is faith. And Saul’s servants therefore told him how David had spoken;

and Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry {1 Sam. 18:25}.

He wanted the death of a hundred Philistines.

But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king’s son-in-law {1 Sam. 18:25, 26}.

His simple mind still clave to the king’s honor. The word so often broken in his own case provoked no sneer. He feared God and the king; and if the king really so thought of David, he valued it. Such was the feeling of his generous heart.

And the days were not expired. Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men.
– double the number the king had demanded;

and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king’s son-in-law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife [1 Sam. 18:26, 27].

What was the effect upon Saul’s spirit?

And Saul saw and knew that Jehovah was with David, and that Michal Saul’s daughter loved him. And Saul was yet the more afraid of David; and Saul became David’s enemy continually [1 Sam. 18:28, 29].

The king was impervious to good and goodmable to David. How came this to pass? Satan held him fast. The very things that even nature would have respected and valued were turned by the enemy only to feed his hatred and his malice continually. Such is the power, such the way, of Satan. And this is the solemn lesson of the history, of which we shall find there is a counterpart in the second Book of Samuel, where we shall have to see it in another form. In short we have here not merely what was of man, but what was of the devil; and this only since the great witness of Christ was come. You cannot have the antichrist without Christ. If there is a witness of Christ in David, there is also a growing embodiment of the qualities of the antichrist, yet to be energized by the devil, and then partially prefigured in king Saul.

Then the princes of the Philistines went forth: and it came to pass, after they went forth, that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul; so that his name was much set by. And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David [1 Sam. 18:30, 19:1].

Thus we see how the design, the hidden snare, the carefully laid plans to overthrow David, all come to nought. First there was corruption, then violence -- equally vain. Saul was now bold enough to speak to Jonathan and all that they should kill David.

The liar and murderer was at his accustomed work.

But Jonathan, Saul’s son, delighted much in David [1 Sam. 19:2].

Is it not refreshing, in so melancholy a picture as this of king Saul, to observe how that the Holy Ghost who wrought all that was then of God, and afterwards sketched for us the history, has shown us also that God does not leave Himself without witness of His grace? He who withdraws the veil from the most secret iniquity of Saul lets us see the devotedness of Jonathan. He tells the tale of what God works in love, Satan in murderous hatred and pride.

Jonathan then only the more cleaves to David because of the enmity of his father; and these things will be both true in Israel; for Jonathan sets before us rather the godly remnant of the Jews, not those called out of the earth to heavenly things. What we have in all these chapters is Christ, but Christ in connection with the kingdom; and we must leave room for the kingdom just as much as for the church. Of course we have a very especial interest in the body of Christ, the church of God. It is perfectly intelligible therefore, that the fulness of our sympathies should flow in this channel, not merely because we are concerned directly, but because the richest displays of Christ’s glory and the deepest grace and wisdom of God are found in it. But, my brethren, it is never a proof of the great power of the Holy Ghost where we only find our joy in our own things. It is manifestly a better sign where things are valued because they concern the glory of Christ, rather than because they are ours. And I am sure that you will not find that the delight in all which gives glory to Christ, and which manifests the ways of God in respect to Him, could in any degree really impair relish for and delight in the ways of God with His church, or the counsels of glory He has for us. It is a healthful and God-glorifying hold of scripture, as centering round Christ for heaven and earth which is most for the glory of God by and in us. What we want is to have Christ Himself more before us, and not merely therefore what belongs to us in personal privilege at any time.

The truth is, we are so blessed, we are so fully and richly endowed in Christ, that we ought to be able in the measure of our faith to enter unjealously and without distraction into everything that glorifies the Lord Jesus. This consequently should be our standard. Whatever glorifies Him -- this is enough for us; for in truth, although the kingdom be a lower level, still we have on the one hand a most important connection, inasmuch as we are to reign with Christ, as surely as we have on the other hand a more special place of blessedness as united to Christ. Both are true of us; and the apostle Paul preached both, each in due season, as we should also. Thus in the Acts of the Apostles it is easy to see indeed rather more of his preaching the kingdom. In the Epistles naturally, where the church was addressed, we have its own special portion very particularly brought out. But still they were both there; and it is a great mistake to suppose that we gain any better appreciation of the church of God by neglecting any other truth. More particularly this becomes more urgently momentous as the coming of the Lord draws near. On the contrary, this distinction will be better understood where we are willing just to follow the current of the Spirit of God throughout all His word; and we need this, let me say, beloved brethren, as much as any. It has helped on the ruin of the church of God to treat a small part of the truth as if it were the whole. The grand and best means of deliverance is, when we have received Christ, and seen that He is the secret of blessing, to cultivate occupation not merely with the church but with Christ. Then it is that the church, the kingdom, and every part of the dealings of God, stand out in the fullest light before our souls.

In reading these Books of Samuel then, we must bear in mind what has been already remarked -- that the main connection is with the kingdom, and not properly speaking the church. Indeed this is a far more general principle; for it is so throughout the Old Testament. But in these later
historical books it is emphatically the king. Doubtless Christ Himself is set out, but it is He in relation to the kingdom. There may be typical illustrations now and then which go beyond that, but scarcely more.

Jonathan then, Saul’s son, shows us, it seems to me, those in whom the Spirit of Christ will work in the midst of Israel, whereas Saul shadows for us that part of Israel which goes more and more into the depths of dark evil because of the non-appreciation of Christ, and consequently falls thoroughly at last under the power of the devil.

But Jonathan Saul’s son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself: and I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where thou art, and I will commune with my father of thee; and what I see, that I will tell thee {1 Sam. 19:2, 3}.

There was a loving heart that sought to render this needed service to David, even though his father himself were in question, manifest alas! in murderous malice.

And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good: for he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and Jehovah wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause? And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As Jehovah liveth, he shall not be slain {1 Sam. 19:4-6}.

It is not therefore that we do not find relentings of heart in Saul (for indeed we do from time to time); but he was no longer in any way master of his movements; he was only a slave of Satan, little as he realized it himself.

And now we shall have to trace how every effort to escape from the slavery of the devil but proves how much he is the stronger of the two, and that flesh in the highest place only the more certainly and speedily brings under the power of the enemy. Hence, in spite of his oath, and Jonathan’s acting upon it,

Jonathan called David, and Jonathan showed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as in times past. And there was war again; and David went out, and fought with the Philistines, and slew them with a great slaughter; and they fled from him. And the evil spirit from Jehovah was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand: and David played with his hand. And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin; but he slipped away out of Saul’s presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night {1 Sam. 19:7-10}.

So we find subsequently, not now in Jonathan’s case, but through Michal, that there was deliverance yet more for David; and when it was told Saul, he sent messengers unto David’s house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning: and Michal David’s wife told him, saying, If thou save not thy life to night, to-morrow thou shalt be slain. So Michal let David down through a window: and he went, and fled, and escaped. And Michal took an image, and laid it in the bed, and put a pillow of goats’ hair for his bolster, and covered it with a cloth. And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, He is sick. And Saul sent the messengers again to see David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may slay him. And when the messengers were come in, behold, there was an image in the bed, with a pillow of goats’ hair for his bolster. And Saul said unto Michal, Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he is escaped? And Michal answered Saul, He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee? {1 Sam. 19:11-17}.

So David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth. And it was told Saul, saying, Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah. And Saul sent messengers to take David: and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. And when it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise. And Saul sent messengers against the third time, and they prophesied also. Then went he also to Ramah, and came to a great well that is in Sechu: and he asked and said, Where are Samuel and David? And one said, Behold, they be at Naioth in Ramah. And he went thither to Naioth in Ramah: and the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on, and prophesied, until he came to Naioth in Ramah {1 Sam. 19:18-23}.

He is none the better for it. The power of the Spirit of God only makes a man’s case the more desperate, if he be not born of God. Who are the most awful instances in the New Testament recorded by the Holy Ghost? Not the people that never had the Spirit, but those that had. There are men who find a great difficulty in Heb. 6. It seems astonishing that Christians who have understanding of the ways of God can find anything peculiar there. There is such a thing as the possession of every Christian privilege in power, not life, ending in apostasy. It is a universal principle. We find it here in the Old Testament; it is not otherwise in the New. Only those can be thoroughly wicked, after this sort (and it is the worst), who have borne Christ’s name, and abandoned Him with contempt and blasphemy. Only those can fall into the deepest gulfs of the devil’s power over the soul who had once the power of God’s Spirit working in them.
But then, be it well observed, it is not said that those of whom Heb. 6 speaks were ever born of God. This is often forgotten. People do not distinguish between the quickening of the Spirit and His various operations of power. Where is there such a thing in the scriptures as one who is quickened by the Spirit thus hopelessly falling into the power of the enemy? Freely is it acknowledged that the power of the Spirit looks a vast deal more for a time than the quickening of the Spirit. That power, as indeed in itself its working is most precious, enables one to have great intelligence in scripture, and imparts not only intelligence but energy even to use it for others; yet there is one thing that power in itself does not give -- to turn the eye of the inner man on self to judge it thoroughly before God, or consequently to lay hold of Christ in the depth of the soul's need. There it is not power that is wanted but repentance and faith. What the sinner really needs is to be made nothing of, and this is always the case when one is quickened. Then in real sense of need, Christ becomes the object, and self is judged. But in this case you will never find persons who fall in the same way under the power of Satan. But there may be only what I call the external power of the Spirit, without any dealing with the conscience before God. One has never in this case been brought to God -- never really felt what sin is; and without this there is no new life.

It is one thing to talk about the sins of other people; but really to feel one's own, to come with the sense of one's own guilt and nothingness before God, is another matter altogether. This goes with quickening, and in such a case accordingly the way in which the truth shows it has really entered is by repentance towards God, as well as by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Now in the description of Heb. 6 there is not a word about it. The persons there described are enlightened perhaps to the highest. They have received the powers of the world to come. They have tasted the good word of God. They have had the heavenly gift -- Christ on high -- before them. All this may be: the sweetness of truth, God's wisdom in it, the harmony of His ways, and all that. It is quite possible: nature is equal to all. In point of fact flesh is rather exalted by it; and man may think a little better of himself in consequence of it, though all the while talking of the old man being buried, and himself risen with Christ. The mind may be charmed with all these wonders. Surely the truth of God is incomparably grander for the intellect of man than human speculation or fables. Does not the history of Jesus something infinitely better, even for the mind, than the bitter selfishness of Juno and the disgusting crimes of Jupiter, of which beings no sensible heathen could even think in the light of the gospel without seeing their abominable stupidity as well as wickedness? On the contrary, in the Lord Jesus there is that which even to the natural mind and conscience has the highest moral sublimity in it.

Hence it is that any one who can pretend to be well read in the history of human thought must know that there have been the most determined enemies of the Lord Jesus, who nevertheless professed great respect for and admiration of Him. They would kiss Him just as lovingly as Judas; they would give a witness to Him no less than Pilate. Alas! the flesh is enmity against God; it violates law, it rejects or corrupts grace. There is no reality before God. There is no entrance of the word into the conscience till one is quickened; there is no meeting God about our own sinfulness; and without this, and believing how Christ meets that need, there is no faith in God's love any more than love towards God. Hence, as God is not trusted for eternal life, so there is nothing in man to trust. The affections may be touched, but affections are apt to pass away and change. Mind more particularly may be exercised; but what is the good of that where it is a question of sin with God? It is not eternal life; but the reception of Christ in an awakened conscience is inseparable from the possession of that new nature. When conscience is pierced and wretched, and the name of Christ penetrates the heart, then indeed it is another thing. Now in such cases we never hear of them falling into a state where they cannot

renew themselves unto repentance {see Heb. 6:6}.

Rather is it a description of those who have outwardly received the truth, and consequently become objects for the power of the Spirit of God to work in or work by; for all this is quite possible without renewal. Such persons may, as I believe they do, fall thoroughly under the power of the devil. It was so of old, as in Balaam, and in Heb. 6 we see it in New Testament times and form.

Here we have it in Saul. He is brought before us as prophesying among the prophets. It was therefore a power entirely superior to his own working by him. Was he the better for that? Much worse. We may notice that after this his progress in evil is appalling.

And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity? for David did not trust this. David did not think himself safer because Saul had been prophesying.

What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life? And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will show it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so {1 Sam. 20:1, 2}.

So fondly thought Jonathan; for he was not aware what would be the result of the power that had been upon Saul where there was not the smallest conscience toward God.

And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly as Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death. Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee {1 Sam. 20:3, 4};
and accordingly a new test was proposed and carried out.

The result is, that

Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let Jehovah even require it at the hand of David’s enemies. And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul. Then Jonathan said to David, To-morrow is the new moon: and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty. And when thou hast stayed three days, then shalt go down quickly, and come to the place where thou didst hide thyself when the business was in hand, and shalt remain by the stone Ezel. And I will shoot, three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark. And, behold, I will send a lad, saying, Go, find out the arrows. If I expressly say unto the lad, Behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them; then come thou: for there is peace to thee, and no hurt; as Jehovah liveth. But if I say thus unto the young man, Behold, the arrows are beyond thee; go thy way: for Jehovah hath sent thee away. And as touching the matter which thou and I have spoken of, behold, Jehovah be between thee and me for ever [1 Sam. 20:16-23].

So David hid himself in the field: and when the new moon was come, the king sat him down to eat meat. And the king sat upon his seat, as at other times, even upon a seat by the wall: and Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul’s side, and David’s place was empty. Nevertheless Saul spake not anything that day: for he thought, Something had befallen him, he is not clean; surely he is not clean. And it came to pass on the morrow, which was the second day of the month, that David’s place was empty: and Saul said unto Jonathan his son, Wherefore comest not, the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday, nor to-day? And Jonathan answered Saul, David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Beth-lehem: and he said, Let me go, I pray thee; for our family hath a sacrifice in the city; and my brother, he hath asked leave of me to go to Beth-lehem: and he said, Let me go, I pray thee; for our family hath a sacrifice in the city; and my brother, he hath commanded me to be there: and now, if I have found favor in thine eyes, let me get away, I pray thee, and see my brethren. Therefore he cometh not unto the king’s table [1 Sam. 20:24-29].

We see the wonderful dignity of scripture, beloved friends, and the wisdom of it too. That is, scripture does not comment upon these tales which are often mixed -- much that was not true with what was true. I grant you unbelief can use this against the word of God. But unbelief is ever superficial, and its malicious haste to condemn is shortsighted. It is not open adversaries that are to be dreaded most, but professed friends who apologize for the scriptures. Where there is not confidence in the truth, they naturally try to excuse what they do not understand, and are somewhat ashamed of in their ignorance. But the calmness of truth can tell out things exactly as they are without the smallest apology for anything. It is an unhappy sign, and always a weakness in those who, whatever happens, are ready to palliate themselves. On the other hand, where there is an habitual looking to the Lord, there is a facility in leaving things more simply in His hands. Why should we trouble about them? When challenged, no doubt it may be all well to explain; but it is a far happier proof of faith where the heart can leave God to vindicate.

In this case then

Saul’s anger was kindled against Jonathan [1 Sam. 20:30];

for now the evil heart of unbelief that was departing so rapidly from the living God burst out in rage against his own son, and against him because of his love for David. Thus Jonathan shares the vengeance that Saul felt towards one who had by God’s sovereign disposal supplanted him in the kingdom. Certainly it was a fine fruit of faith which shows itself in the son where the father’s want of it, was becoming more and more apparent.

And he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman.

Ah, it would have been a good thing if he had only felt that he was the son of a perverse rebellious man! but this was the last thing that could now enter his heart.

Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother’s nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom [1 Sam. 20:30, 31].

There was thus the instinct that dreaded what was coming; for unbelief has its instincts just as truly as faith; and as faith knows the good that is coming before it comes, so unbelief has the sense that these good things are slipping away from its grasp for ever. Now the unseen is revealed, the future as the present.

Thou in thy lifetime hadst thy good things [Luke 16:25].

How wretched the prospect that was before Saul in his miserable contest with God.

Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die. And Jonathan, answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done? And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David. So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger [1 Sam. 20:31-34].

It was not for himself, but for David. He saw clearly the murderous hatred of his father that nothing could turn aside. And he

ate no meat the second day of the month: for he was grieved for David [1 Sam. 20:34].

How admirable!
He was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame. And it came to pass in the morning, that Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little lad with him. And he said unto his lad, Run, find out now the arrows which I shoot. And as the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. And when the lad was come to the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried after the lad, and said, Is not the arrow beyond thee? And Jonathan cried after the lad, Make speed, haste, stay not. And Jonathan’s lad gathered up the arrows, and came to his master. But the lad knew not anything: only Jonathan and David knew the matter. And Jonathan gave his artillery unto his lad, and said unto him, Go, carry them to the city. And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded. And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of Jehovah, saying, Jehovah be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city {1 Sam. 20:34-42}.

It was not easy, but faith working by love finds how to conciliate what one owes a guilty father or any other with what is due to God’s witness in any crisis. And this Jonathan shows here. How disinterested too is faith; for Jonathan well knew that David’s rise was fatal to the house of Saul. But he knew that this was of God; and that it is vain, if it were not wicked, to fight against Him.

I shall hope in another lecture to finish this portion of the deeply interesting, and I trust profitable, history. Assuredly it is our own fault, our own unbelief, if we do not gather from God for our souls. May our God Himself give His children to make it their own! This is what one most of all desires, that we may have each his heart drawn out by scripture to Him of whom it speaks to us. All that can be pretended to in so cursory a sketch is to act as a kind of finger-post, and indicate according to one’s measure the points of special blessing in the precious word of God as they rise before the eye.
The Earlier Historical Books
Lecture 10
1 Samuel 21–31

We enter now on a portion of David’s history sensibly different from what we have already had, which closed with the efforts of Jonathan to restore matters and to attach Saul to him at least openly. Jonathan himself was convinced that this was vain; and as he went unto the city, David more and more is found in the desert, in the place of the pilgrim and the stranger, yea, of the outcast -- increasingly the object of the jealousy and hatred of king Saul. This it is that leads him into a path where his history becomes more definitely typical. Here above all the Spirit of Christ has the work of foreshadowing the life of our Lord Jesus as rejected of men; and now were occasions given too for those wonderful compositions, the Psalms, or for very many of them at least, in which that Spirit anticipates the feelings, ways, and earthly glory of Christ.

The present occasion, however, calls for an observation often applicable to circumstances which called out those outpourings of the heart in trial. Who can rightly glory in man? None who understands but what can see the vast gap between David and Christ; and this we may the more remark (though it may be quite as particularly on more than one occasion), as this is the opening scene. We shall find it almost to the last. If God was going to put forth His power, and to establish David at the head of Israel, He would make it most evident both to David and every one else who has an ear to hear that it was of His pure grace. Man deserved it not in any sort. The time was not yet come for one whose ways were the expression of God Himself -- whose ways brought glory to the Father at every step. David was beloved, and great were the things in store for him; yet he was but a man, and a sinful man. Grace might make him a type, but he was only a type.

So on this striking occasion, where grace asserts itself in a decisive manner (and the Lord Jesus Himself refers to it, and draws out the analogy between the position of David and Himself when growingly rejected in Israel), it is impossible to overlook that David is introduced to us with a story in his mouth which was far from true. But the priest was struck by the circumstances with a great anxiety; for he too had little understanding of the mind of God. He was troubled about David. He suspected that something was wrong. But God moves above all clouds; and this is the only just ground of confidence.

Thus, whether we look at David or consider the priest, there was no ground for boasting. Nevertheless, in these very circumstances there was that which Christ turns to everlasting profit. Very likely we might have passed by this story without edification; we might have seen in it nothing to guide our souls in a dark day. But Jesus is the light, and in His light alone can we see light; and so He for us draws out of the precious word of God this astonishing fact (for truly it is so), that the rejection of the beloved of God in the midst of God’s own people profanes what was most hallowed. How could anything needed by David be viewed any longer as holy in the eyes of God where David was rejected, the anointed of Jehovah?

Therefore had priests’ bread become for his wants nothing more than common bread. Did he want? From that store must he be supplied as much as from any other. Ceremonial restrictions of the law are all well enough where things go truly according to the law; but what of Him who is the central object to which all its ordinances turn, if He be cast out for God’s sake, and He and His be thus in want? Would God sustain those forms against the man of his own heart? Impossible! And therefore the priest gives him the hallowed bread; for there was no bread there except the show-bread taken from before Jehovah to be the food of the priests.

But here, as everywhere, how ineffably superior is the Lord Jesus, holy, harmless, and undefiled! We do find in His history that the restrictions of the law and its regulations lose their force as He passes on rejected to the cross. It is beautifully brought out in the case of the Samaritan leper; not that strictly speaking he could be supposed to be under the law as a Jew was, but that his case made plain the supremacy of the person of the Lord Jesus and of the power of God that wrought by Him. It was proved then as against all such demands, whereas a Jew must wait till the cross proved it for him. The Samaritan, ignorant as he was, was the more open to learn the glory of the Lord Jesus; and he learnt it first of all, as we all must if we learn it aright, by his abject need supplied in divine grace. We ought to begin there. We are mere theorists if we do not, and it is dangerous for the soul where the conscience awakened to its wants before God is not the hinge of first approach to God. But then ought we to remain always there, always at the door? Certainly not. A door is to enter in by, and it is both impossible and wrong to limit the God of all grace to the supply of our first wants as sinners even though essential for the soul. Let those supplies too be ever so rich and blessed there is God Himself to know in Christ and to enjoy. This was what, substantially at least, the Lord Jesus was
showing, the faith that came back to Him instead of going on to the priests. Thus, while He left those that were under the law in their place for the moment, He did assert in principle, where it could be and in answer to faith, that very grace which was afterwards to shine perfectly when the cross had made it a righteous thing for all.

After this another scene opens; for David, having now received the bread hallowed for himself and his company, asks for more -- for all that he wanted. He could be bold in this; for all that he wanted was for God’s glory. The sword of Goliath was not so much in view of any personal consideration. He had brought neither weapons nor munitions of war. The priest’s answer was,

The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here

{1 Sam. 21:9}.  

A strange place, perhaps we might think, to find it; but not so in truth. As David said,

There is none like that: give it me {1 Sam. 21:9}.

It was the emblem of a great day for Israel, a great defeat for the Philistine; but it was the sword which death supplied in order to victory. Was it the power or skill of David that was in the truest sense the means of victory? Was it not his faith that overcame, as it alone overcomes the world now? To conquer thus, the weapon taken out of death must be wielded by the Spirit in the power of life in Christ. It is useless otherwise, as Goliath proved.

But a day of honor may be followed at once by one of shame, and none is exempt from the need of dependence on God or His guidance. How humiliating to see David fleeing that day {1 Sam. 21:10} for fear of Saul to Achish the king of Gath! Even the memorial of God’s early use of him, here recalled by the lips of the Philistines, awakens not trust in Him, but the more terror of Achish.

And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me? Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? shall this fellow come into my house? {1 Sam. 21:13-13}.

But grace knows how to turn to its own account the low estate of the believer; as we may learn in what follows.

For in the next chapter (1 Sam. 22) we see David become the attractive center to all that could value what was of God and discern what grace was doing in Israel. Was it merely this? Was he not also for those that were in debt and wretchedness, who could find no comfort, nor even eye to pity elsewhere? The same Christ our Lord gathers both to Himself, and let us bless Him for it. We are often apt to have narrower thoughts of the Lord than suit Him, my brethren; but Christ is none the less high and glorious because He can afford to look on the least and call the lowest, and thus form them after Himself. It was so even in its measure here; and in truth there is scarce anything that more brings out the infinite value of the Lord Jesus than that He is not crowning what is good apart from Him, nor looking to discover its germs. All that is excellent, all that is of God, will surely range itself round the Lord Jesus; but then He Himself creates, He forms, not finds merely. It is He who gives, and can give out of His own fulness. And in its little measure we see that this was true of David; for out of this group, so despicable in man’s eyes, what did not that man of God fashion? and this too more truly because it was in the path of rejection, and scorn.

Here then we find David, as we are told, in the cave of Adullam;

and when his brethren and all his father’s house heard it, they went down thither to him.

But not they only. These might be supposed to have a claim; they certainly had a relationship already; but there were others there who gathered to him because as yet they had none, having lost all.

And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented; gathered themselves unto him

{1 Sam. 22:1, 2}.  

It is a poor thing to be a contented optimist where the things we are sanctioning are contrary to God. And those are not to be envied who, being in evil case condemned by the word of God, boast because they are not given to change. Happier, far happier, they who prove all things, and hold fast that which is good. There were souls who groaned in Israel. But were they discontented when they surrounded David? I grant you most entirely it was a paltry-looking set to gather, and in the obscurest of places; but what was David to them? and what did he make them? All the world felt and bore witness in the day of his and their glory, after they had been fashioned in the day of trial and sorrow and reproach by the mighty action of the same grace that shone in David.

But even now, as we are afterwards told, it was not merely this: the prophet Gad is there, and again, as we know, the priest. More particularly was it marked when the hand of Saul was lifted up to destroy through an evident instrument of Satan. For the king condescended, nay, was blinded by the power of Satan, to employ his herdsman Doeg, an Edomite, against the priests of Jehovah! A sad story is his declension. Hear the taunts of the king, his affected contempt for the son of Jesse. If he who had the power feared David in earlier days, his deadly persecution attested the importance attached to him now. Words of wrath and scorn do not tell out save to the intelligent how he really regarded him in his heart. Where was self-judgment for the sin which had forfeited the kingdom? Where was the sense of the honor God had put upon him, and of his own misuse of it? Only the rankling of deadly enmity burns
within, which now breaks out, not against the man whom most of all he desired to destroy, but against those that had shown him kindness, priests of Jehovah though they were. But it has for its effect, that this holy point of connection and means of sustaining relationship with Jehovah is now found with David.

And one of the sons of Ahimelech, the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David {1 Sam. 22:20}.

Doeg at Saul’s command had smitten Nob, the city of the priests, with the edge of the sword, men and women, children and sucklings. The man who spared the Amalekites thus mercilessly destroyed the priests of the Lord. The priest and the prophet were now with God’s destined king.

The next chapter (1 Sam. 23) lets us see some fresh features of David’s distressed and dangerous condition, and what and how God was acting there.

Then they told David, saying, Behold, the Philistines fight against Keilah, and they rob the threshingfloors {1 Sam. 23:1}.

Surely it had been more natural that they had told king Saul. It was what one might call his business; it was due to him who was raised up and responsible to be the protector of Israel as well as their leader in the battles of Jehovah against the Philistines. But no! heart and conscience told Israel that there was no hope in the king. The outcast man he pursued was the one to whom all hearts turned and thoughts tended. It was to David, himself hunted for the very life, that they looked for whatever protection God might give them against the enemy. And another feature here remark. It is not only that God was morally preparing the people for David, but further David himself is being trained in a deepening dependence on God.

David enquired of Jehovah, Shall I go and smite these Philistines? And Jehovah said unto David, Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah {1 Sam. 23:2}.

David then clearly is not the mere favorite, as he had been the champion, of the people, but the one that God hears, answers, and uses to His own praise. Saul is ignored in what ought specially to have been his work.

And David’s men said unto him, Behold, we be afraid here in Judah: how much more then if we come to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines? {1 Sam. 23:3}.

David enquires again,

And Jehovah answered him and said, Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand {1 Sam. 23:4}.

Obediently he went, fought the Philistines, brought away their cattle, and smote them with a great slaughter.

So, as the Spirit of God sums it up,

David saved the inhabitants of Keilah {1 Sam. 23:5}.

Next we find it recorded that, when Abiathar the son of Abimelech fled to David to Keilah, he came down with (not “an,” but the) ephod in his hand: on the death of his fellows he succeeded to the highest place.

Saul, utterly infatuated and without divine guidance, regards David’s position at Keilah, shut up among those he could influence, as God’s intervention to deliver his enemy into his hand. So often is malice thus thoroughly blinded; and God permits when will thus works that circumstances should appear to favor it, only to give another and a fuller proof how far opposed to His will is all such vindictive rancour.

And Saul said, God hath delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that hath gates and bars. And Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. And David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him.

Again therefore he has recourse to Jehovah.

Bring hither the ephod {1 Sam. 23:7-9}, says he to the priest.

Then said David, O Jehovah God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O Jehovah God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And Jehovah said, He will come down. Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And Jehovah said, They will deliver thee up {1 Sam. 23:10-12}.

God prompts the question He only can answer. David might naturally distrust the men of Keilah. Whatever led him so to enquire, it was of God to preserve him from the imminent snare then surrounding him. For the meek will He guide in judgment, and to the meek will He teach His way. But we may remark that the intercourse, the familiarity (if one may so venture to call it), of Jehovah with David, and of David with Jehovah, is extremely striking in this incident. He was long a man of faith; but he pleads his suit in a way beyond anything we have had before. He is the evident type of one that walked in perfect dependence on God.

Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah; and he forbade to go forth {1 Sam. 23:13}.

Subsequently he is found in the wilderness of Ziph.

And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand {1 Sam. 23:14}.

And here we read of a deeply touching account of love
to David in Saul’s own house at this crisis. Alas! it was the last meeting between David and Jonathan; for there follows the sorrowful disclosure that Jonathan’s faith proves unequal to the trial, the bitter consequences of which he reaps in due time. Nevertheless, as there was a real affection, so one is far from insinuating that there was not real faith; but things were come now to a pass so critical that even for safety, not to speak of the honor of God or the love of man, there must be a clean and an effectual breach of the outward order that stands up, the no longer secret but open and determined enemy of God’s purposes. And so it constantly is. God at first deals tenderly and pitifully with men who are ignorantly wrong. He gives many an opportunity to exercise faith before sin is risen to such a pitch as this; but, that paint reached, we must either turn the corner or go back, if not perish. Whether this was not solemnly shown in the future of Jonathan, I must leave to yourselves to consider. Nevertheless, whatever be our judgment as to this, the tender love of Jonathan to David on this last occasion is most affecting, and the mingling too of what was truly of God with what showed the weakness of the earthen vessel.

And Jonathan Saul’s son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God {1 Sam. 23:16}.

Fear not, said he:

for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee.

In this certainly he was right; he spoke almost as a prophet of Jehovah.

Thou shalt be king over Israel.

Right again.

And I shall be next unto thee.

Not so, Jonathan! He was wrong there. Jonathan never lived to be anything to David. This was to be their last interview. But he adds,

And that also Saul my father knoweth {1 Sam. 23:17}.

Thus, I think, the mixture of what was true and what was mistaken precisely marks the mingled condition of Jonathan’s soul at this very point. It was not faith in its purity with singleness of object and character. Faith there was; but there was wrong anticipation, as there was unbelief. And so he soon proved. Nevertheless,

they two made a covenant before Jehovah: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house {1 Sam. 23:18}.

Now we may turn briefly to a sorrowful piece of treachery, pleasant to the king then, whatever he might have felt once.

Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself with us in strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king’s hand. And Saul said, Blessed be ye of Jehovah; for ye have compassion on me. Go, I pray you, prepare yet, and know and see his place where his haunt is, and who hath seen him there: for it is told me that he dealeth very subtilly. See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hideth himself, and come ye again to me with the certainty, and I will go with you: and it shall come to pass, if he be in the land, that I will search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah {1 Sam. 23:19-23}.

The unhappy king blesses these men for their readiness to betray David; but it was all in vain. They took their measures with skill.

They arose, and went to Ziph before Saul: but David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon. Saul also and his men went to seek him {1 Sam. 23:24-25}.

It seemed as if it was impossible to escape, especially when David came down and abode in the wilderness of Maon. When Saul heard the exact position, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon.

And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them {1 Sam. 23:26}.

At the very crisis, when it seemed all over with David, a messenger comes to Saul saying,

Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land {1 Sam. 23:27}.

God is always superior to the difficulty. Saul is obliged to return, and David was delivered.

But the unhappy king, in no way ashamed of himself, or heeding the lesson of the Lord, as soon as possible returns to the pursuit of his dutiful son-in-law and faithful subject, David. This one object characterizes his life henceforth. The more evident indeed that God had interposed to deliver, the greater his desire to seize and slay him whom his evil mind conjures into an enemy; and so he takes three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, when he hears of David being in the wilderness of Engedi, and goes in quest of him there (1 Sam. 24).

But a very different issue soon appears. The tables are turned in God’s providence, and Saul falls manifestly into the power of David; but, oh, how different was his feeling and use of the opportunity! so plain was it that even Saul himself has the springs of his natural affection touched, and owns how much more true David was to the king than the king to himself.

And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men’s words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that...
Jehovah had delivered thee to-day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eyes spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is Jehovah’s anointed. Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou hastent my soul to take it. Jehovah judge between me and thee, and Jehovah avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee {1 Sam. 24:9-13}.

The consequence was that

Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. And thou hast showed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when Jehovah had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not {1 Sam. 24:16-18}.

And then he calls on David to swear; for it was no question now of David begging an oath from Saul to spare him, but of Saul manifestly wrong, and yet afraid of his vengeance whom he sought to slay.

Swear now therefore unto me by Jehovah, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father’s house. And David sware unto Saul {1 Sam. 24:21, 22}.

What a sight of king and subject, and what a victory, my brethren, for faith and grace! The flesh which fights against God owns its defeat virtually, and this in the very hour in which it had sought destruction for the object of its dislike. It dreads the judgment, but that judgment comes not from the grace it ignores and hates, but from the retributive government of God.

And Saul went home; but David and his men gat them up unto the hold {1 Sam. 24:22}.

But here again we have in brief words another change. It is not now a question of Jonathan; but Samuel dies; and this surely was an event of no small consequence, little as he may have been named for a long time. We are approaching the end when it is no question of prophecy, but still we are not yet arrived at it. The power of God does not interfere; but the end approaches, when the witness of it is gone.

Before that, however, a new character of faith is found or formed in a new witness, and this too where it could have been least expected — not in a man who was to pass away, but in a woman — not in Jonathan, but in Abigail, who abides and is blessed indeed. A very striking difference too in the character of her faith will be apparent to any one who reads the chapter with simplicity, and before the Lord.

David goes to a man of estate called Nabal, seeking there in his distress some refreshment for his young men, and David sent ten young men with a respectful message to these Israelites.

And thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast. And now I have heard that thou hast shearers: now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel. Ask thy young men, and they will show thee. Wherefore let the young men find favor in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David. And when David’s young men came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased {1 Sam. 25:6-9}.

This no doubt was a great trial to David. It requires, I need not say, much grace to ask a favor, especially of such a man as Nabal; but, even little known as he might be — and David well knew what some men were in Israel — it was no small humiliation for the anointed of Jehovah. But Nabal appreciated nothing of God, and hated every thought of grace, as the natural man does; and hence answers with the utmost rudeness,

Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearsers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be? So David’s young men turned their way, and went again, and came and told him all those sayings {1 Sam. 25:10-12}.

David was deeply irritated, and

said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on his sword: and there went up after David about four hundred men; and two hundred abode by the stuff {1 Sam. 25:13}.

But the Lord had a better path and counsels for His servant. For

one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal’s wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he railed on them. But the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields: they were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him {1 Sam. 25:14-17}.
The pathway of faith sometimes looks suspicious, and what Abigail did might have seemed to one who looked from outside to be a matter censurable enough whether one thinks of David or of her husband; but Abigail saw the will and glory of God, and where faith sees what He is doing, all questions are settled. Whatever it might seem, whatever it might cost, her mind was made up: and God vindicated her, and judged Nabal.

Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses. And she said unto her servants, Go on before me; behold, I come after you. But she told not her husband Nabal {1 Sam. 25:18, 19}.

And it was so, as she rode on the ass, that she came down by the covert of the hill, and, behold, David and his men came down against her; and she met them {1 Sam. 25:20}.

Condign punishment was hanging in the balance, for all were ready to rush on Nabal and his household.

Now David had said, Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness {1 Sam. 25:21}.

So, he says,

And more also do God unto the enemies of David {1 Sam. 25:22},

if he left any male of them alive by the morning light.

And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. Now therefore, my lord, as Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing Jehovah hath withheld thee from coming to shed blood {1 Sam. 25:23-26}.

What a fine witness to the power of the Spirit of grace, where the execution of judgment was so richly deserved! She had the instinctive spiritual conviction that it was best in the hands of Him who would deal solemnly with her guilty husband.

It is good not to avenge ourselves.

Seeing Jehovah hath withheld thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal {1 Sam. 25:26}.

There is no indecision here, and without claiming for her a prophetic spirit, we can see -- and she is not the only one too -- that God not only hearkens and hears, but suggests too, when He sees fit, and verifies perhaps far beyond anything that she herself anticipated. And it is as true now as ever it was, my brethren; for the path of faith is not wholly deserted yet, and the living God has those that He guides and forms still, and yet more manifestly according to His no longer promised but revealed Son, the Lord Jesus.

And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord. I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for Jehovah will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of Jehovah, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days. Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul {1 Sam. 25:27-29}.

All is judged to faith; and nothing can be more striking than this. Do you suppose that Abigail in her ordinary life had lacked love for her husband? I am far from conceiving so injurious a thought of one whose moral judgment in word and deed expresses itself with such delicacy and truth. Do you suppose that Abigail had hitherto lacked respect for king Saul? Far from it; but now, whether it was husband or king, if they set themselves in direct antagonism to God, what were they? One was but a man,

the other

a son of Belial.

Yet I am sure that in her own sphere she had still been dutiful to them both in their just claims. But it was a question now that had arrived at the point where one must be thoroughly decided either for or against the Lord. Here she could not hesitate for a moment. She was right; and it shall come to pass, says she in the power of the Spirit,

the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with Jehovah thy God {1 Sam. 25:29}.

She sees him taken up by God intimately and for ever: this alone explains and justifies her conduct.

And the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling. And it shall come to pass, when Jehovah shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel, that this shall be no grief unto thee {1 Sam. 25:29-31}.

How sweet to see in the dark and cloudy day a matron of Israel whom faith gives to discern clearly and to feel such jealousy, not merely for the unstained honor of the future king of Israel, but also for his soul to be kept simply and to the end of the trial from that which was contrary to the grace of the Lord.
That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself: but when Jehovah shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid [1 Sam. 25:31].

Faith even here, while tried, is not without a present answer from God where we can bear it.

And David said to Abigail, Blessed be Jehovah God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me.

It was a singular thing for David to find a faith that surpassed his own; and yet who can doubt that in this at least there was no such faith seen in Israel as Abigail’s that day?

And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand. For in very deed, as Jehovah God of Israel liveth, which hath kept me back from hurting thee, except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal by the morning light a single soul. So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person [1 Sam. 25:32-35].

The rest of the chapter sets out the judgment that immediately befell Nabal; and there is no judgment so solemn as when a man falls into the hand of the living God. David thereon takes Abigail to be his wife.

In the next chapter (1 Sam. 2:6) we have Saul again, still unrepentant, still bent on his bloody mission. He seems once more to be on the point of catching David; but in truth David sends out spies, and understood that Saul was come in very deed before Saul knew aught for certain as to David;

and David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched [1 Sam. 26:4, 5].

How striking the quiet confidence of faith -- the sense of security from God which gave the hunted man courage to draw near his pursuer.

And David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the captain of his host: and Saul lay in the trench, and the people pitched round about him [1 Sam. 26:5].

That very night, as we are told, David and Abishai came while Saul was sleeping within the trench. Then his companion says to David,

God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day.

No one knew better that David was always indisposed to deal with Saul. Who did not know the grace that filled his heart just recently?

Now therefore let me smite him,
would not stretch forth mine hand against Jehovah’s anointed. And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of Jehovah, and let him deliver me out of all tribulation {1 Sam. 26:22-24}.

He has no confidence in Saul, though he may say as his present feeling,

_Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail {1 Sam. 26:25}._

Nevertheless what is man to be accounted of? what David? All flesh is grass, and its glory as the flower of grass. For this triumph over self, this victory of grace, is followed by one of the most painful passages in David’s life. Wearied at last of his continual exposure to the king’s malice, he says in his heart,

_I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul, and this exactly when, as it would appear, the danger was over. Alas! what are we? Christ is for us the wisdom and the power of God._

There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines {1 Sam. 27:1}.

_Can it be David who thus feels and speaks? The man of faith deserts the ground of God, and deliberately seeks a shelter in the country of the enemy. David arises, passing over to the enemy he had so often conquered._

_And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal’s wife. And it was told Saul that David was fled to Gath: and he sought no more again for him {1 Sam. 27:4}._

_Can one wonder that so evil a step led to others? that David carries on a course of deception of the most painful and pitiable kind, especially in a servant of Jehovah once so true and simple and transparent as he._

_But soon the Philistines gather their armies to fight with Israel, and then is shown the tender mercy of God in repairing or at least overruling at this stage the mischief of His servant._

_And Achish said unto David, Know thou assuredly, that thou shalt go out with me to battle, thou and thy men. And David said to Achish, Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do {1 Sam. 28:1, 2}; and so it remained for the present. As far as arrangement was concerned, David was to fight with the Philistines against Israel! God only is faithful. And hence another phase opens to us; for truly things were at the lowest ebb of the tide in Israel morally: David arming himself against God’s people among the Philistines; and Saul, not only forsaken of God as he had forsaken Him, but himself now abandoning the one point of an Israelite’s integrity which he had hitherto maintained, whatever else broke down; for he really had up to this, as far as the history makes known, been unswerving in his hatred of all seeking divination or allowance of witchcraft in Israel. But there is no good thing in the flesh, and the one thing that seemed good in the king as completely fails now, as he had failed already on every other ground on which he had been tried by God._

_Now Samuel was dead, as we are here reminded (in 1 Sam. 28:3), and Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land._

_He now saw the host of the Philistines mustering, and his heart trembles. Where was the champion of Israel? and why? Had he himself nothing to do with enfeebling the kingdom? Unable to learn of Jehovah, Saul says to his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her {1 Sam. 28:7}. Accordingly the servants tell him of one at Endor._

_And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment {1 Sam. 28:8}. Every shred of honesty and truth was manifestly gone. And he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee. And the woman said unto him, Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die? {1 Sam. 28:8, 9}. She was afraid that he might be an informer on her to the king! And Saul sware to her by Jehovah, saying, As Jehovah liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing. Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel. And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul {1 Sam. 28:10-12}. What is the connection? Why should she augur from the sight of Samuel that this must be Saul? We have no reason to believe that Samuel said it was Saul, but she drew unhesitatingly the inference that, Saul it must be. And why? Because it was not the familiar spirit she expected, but Samuel whom God alone could send. Why so if not for the king? She only looked for the spirit that she was used to -- the demon in New Testament language which personated whosoever was named. When she saw that it was the true Samuel who came, she could not but feel the reality of the case, and gathered, as I suppose from this, that the present was altogether out of her own and Satan’s line of falsehood to delude man. It was God Himself who took all up. Hence it was that Saul, in his desperation, wishing to consult a
Thus I have little doubt that it was the keen inference of a woman who was accustomed, it is true, to the power of Satan, but who on the failure of that power at once felt in her way, as Balaam similarly once before in his, the truth of things before God. And suppose you, my brethren, that there is no such reality as the power of evil working in unseen ways, and by demons with and in man? You are mistaken. Only there is no reason for a believer who walks with God, and far from all tampering or meddling or curiosity, to be in the smallest degree alarmed as to such a transaction as we find here. The fact that it was not a mere evil spirit that appeared, but the real spirit of Samuel, she owns by this very circumstance to be altogether unusual. This it was that occasioned the greatest possible surprise to her soul. It is not in the power of the devil to bring up the spirits either of the lost or of the blest. Only God can do it; and He, I need scarcely say, never does so except under circumstances known to be adequate before Him for stepping entirely out of His ordinary ways. Such an occasion was the present; but we must not lightly imagine conjunctures of the kind.

And how then? Can there be no such thing as the appearance of this or that person after death? Not so infrequently as men think in these wise lands. Only it may be well to add what they are in my judgment. The real appearances of this or that person after death? Not so.

Then as to the question: Why was Samuel, as we know from 1 Pet. 3:19. This shows us the condition in which the lost are. There they are kept waiting for the day of judgment. No power of Satan can bring them now out of that prison. They are under the power of God.

And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what savest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself before him {1 Sam. 28:13, 14}.

Samuel, now recognized, speaks to Saul.

Still less can Satan govern the movements of the blest. These are never said to be in prison, or anything of the sort. There is no ground at all to suppose that the righteous are or can be in prison in any sense since their justification by the grace of God. A part of their blessedness even in this world where Satan reigns consists of their being brought out of bondage of one kind or another; and certainly those that are with Christ are in Paradise, which is in no sense a prison or place of custody. If Satan cannot rule the wicked dead, if he has no power beyond this life, if death closes all, still less can he touch the saints, or cause them to appear at his will, or convey any such power to man.

I allow myself to make these general remarks because they may tend to suggest, as I trust, the simple truth as to this subject, and may hinder the young more particularly, and indeed others who may not have fully considered the matter, from being a prey to the thoughts of men. Our wisdom here, as everywhere, is to be wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil; to believe, not to imagine.

In this case then God was intervening contrary to the witch’s thoughts. She had only to do with an evil personage called a familiar spirit {1 Sam. 28:7; Lev. 20:27} – the one that attached itself to her iniquitous life as a witch. She expected this evil spirit to pretend to be Samuel; but when she found it was not her familiar but the real person -- the spirit of him that was gone, she judged at once, and rightly, that it must be God who was interfering for the king. Therefore her great alarm, and her conviction that he who consulted her could be no other than Saul. She right well knew that for good or ill the king was the great person in Israel. Thenceforward, as we said, not the priest, but the king was the new and principal link with God. Once indeed it had been in grace, typically at least while the law subsisted; now it was in government. And he who took the “mad prophet” by surprise, and compelled him to foretell good and glorious things of Israel, now surprised both the king and the witch by sending Samuel to announce the speedy and shameful end of the king of man’s choice. Nor need we wonder at the one more than the other; least of all at God sending Samuel now to Saul in his exceptional position and relationship, and under circumstances so critical both to the people and to the king of Israel.

And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what savest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself before him {1 Sam. 28:13, 14}.

Samuel, now recognized, speaks to Saul.

Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams.

Terrible but true confession!
Therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do {1 Sam. 28:15}.

He was at his wit’s end, powerless before man, and forsaken by Jehovah. Oh, what an end of the first and favored king of Israel!

Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing Jehovah is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? And Jehovah hath done to him, as he spake by me: for Jehovah hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbor, even to David: because thou obeyest not the voice of Jehovah, nor executest his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath Jehovah done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover Jehovah will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me. That is, they should have departed this life.

And Jehovah also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines. Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel: and there was no strength in him {1 Sam. 28:16-20}.

The very witch has to comfort him as best she can.

The next chapter (1 Sam. 29) follows up the more public course of things which had been interrupted by the melancholy episode of the forlorn, and one may say apostate, king Saul. Here the Philistines are seen mustering in thousands, while the Israelites pitch by a fountain in Jezreel. Now it becomes a question of David. What was he about?

And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds, and by thousands: but David and his men passed on in the rearward with Achish. Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here? And Achish said unto the princes of the Philistines, Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days, or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day? {1 Sam. 29:2, 3}.

But God overruled the matter, and solved the difficulty into which David’s unbelief had plunged him. Nor was it a dilemma only, but indeed a horrible sin. What must have been the result to his own spirit, had it not been completely cut short by that grace which held him in by bit and bridle, and, one might almost say, expelled him by the spears of the Philistines. In deep distrust and jealousy they say to Achish,

Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? should it not be with the heads of these men? Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands? {1 Sam. 29:4, 5}.

Powerless before his princes, Achish, could only beg David to go in peace, that he might not to his own peril displease the Philistine lords past all power of healing. David sinks to the degradation of entreaty, indeed with somewhat of upbraiding in his tone addressed to Achish, because they did not allow him to go forth against Israel and the king he had so often spared. But Achish stands firm.

So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning, to return into the land of the Philistines.

And the Philistines went up to Jezreel {1 Sam. 29:11}.

Deeply interesting as 1 Sam. 30 is, at present I must content myself with but few words of comment. It is a scene happily familiar to most Christian readers, a turning-point in the dealings of God with the soul of David, who had slipped far from him. How could it suffice His heart to overrule and keep David back? He loved him too well to leave him as he was. The Amalekites become the instruments of discipline by making a raid on Ziklag, carrying off the wives of David and his men, their sons and their daughters, and everything belonging to them.

So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives. Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep. And David’s two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in Jehovah his God {1 Sam. 30:3-6}.

The man of faith turns to Him whom he had so deeply dishonored. It was the point of recovery, when deserted and on the point of destruction by his own men, after all else was lost and in Amalek’s hands. The last lesson of needed chastening had fallen on his heart. The blow of the Amalekites did not effect it; but that David’s men who loved him and whom he so loved should be on the point of stoning him, broke up the great deep, and the mighty pent-up waters flowed, not in judgment, but in grace. His soul was restored. He encouraged himself in Jehovah his God. What would have been despair to a man of the world wrought repentance not to be repented of in David, and turned him simply and completely to the Lord. It was the leper white all over now pronounced clean.

And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech’s son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod {1 Sam. 30:7}.

Can he not now enquire of Jehovah? It was long since he had done so. He had been far from God.
And David enquired at Jehovah, saying, shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them?

And if David encourages himself in Jehovah, Jehovah surely encourages David.

Pursue, says he; for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all {1 Sam. 30:8}.

This he does by the help of an Egyptian servant who had been left behind sick. The Amalekites were discovered; David and his men pounced on them; and every one of those that they loved, as well as all they possessed, were recovered safe and sound, with a great deal more.

But further, the exceeding grace of God gave occasion to two things it is well to note here: the breaking out of hateful selfishness on the part of those who had no appreciation of the Lord (for the presence and activity of grace always bring out the evil of the heart where there is no faith); on the other hand, the single-eyed devotedness of one that no longer sought his own things shone once more with undiminished brightness. David was truly and fully restored. Grace had thus achieved not merely a great victory for David, but a greater victory in him.

In the spirit of love the chapter closes with the loving remembrances of David to the elders of Judah and his friends.

But the last chapter (1 Sam. 31) unveils a far different sight: the lamentable signs of the Philistines’ victory over Saul and his sons, who fell down smitten on mount Gilboa.

And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadah, and Melchishua, Saul’s sons. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers. Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together {1 Sam. 31:2-6}.

How truly had the prophet warned, how punctually was every word verified! Thus fell Saul and his house. The circumstances of the enemy’s triumph need not be dwelt on, nor the comely act of the men of Jabesh who recovered the bodies of Saul and his sons exposed on the walls of Bethshan, burnt them, buried their bones, and gave themselves to a fast for seven days. All this is doubtless familiar to most.

We shall see in the next book the commencement of an entirely new line of things for David, who reigns gradually rising to full and undisputed sway over all Israel, and there passing according to the ways of God through another kind of trial. In all this the wisdom of the Lord is apparent -- the failure of man unquestionably, but the grace of God triumphant everywhere.
The Earlier Historical Books
Lecture 11
2 Samuel 1–12

We have seen the sorrowful circumstances out of which arose the first desire to have a king in Israel, and the remarkable fact that, although it was a sin, God nevertheless did not put the people back into the condition in which they had been before they sought in this to be like the nations, but gave them a king after His own heart, as far as that could be, till He comes whose right it is. Now this is exceedingly instructive to my own mind, and the rather as in fact it is a principle in the dealings of God. So far is man’s unfaithfulness from hindering God, that it only furnishes Him fresh occasion to glorify Himself, by proving and making known His supremacy over evil, and this invariably too by taking up the results of sin in order to make them the opening for the display of the resources of His wisdom and goodness. It was sin to have asked a king, but it was grace on God’s part to give it.

But God was looking onward to a better than David; and now we have seen that, even after David was designated to the kingdom and anointed for it, God did not set aside at once the miserable consequences of man’s choice. He allows the whole thing to resolve itself responsibily before the eyes of all men. He permits Israel to see, on the one hand, the ruin which the king of their own choice had brought in; but He lets them see, on the other hand, the weakness of the one He chose from among them to establish the kingdom according to His mind, a type, and only a type, of the good and enduring things to come.

There never was greater confusion than towards the end of 1 Samuel -- David among the Philistines seeking to fight Israel, Saul and Jonathan utterly worsted at last by the Philistines who slay them. What an awful issue for the king, Israel, Saul and Jonathan utterly worsted at last by the Philistines who slay them. What an awful issue for the king, and now we have seen that, even after David was designated to the kingdom and anointed for it, God did not set aside at once the miserable consequences of man’s choice. He allows the whole thing to resolve itself responsibly before the eyes of all men. He permits Israel to see, on the one hand, the ruin which the king of their own choice had brought in; but He lets them see, on the other hand, the weakness of the one He chose from among them to establish the kingdom according to His mind, a type, and only a type, of the good and enduring things to come.

Let me take this opportunity, before passing on, of saying a little on the great central idea of these two Books. God’s intention was to set up a king according to His own mind. It was an entirely new place; but even though those who were called of God to fill that place for the time were altogether short of what was in the divine purpose, one remarkable witness of Christ there was from the first attached to the kingly place in Israel: the priest was to fall into a secondary place, and the king be henceforth the immediate link between God and the people. We have already seen that in Saul’s case this entirely failed; for God forsook him, when morally obliged to become the enemy of one who, despising His will and word, at last betook himself to the power of evil to enlighten and sustain him when consciously forsaken of God. There we behold complete failure; immediately after which he and his perish.

The king’s place in Israel for all that was of no less, but rather of the deepest, interest and importance, and for this simple reason: had he gone right, all would have been right for and with the people. I am not at all speaking about the Israelites individually viewed. It is impossible that it should be well with any soul for eternity who is not right with God for himself. There must be individual and immediate links with God. There is nothing stable short of life in the soul. But we are speaking now, not of life, nor of eternity, but of the kingdom on earth; and I say that the prime idea, the chief central thought of that kingdom, was this -- and it is a grand one -- that if the one man, the king, had only stood firm and right with God, he had been always the means of blessing unfailingly and fully for the people of God. Is it to be supposed that God did not know what sort of stuff kings were? He knew right well what the ways would be, not merely of Saul, but of David. He knew perfectly of course what David’s sons would come to. How comes it then that God sees fit to introduce such a principle as this, that the destiny of the people should turn on one person, even the king; that on his fidelity in glorifying God, on his standing true to Jehovah’s name, should depend the well-being of Israel? Had the king of Israel been faithful in his office before God, there had always been an unfailing supply of...
blessing for the children of Israel as a people. It is no question simply now of his being a believer, or therefore of eternal consequences; but how are we to account for his astonishing public place in the early ways of God? Because the Holy Ghost is even here always thinking of Christ. When He comes, it will be so. And God, who is looking onward to this, had before His mind the one person who is the pivot on which turns our blessing, not only for eternity, but also for His people and all the earth in time.

This then is the great truth which is shadowed out by the throne of Jehovah in the midst of Israel; and this we shall see illustrated yet more in the Second Book of Samuel than in the first. In the first negatively we have seen the idea coming to a close, because it was a king that Israel chose according to their own heart, although even there God held the reins, as He always does. We have seen the type of the true king in anything but a kingly place -- the outcast most hated and feared by the king who then was in all the group of outcasts who surrounded him; for David was beyond doubt the one who, if he cast a halo around all, continually brought them all into danger. Such is the case where Satan governs, even though there may be the form of the kingdom of God. It was exactly so under Saul. All outward order was around him. And this is the more striking, because that outward order was never to be disrespected.

Evil as Saul might be, and the path of faith assuredly far away from him, for all that the people that were most severed from Saul and most attached to the person of David were those that most felt for Saul and Jonathan when they fell. We see it in David himself. Nor was it the feeling of David exclusively, but shared by those that surrounded him; for they were but the reflex of his own mind and heart. The fall of king Saul in David’s circle was a sorrow, and to outward order was around him. And this is the more striking, because that outward order was never to be disrespected.

Whither shall I go up? {2 Sam. 2:1}

Nor was this by any means all. On the occasion the ten tribes afterwards. Just as we find in the case of the twenty-four elders around the throne of Jehovah, saying,

And Jehovah directs him to Hebron, whither he goes: And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

And this furnishes opportunity for another truth of some importance: even our blessed Lord Jesus will not take the entire kingdom all at once. There are many persons who suppose that, when the Lord returns, the fresh work of establishing Israel and of Himself as the true Christ in the rights of David’s throne will be all brought about in a moment. This is a mistake. He has all rights as well as all power; but the Lord Jesus, divine person though He be, will act for some time transitonally after He returns. Before He returns, when He has received the heavenly saints to Himself, there will be a transition during which He will occupy Himself among other things in getting ready a remnant from the Jews. He will deal with their consciences as well as their affections; He will produce an earnest desire, not in “the many” but in the few, to hail Him as coming in the name of Jehovah. But after this another transition will follow, which is even less generally seen by those who occupy themselves with questions of the prophetic word, -- the transition that fills up the gap between the destruction of the antichrist, when the Lord Jesus shines from heaven and the judgment He will execute when acting from Zion against the leader of the nations of the world, more particularly in its northeastern quarters where the masses of population are found, above all against the one called in scripture Gog, prince of Rosh. This is a considerable time after the destruction of antichrist. Does scripture tell us nothing of what the Lord Jesus will be doing then? There will be a settlement of all morally, according to God, in the hearts of Israel -- Judah first, and the ten tribes afterwards. Just as we find in the case of the genuine effusion of his affection. Faith can afford to be generous in a way and degree that puts the finest feelings of nature to the blush.

But the death of Saul and Jonathan by no means settled the question of David’s succession to the throne. Nor does David for his part trouble himself about the issue. He walks in faith still (2 Sam. 2). Instead of taking up measures of policy or violence with a view to the throne, he enquires of Jehovah, saying,

This is admirable. He well knew that he was anointed, but he will not take a step without Jehovah. Any other would have had himself introduced at once with a flourish of trumpets. David could wait, and so much the more because he was anointed of Jehovah. He knew right well that Jehovah’s purpose could not fail. For that reason he could afford to be quiet. If indeed we believe, beloved brethren, then do we with patience wait for it: the hope that we have is well worth the while.

And Jehovah said unto him, Go up. And David said,

Whither shall I go up? {2 Sam. 2:1}

It was not merely the general fact, but he was led in the way in each particular part as well as in the main. And Jehovah directs him to Hebron, whither he goes: And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.
David in the second Book of Samuel. He does not become king over all Israel at once; and even when he does, there is still a work of putting down adversaries among the neighboring nations.

It is altogether a mistake to suppose that the Lord Jesus will solve every question by a single decisive blow inflicted on His adversaries in the camp. It is probable that this is the idea that commonly prevails among the mass of those persons who look for the Lord Jesus; but it is not sound, because it is not scriptural. It is a human inference drawn from the fact of His divine glory. It is supposed that, because He is God, because He knows all the wickedness of every individual, therefore every wicked one is consumed in an instant; but these are not the ways of God. He could do so if He pleased, but as the rule He has never acted thus; and He will not do so at the time to which we are now referring.

And hence it is that this book is in my judgment a very full and exact type in its grand features, without straining any part of it, or pretending that everything has an answer in the circumstances of that day. At any rate it is far from me to set up for having the competency, if indeed any man could have it, to run the analogy with a closeness which is not warranted by the direct instructions of the Lord elsewhere. Still the great general principle that applied of old will apply yet more by and by. And for this we are not dependent on this Book taken typically without plain teaching of scripture which openly refers to it.

For instance, let us take the account that is given in the prophecy of Isaiah, where the Lord Jesus is seen returning from Bozrah. What means this? I do not anticipate that any one who hears me will be under the ancient and general error of ecclesiastics or other uninstructed souls, that it is a question here of the cross or atonement. But many conceive that it points to the Lord destroying the Roman beast and the false prophet with the associate kings of that company and day. Not at all. It is the Lord dealing with earthly things, not merely from heaven. It is the Lord Jesus, now associated with the people, who puts Himself at the head of Israel.

Again take the well-known picture of the day of Jehovah, Zech. 14, where it is said that Jehovah shall go forth as in the day of battle and fight with those nations. It is granted that this does not fall in with ordinary pre-conceived notions, as to the manner of the Lord’s future association with His earthly people here below. But the fact is that the faith in Christendom as to the judgment of the quick is vague, uncertain, and unreal. They hold the judgment of the dead, but in general merge in it that of the quick, which is to lose it. We must make room in our thoughts, my brethren; we must leave room rather for the truth of God’s revelation as to all this. Here it is quite plain that the Lord will destroy one class of His enemies when He appears from heaven; equally plain is it that He will reign in peace over the earth; but there is a transitional period between the two. As its type, the second Book of Samuel is most valuable as showing that the grand distinctive principles which will exist under Christ were manifested in David.

Hence the application of what comes before us here. David is hindered for a time by the family of Saul; and more particularly we are told

Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul’s host, took Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim; and made him king over Gilead {2 Sam. 2:8, 9}.

Now Ishbosheth had no title whatsoever. Nevertheless we see great tenderness toward him on the part of David, and this the more because he knew his own title to be indisputable. When people are wrong, do not wonder if they are generally apt to be touchy; when they have the confidence of the truth of God, they can afford to leave things without anxiety or bluster. Here certainly David shows us this. Although the pretender might be exceedingly vexatious, and an injury to the people too, nevertheless violent methods would have ill become the king that God had chosen in grace. David therefore leaves all with Him. Ishbosheth then resigned for a certain time.

But the house of Judah followed David. And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months {2 Sam. 2:10, 11}.

Thus patience had then its perfect work in David. And this, it will be observed, not merely while suffering in the presence of Saul, but now even after he had as the anointed king been reigning in Hebron according to God’s direction for him to go up thither. Indeed it was perhaps in a certain sense more trying now, because in Saul’s case there was a title; in Ishbosheth’s there was none. Nevertheless in every way the anointed of the Lord was to triumph.

But soon we find Abner and Joab coming into opposition and collision. Only now is the name of Joab first heard of during these sorrowful scenes in Israel. There does this politic and bold man begin to take a very leading part. There are only two occasions perhaps when Joab ever appears; one is when there was anything bad to be done, another is when there was anything great to be won. Joab was a man as far as possible from the faith of David, and to suffer the prominence and allow the influence of such a chief was one of the fatal weaknesses of David’s kingdom -- that is, of God’s kingdom in the hands of man, not merely man’s kingdom in the presence of God’s anointed, but, as has been remarked, God’s kingdom confided to man, and there failing.

The wily Joab accordingly caused great distress to David, though without hesitation taking part with him. He was a man of sufficient penetration to know who would gain the day, not to speak also of a family connection with David, which naturally gave him a certain interest in his success. It is to be feared that a principle of nobler, of less selfish, character never wrought in Joab. At any rate we see him in a most unhappy light on this occasion; for the result
was that, in the conflict that ensued, Joab gains the day by treachery and violence, accomplishing by murder the downfall of those whom he too was desirous to see put out of his ambitious way. He wished to stand without a rival in the day of triumph and glory which he well knew would soon come to king David.

In the chapter (2 Sam. 3) that follows the Spirit of God marks the progress of things.

There was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker [2 Sam. 3:1].

This gives occasion for showing out the end of Abner's history, as well as of Ishboseth's, in the next chapter. The continual fighting furnished at last what Joab had long wished for -- the opportunity to take Abner aside and speak with him quietly, thus lawlessly to avenge the blood of his brother, while he got rid of a great opponent disposed for peace with his master. But David bore witness in his fasting and, tears how deeply he felt Abner's death, and how truly he judged Joab's iniquity, though alas! his power was not equal to his heart. Hence he could do no more at present than say to Joab and all the people that were with him, Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. And king David himself followed the bier [2 Sam. 3:31].

It was a fine feeling, and this, I am persuaded, from higher than human sources. But while his was a generous heart, there was that which, being of God, gave it its true direction, and sustained it in power spite of all circumstances. Clearly I speak now of where he was directly guided of God.

And the king lamented over Abner,

just as suitably as he had before lamented over Jonathan and his father,

and said, Died Abner as a fool diet? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou [2 Sam. 3:33, 34].

He judged truly even of his own commander-in-chief, as one may call Joab -- at least the one that was to be so formally before long.

And all the people wept again over him. And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down. And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased the people. For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner [2 Sam. 3:34-37].

At the same time the king confesses what a sinful thing had been done, and his own weakness.

Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel? And I am this day weak.

How true!

I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: Jehovah shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness [2 Sam. 3:38, 39].

A single eye is always full of light; and though David could not shake off those on whom indeed he was too dependent as the supports of his throne, nevertheless he does judge what was unworthy of the name of Jehovah, and what was abhorrent to his own soul. Weakness or worse must always be till Jesus take the throne.

But it is not only that we have the death of Abner, as I have said, but of Ishboseth also. This follows in the next chapter, and there again how truly men mistook the heart of the king. The murderers brought the head of Ishboseth unto David to Hebron, and said to the king, Behold the head of Ishboseth the son of Saul thine enemy, which sought thy life; and Jehovah hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul, and of his seed [2 Sam. 4:8].

How little unbelief ever learns! The lesson that was taught the Amalekite one might have supposed would have been remembered by the men of Israel that heard of the king's feeling. But unbelief, in its ignorance of God and its incapacity to discern those that are His, unfit itself to appreciate the ways of faith and of love, and hence it is that all was lost on them.

And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said unto them, As Jehovah liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity, when one told me, saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings: how much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed? [2 Sam. 4:9-11].

What can be finer than this? Here was a man that was a rival, and this too without a cause and without a title. But faith is more than upright, and can readily afford to be generous. Certainly so it was with king David, who hated any advantage taken even of his enemies.

How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed?

It was not that David shut his eyes to anything that was wrong. He did not mean that Ishboseth was righteous in everything, more particularly in disputing the throne given by God to himself. But he did not forget his life and general character, because of the grave mistake that opposed David and turned out fatal to himself. Therefore he adds,

Shall I not therefore now require his blood of your
hand, and take you away from the earth? And David commanded his young men, and they slew them {2 Sam. 4:11, 12}.

The time was now come for the just place of the king.

Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and Jehovah said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel {2 Sam. 5:1, 2}.

Nevertheless it is solemn enough to observe that these men had known it all the time. It is not want of knowledge that hinders souls from acting according to God: I speak now of the general rule. But want of faith dulls the force of what we know, and makes it as if we knew it not. As long as there were those who acted on their nature, as long as it was a king of their own choice, or any one belonging to his family that seemed to have the smallest shadow of a title to the throne, their feelings wrought; their prejudices proved strong; their prepossessions were so deeply engaged that they forgot the word of the Lord. But now the Lord had put aside these different hindrances manifestly by His judgment, and had done it so much the more solidly for David as it was not by David. For David’s hand was never lifted up against Saul or Jonathan; David’s hand never got rid of Abner nor of Ishbosheth. But now, whether by wicked men with David, or by wicked men against him, or by the open enemies of the Lord, in all these various ways God had wrought and disposed of the different men who laid claim to the throne one after another; and lo! the confession comes out, which must have been as true of the dead as of the living, that all through they knew well enough what the will of Jehovah was.

And so do we find now constantly. When souls are brought out of hindrances, when they are brought out of a false position, there is many a confession made which shows that the truth had pierced their consciences long before: only will, the world, the difficulties of family connection, a thousand snares, hindered fidelity to the Lord. But in truth, my brethren, we are entirely dependent on God Himself to give force to His own truth. Power is not in the truth simply. It is still less in a position, true as it may be. The grace of God alone gives the truth power. It is this that really works so as to deliver from hindrances, and therefore it is of such importance to our souls that the affections should be strong and rightly set. If the affections are kept vigorous and pure on the object of God, then the truth is seen in its real beauty and brightness; whereas if the affections are weak, or wandering after false objects, we may have all the truth in the Bible before us, but it makes little or no impression. This we see in the unconverted man fully; but the very same thing that ends in the ruin of the unconverted operates, if allowed, and in the degree it is allowed, to the hindrance and injury of those born of God.

At last, then, all the tribes of Israel come and make their common acknowledgment to the king (2 Sam. 5). Now they could see that they are his bone and his flesh. Had they not been so before? Now they could remember how he led them in olden time. Was this again something new? Now they could remember that Jehovah said,

Thou shalt feed my people {2 Sam. 5:2; Psa. 78:70-72}.

Had this too only just then burst on them for the first time?

So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before Jehovah: and they anointed David king over Israel {2 Sam. 5:3}.

Was there a reproach from David? I venture to answer there was not. No; there was a heart that loved them better than they loved him: there was one that sought Jehovah’s glory for them, and who valued the throne because it was Jehovah’s gift. I do not mean to say that he did not value it in itself, but I do affirm that it never entered the heart of David to seek the throne for himself. The first conception of it, the first presentation of the thought, was produced by God’s own deed and gift. It was in no way the fruit of vaulting pride in the spirit of David. But God’s call made it a duty to obey on his part as on Israel’s. He consequently was the one who could use that throne in his measure for Jehovah’s glory.

But if David and his men come to Jerusalem, the stronghold of Zion was still in the hand of the enemy, as it had hitherto been. Whatever might be the conquests of Joshua, whatever might have been achieved afterwards, in the very middle of the land, in the center of Jerusalem itself, there frowned this stronghold held by the Jebusites. The time was come to mark a most important change. It was impossible that the kingdom could be according to God unless Zion were wrested for the king from the enemy who had thus daringly defied His people; and David felt this in all its force. He was keenly alive to the dishonor that was done to God by the very heart and citadel of the kingdom belonging to an accursed race of Canaan. There they proudly and at ease, by long possession in their fortress, laughed all assailants to scorn. Hence, when David comes before it, they say to him,

Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither {2 Sam. 5:6}.

A most stinging taunt to the warrior king! The blind and the lame were sufficient to keep the stronghold against David and his men. That is, the place was so excessively strong by nature, perhaps also so fortified by the men of Jebus, that they had conceived it to be impregnable.

Nevertheless David,
as the Spirit of God says so calmly --

Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion: the same is the city of David. And David said on that day, Whosoever getheth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David’s soul, he shall be chief and captain
David was not only too sensitive to the taunt, but could not rise above it. All flesh is grass, and its glory as its flower. Generous as David was, he was wounded and resented the insult on those innocent of it.

Wherefore this day the blind and the lame shall not come into the house [2 Sam. 5:8].

We know how the grace of the Lord Jesus reversed this. The blind and the lame were just the people that did come into the house when He was there. But David was not Jesus. The king felt things after a too human sort. The Lord Jesus only and always went or came in a way perfectly suitable to God and His grace.

So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David [2 Sam. 5:9].

This, though it be so briefly named by the Spirit, becomes ever afterwards an epoch and turning-point in the history of Israel. I do not know anything more striking in scripture, or a more remarkable characteristic of it, than such a fact as this, slight as some may count it -- the quietness with which the Holy Ghost notices the completeness of the blow that was struck in the heart of the land at that which had been a constant challenge and triumph over all the efforts of Israel to that day. Now that David had wrested it from the Jebusites, this becomes the great fact that afterwards stamps its character upon Israel. Zion, in short, becomes a new name of the deepest moment -- the sign of divine grace in royalty -- the grace that took up the people in their lowest condition, and by that man whom God employed raised them up step by step to such a place of power and blessing and glory as never was before and never can be again till Jesus come and make this very Zion the center of His earthly government with the blessing and glory due to His name.

Hence it is referred to in Hebrews strikingly, where it is said,

We are come to mount Zion {Heb. 12:22}.

It is indeed the most characteristic spot in the whole earth as the sign of grace. Why should it be so? Why should it not be so? There are two mountains that have a place proper to them -- the mount of law and the mount of grace. Sinai, I need scarcely say, is the one, as Zion is the other. Sinai came into view when Israel were tried under law and all was favorable, the people having been brought out by the mighty power of God in the freshness of their youth. It was the beginning of their history, when all looked fair. They had entered upon it by a victory over the proudest king of the earth in that day; and what did they come to? Ruin, ever worse and worse, as each means successively tried proved the hopeless evil of man when fairly and fully put to the test by God.

But now what a contrast begins to dawn, though only in type! They were taken up from the depth of ruin, and after that estate Zion was won. Thus it is the kingdom established in power after the people had been utterly ruined -- after they had gone through every phase of change calculated to help, yet every experiment only sinking them deeper into the dust. After all this was Zion won, and not till then. Now there is nothing that so beautifully shows grace; for it is not only great activity of goodness, but also perfect goodness displayed after all had been lost. This is grace, and such is precisely therefore the picture of the stage at which Zion comes before us in Jewish history. Therefore it is that in the epistle to the Hebrews, where the apostle is contrasting all that flesh boasted of in Israel -- Sinai and its ordinances, he takes up that name of Zion which they little felt and little thought of, giving it its real prominence and most striking superiority. The moment that it is named thus, how the heart recalls and turns over all the glorious things spoken of the mountain of grace, and remembers that Zion too was chosen by God for His holy hill -- that not only was David an object of divine choice, but withal Zion! Nor need we wonder, because God in this too was thinking of Christ as King. There had He anointed His Son. It He desired for Jehovah’s habitation.

This, said He,

is my rest for ever; here will I dwell: for I have desired it {Psa. 132:14}.

There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle {Psa. 76:3}.

Jehovah loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob {Psa. 87:2}.

We shall see perhaps a little more as we go on.

Again, we hear next how David was owned by the Gentiles gradually.

And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons: and they built David an house. And David perceived that Jehovah had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel’s sake {2 Sam. 5:11, 12}.

All this flowed in on the king after Zion was won.

But I am far from saying that we have more than a pledge as yet of good things to come, chequered alas! by the too evident fact that the first man is not the Second. Thus David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron: and there were yet sons and daughters born to David. And these be the names of those that were born unto him in Jerusalem; Shammuh, and Shobab, and Nathan, and Solomon, Ibar also, and Elishua, and Nepheg, and Japhia, and Elishama, and Eliada, and Eliphelet {2 Sam. 5:13-16}.

The law made nothing perfect. Christ, the true light, was not come; nor was even the believer, though born of God, the new creation yet, so as to say,

old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new {2 Cor. 5:17}.
Moreover we find, when the Philistines who heard of it came up, that David was still as dependent on God when on the throne as he had been while in the place of suffering. He enquired of Jehovah, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? {2 Sam. 5:19}.

There was no confidence in his own powers, no presuming on past victories -- as easy a thing to slip into as it is dangerous.

And Jehovah said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand {2 Sam. 5:19}.

And so he smote them;

and there they left their images, and David and his men burned them. And the Philistines came up yet again {2 Sam. 5:21, 22}.

David does not even then act, because he had before beaten them; nor does he satisfy himself for the fresh need with the answer God had given him for their former attack. He enquires again; and Jehovah exercises his obedience by an altogether new command:

Thou shalt not go up: but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou heardest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall Jehovah go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines. And David did so, as Jehovah had commanded him; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer {2 Sam. 5:23-25}.

But now (2 Sam. 6) we have another and a totally different scene. It is no longer a question of the enemy, but of the ark; for how could David’s spirit rest if the great symbol of Jehovah’s presence in Israel was wanting? If David now is established king of Israel, could he but desire the establishment of the sign that the true God was there? Nevertheless it was not yet apparent, and there were many mistakes made in consequence.

And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God {2 Sam. 6:2}.

It is instructive to notice that here at first he did not enquire. He evidently thought there could be no doubt of the matter. When it was a question of opposing the enemy, he felt that he needed the guidance of God; but when the point was the establishment of Jehovah’s ark in its due place in Israel, how could it be necessary to ask Jehovah about it?

And so it is we often deceive ourselves. For in fact there is no occasion where we more need the sustaining of God than in His very worship. Have we not learnt this by experience, my brethren? Some of us are apt to think that, because this is a holy place, and because it is a holy work, and because we are by the grace of God

holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling {Heb. 3:1},

we may enter into it as a matter of course. And what is it that we prove when we do? Certainly not the power of God. There is no place where there is a greater danger of distraction on the one hand or of form on the other. Is this to us anything but the iniquity of holy things? No where do we more truly need the guiding and directing grace of God than in His own service and worship. Do not suppose that this is said in the slightest degree to encourage legalism, or in any way to sanction the morbid state of a Christian which would shrink from that which is due to the Lord and ought to be his deepest joy, and what most surely He looks for continually; but one may warn that there is no small danger of our taking it all as a matter of course, just as we find David did on this occasion. We do well therefore and wisely if we read the history of David before the ark as a serious admonition to our souls in all that concerns our drawing near to God.

And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart {2 Sam. 6:3}.

Where we have not the guidance of the Lord, and do not even look for it seriously, every step cannot but be wrong. Who told them to put it

upon a new cart?

Were they Philistines? Another Book told us of the Philistines doing so, and how God bore pitifully with these heathen who knew no better. But will He allow such a procedure in Israel? God deals with men according to the place in which they are, or He has put them. If He left the poor Philistines to the darkness of nature, only just illuminated by whatever beams of light might from Israel break through the darkness from time to time, could it be that God’s elect should surrender themselves to imitate the darkness of the heathen? What a wretched descent, beloved brethren, when those who are called into the light of God allow themselves to be swayed by the license taken by the world, even though it may be the religious world!

But let us pursue the tale.

And they brought the ark out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before Jehovah on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon’s threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God {2 Sam. 6:4-7}.

Surely this is very solemn for me, for any. God did not at once deal with the first departure from His word. They drove the new cart for a time without a sign of His displeasure. Then He allowed what might have seemed to be
a mere accident of circumstances, by which He was pleased to try them, and in a single instance show signally His sense of their irreverence, though of course especially in one who went farthest in it. It is true that it was another act, and it was an aggravation of the evil.

Nevertheless on the outward surface of things it looked justifiable enough to guard the ark from a fall. The ark of God seemed in danger: why should not a Levite put out his hand to save it? Was not Uzzah, son of Abinadab of Gibeah, the most fit to do so holy an act? But the act involved going against the express word of God. What of this? It was not only a device that was taken up hastily in the first instance, and carried out independently of God’s order for carrying the vessels of the sanctuary; here there was a direct failure in the respect due to God’s ark when it seemed to need man’s succour. The Lord had appointed who it was in Israel that should carry the ark, and how it must be done. Of this the Philistines knew nothing, nor were they responsible to obey such an ordinance; but Israel were as being under the law. They had His word in their hands, and were responsible accordingly.

So when Uzzah put forth his hand and took hold of the ark, for the oxen shook it, God was bringing the matter to a point in judgment.

The anger of Jehovah was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.

And David, instead of judging himself, instead of looking back and confessing how completely they had all acted without the guidance of Jehovah, was displeased because Jehovah had made a breach upon Uzzah. Displeased with whom? Oh, it is a sorrowful thing to say, he was displeased with the God of Israel. But do not think this so strange a thing either. When you murmur and complain of His chastening in your own case, what are you doing but expressing your displeasure at the Lord? Do you suppose, beloved brethren, that any trial which happens to you, no matter what it may be, or by whatever instrument it come, is never a reason either to justify you nor the smallest excuse for being displeased with God.

The fact is that Israel had acted without God’s word from the first -- even David himself; and if David was the one whom it least of all became, we must not be surprised if he also had the sorest feeling about the Lord.

And David was displeased, because Jehovah had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perezuzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of Jehovah come to me? So David would not remove the ark of Jehovah unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. And the ark of Jehovah continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and Jehovah blessed Obed-edom, and all his household {2 Sam. 6:8-11}.

What an answer to David’s displeasure!

And it was told king David, saying, Jehovah hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness. And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of Jehovah had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings {2 Sam. 6:12, 13}.

Now we have David righted in his soul, and Jehovah, instead of being dreaded, or being the source of displeasure, is the spring of gladness and thanksgiving. But it is holy joy. There is no brighter happier moment, as far as I can discern, in David’s history as a king than on that day.

So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of Jehovah with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. And as the ark of Jehovah came into the city of David, Michal Saul’s daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before Jehovah; and she despised him in her heart {2 Sam. 6:15, 16}.

No wonder that the Spirit of God calls her Saul’s daughter. Why, I thought she was now David’s wife. Yes, but what woman that day behaved less like it? She was Saul’s daughter still. It was the genuine expression of her father. There was not a right feeling towards her husband in this transaction (and how near it was to his heart!), still less in her value for Jehovah’s relation to Israel as witnessed by the bringing of the ark to Zion.

But they brought in the ark of Jehovah, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before Jehovah {2 Sam. 6:17}.

They were undisturbed by any hindrance now. Their sense of the divine majesty was evident, their adherence to the word of the Lord unmistakable. All the offerings speak of thanksgiving in devotedness and fellowship.

And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, he blessed the people in the name of Jehovah of hosts {2 Sam. 6:18}.

It is clear that David was now enjoying in the very fullest sense the grace of God toward Israel and himself.

And he dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. So all the people departed every one to his house {2 Sam. 6:19}. 
Yet there was one person who had no sympathy with the festive joy of that great day in Israel, one soul who was as displeased with David now as he himself had once been with Jehovah.

And Michal the daughter of Saul [mark the significant repetition of the natural root] came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself to-day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself! [2 Sam. 6:20].

But how dignified and withering was the rebuke of her husband! And David said unto Michal, It was before Jehovah, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of Jehovah, over Israel: therefore will I play before Jehovah [2 Sam. 6:21].

It was the service of faith. It was the king of Israel who, the more he was exalted and established of God, used all his exaltation as an offering to the Lord, and felt himself too so much the more exalted because God was everything to his soul. Nearness to God was greater in David’s eyes at that moment than the throne that God had given him; and David rightly judged. And Michal, far from appreciating the Lord’s grace in her soul, was thenceforth doomed to be far from a husband whom she failed to honor when he proved that his heart was set to treat all else as nothing so that he might honor the Lord.

In the next chapter (2 Sam. 7) we have the king before Jehovah. How different all that passed there, as we pass from Michal and the king to the king and Jehovah!

And it came to pass; when the king sat in his house, and Jehovah had given him rest round about from all his enemies; that the king said unto Nathan the prophet. See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains. And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for Jehovah is with thee [2 Sam. 6:13].

But Nathan was wrong in this; he had answered hastily. The prophet is as much dependent on God for light as any other person, and it is an instructive thing that we should have the mistakes of a prophet, or it may be of a greater than the prophet: I speak of course even of an apostle himself; and, without entering on doubtful points, I do say it is perfectly certain that, great as was the apostle Peter, he made not only mistakes, but some of the most serious kind. I do not speak of what he did before he was brought into the highest place, and had the power requisite to fill it, but it is plain that God has recorded for our instruction that not even the very chief of the twelve apostles had wisdom except in what was given him. For experience will not suit in the things of God, nor any power in which a person may have previously wrought, unless there be also dependence on the Lord.

So here Nathan has a corrective from the Lord Himself, as indeed it was needed.

Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith Jehovah, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar? [2 Sam. 7:5-7].

Many an edifice of our proposal and making God had never asked of us. We ought not to run before Him. Faith waits on God, instead of anticipating in self-confidence, or in the desires of our own heart, let them be ever so simple. It is obvious that David was acting from his own thought and his own circumstances. It looked excellent, humanly speaking, and might even seem so for a man of God. In a certain sense the desire was admirable; but, beloved brethren, to obey is better than sacrifice [1 Sam. 15:22].

Can we trust our desires? There is nothing so humble as waiting on the Lord, and quietly doing His will as God makes it known; nor is anything really so firm, although unbelief counts and boldly declares it the greatest presumption to know it.

But there is more than this. God deigns in grace to serve His people and to suit Himself to them. It would not answer to His feelings that they should be at work or war, and He in rest and peace. When they were wanderers in the desert, He dwelt in a tent in their midst; and He must settle them in the land before He would accept a temple or settled dwelling at their hands. Yea, He must also make David a house settled in the throne of Jehovah before his son could build Him a house. For such was His holy pleasure, that not David but David’s son should build the house of Jehovah. The bearing is evident: the true Solomon, the Prince of Peace, is before the eye of God.

Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people over Israel: and I was with thee withersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, and as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also Jehovah telleth thee that he will make thee an house [2 Sam. 7:8-11].

Thus God must always have the first place, and always be the first mover. It would not consist with His glory to let David build Him a house till He had built David a house. Of
this He proceeds to assure the king.

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son [2 Sam. 7:12-14].

It is true that David’s seed should come under the righteous government of God.

If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men [2 Sam. 7:14].

It was not Christ yet.

But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. . . . So did Nathan speak unto David [2 Sam. 7:15-17].

David goes in and sits before Jehovah, and pours out that wonderful answer to the expression of Jehovah’s grace even in correcting David’s hasty desire to glorify Him.

Who am I, O Lord Jehovah? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord Jehovah; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant’s house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord Jehovah? And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord Jehovah, knowest thy servant. For thy word’s sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them. Wherefore thou art great, O Lord Jehovah: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel? [2 Sam. 7:18-23].

Could any words so well present this admirable feature of David’s faith -- that he so much the more appreciated the people as Jehovah’s people because he had appreciated Jehovah? For His grace to himself and his house he has now to bless Him.

It is granted that, where we are occupied with the people first, we are never right. Who could ever trust a man’s love for the church until he is content with the love of Christ alone? But when you have got the sense of what Christ is, when you are filled with His glory and with His love, then not to enter into His feelings toward the church would be the most unnatural of all things. It is more than doubtful whether it is really possible, but there may be something like it occasionally. There is an ultra-spirituality which loudly professes that it cares for nothing but Christ, while it despises the testimony of Christ and the fellowship of saints. This I believe to be a most offensive thing in the sight of God; and it is shown by the person isolating himself in heart and ways from all that tries as well as exercises heart and conscience. It will be found contrariwise, my brethren, that the more truly you are isolated in the power of faith to Christ, the more precious the children of God become to the heart; but for this very reason you cannot endure their walking apart from the Lord’s will. It deepens your judgment of the condition in which they may be practically; but then it strengthens your desire to see them really delivered out of it.

Something of this sort you may trace running through all scripture. It does not matter where we search; the darker the time, the plainer it appears. Take for instance Daniel. Did any one ever love Israel more than he did those in Babylon? Yet he assuredly felt the condition of the people more gravely than any other; and it was because the power of faith isolated him so truly to the Lord that he loved them, and this for God’s glory in them. I do not doubt that practically he walked in the empire a lonely man: few there beyond the three companions of his youth could appreciate his feelings; but I am persuaded that he loved Israel so much the more because Jehovah was all to him.

Similarly, though in a comparatively good time and quite other circumstances, we find David now communing with the counsels of God. It was at the time of fresh power and blessing to Israel where the name of Zion, as it were, gives character to the period, and the putting forth of divine power and goodness by David makes it an epoch in Israel. But whether one look at Moses or David or Daniel, at the beginning or middle or end, after all the Lord is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever; and the effect is the same in the heart of those that love Him. It may be modified by our circumstances, and the state of the people of God of course; but it is the same principle always. It was David’s portion then to enjoy Jehovah’s love, and not merely to himself but to His people, yet to be the witnesses of His glory as enjoying it themselves.

Hence David launches out into praise.

What one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, Jehovah, art become their God. And now, O Jehovah God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said [2 Sam. 7:23-25].

Such grace was indeed a great thing to say and do, but not too much. What could be too much for God? It made David nothing; but for this very reason David’s heart just forgets himself, and there is no true dignity that is not founded on self-forgetfulness. But the only thing which ensures its reality is the sense of the grace and the presence of the
Lord. David enjoyed it most deeply at this very time. And now, O Jehovah God, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O Jehovah God, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever [2 Sam. 7:28-29].

In the next chapter (2 Sam. 8) we hear of wars, and the Philistines and the Moabites subdued. We read of Hadadezer, king of Zobah, smitten, and the Syrians who would succour him also put down. At the same time some of the Gentiles come to bless the king with presents, and all those rarities that befit the character of the kingdom; in short power, glory, and blessing fill the scene. Further, the Edomites are made subject to the throne. Lastly, the administrative order and government of David are brought before us in due season, as well as his own place as supreme.

And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people. And Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the host; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder {2 Sam. 8:15-16}.

The priests, and the scribes, and the various other officers are brought before us, each in his place.

Then in 2 Sam. 9 a different picture opens before us. The heart of David yearns now, not for subjecting others, but for the exercise of that grace that God had shown to his own soul. And so he thinks of the house of Saul. Were there any of them to whom he could show the kindness of God {2 Sam. 9:3}?

On this most grateful scene we need not pause long. It is happily no strange tale to almost all of us, being the account of David’s wonderful grace to Mephibosheth.

So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king’s table; and was lame on both his feet [2 Sam. 9:13].

After this another scene opens (2 Sam. 10), in which David wished to show kindness, not to Jonathan’s line of the house of Saul, but to Hanun, the son of Nahash, as his father had shown kindness to David. This was completely misunderstood. The Ammonites could not appreciate the grace of David’s heart, but only suspected mischief, as the wicked naturally do.

And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, Thinkest thou that David doth honor thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it? Wherefore Hanun took David’s servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away [2 Sam. 10:3, 4].

The insult was told to David, who quietly met the matter; but at the same time it was committed to Joab; and certainly the vengeance taken was grateful to him. Joab took them, and, as we know, spite of the Syrians who sought to shield them. Resistance was vain. They were punished severely. The power of the throne of David was firmly settled everywhere.

The next chapter (2 Sam. 11) introduces the first dark shade since David came to the throne.

And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah.

There was a bitter vengeance.

But David tarried still at Jerusalem {2 Sam. 11:1}.

I doubt that the soul of David was thoroughly with the Lord either in taking his ease, or in wreaking the vengeance that had been poured on the Ammonite. At all events the history that follows is too painful for us to dwell much on at this time. It need only be briefly touched on. His heart was ensnared, and sin soon followed -- the gravest sin, more particularly in such a one as David. It was followed, as sin usually is, by the worst efforts to cover all, and he who did the wrong with Bathsheba tried ineffectually to conceal his sin by having home his faithful servant Uriah; and when this failed to gloss over his own wickedness, he devised the means by which Uriah should be brought to his grave. Thus did the fallen king still more pursue, and now without a check, the course of wickedness on which he had entered. Oh, what sin and shame for David!

The next chapter (2 Sam. 12) brings Nathan again forward, who comes and puts before the king the case of the two men in the city, the one rich and the other poor.

The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him {2 Sam. 12:2-4}.

And David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man {2 Sam. 12:5}.

Do not always trust people when they show indignation with vehemence. David even then could feel hotly enough about evil. Alas! there was no self-judgment, nor is there a single feature more terrible in the sin of David than the long time he gave himself up to it, apparently without a right feeling as to man, or exercise of conscience as to God; so that, even when it was plainly enough set parabolically before him, his anger was kindled only against another man’s wrong. When Nathan came, David might well have had his
ears open to know whether there was any word from God about such a sin as he had been guilty of; but not so. Let us not deceive ourselves, my brethren, or be deceived by others. The only thing that enables us to judge aright anything in others is self-judgment. If we are to see clearly the mote in a brother, let us not forget to take the beam out of our own eyes. David here stands as a solemn instance that he who is so quick to see sin in another may be utterly blind to his own grave and unjudged iniquity. Hence too he says quickly,

As Jehovah liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith Jehovah God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of Jehovah, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor [2 Samuel 12:5-11].

Mark the solemn principle of retribution in this instance, so habitually found in fact as in scripture. Our sin always gives the form of our chastening.

I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor.

And further.

Thou didst it secretly.

Here comes in contrast, as before there was analogy, the one or the other characterising God's ways, as each would mark most impressively the deceitfulness of sin for man, and God's eternal abhorrence of it.

Thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against Jehovah. And Nathan said unto David, Jehovah also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die [2 Samuel 12:11-13].

He had sentenced himself, but God in every sense is greater.

Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die [2 Samuel 12:14].

Nevertheless of that very mother -- of her who had been the wife of Uriah the Hittite -- did the grace of God raise up the heir to the throne of Israel, whom He made His firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth and type of Christ in peaceful glory; as David had been in suffering and warlike power -- the latter yet to be fulfilled. Truly the ways of God are wonderful. Here again we see, whatever may have been the sin of gaining her as the king did, the sovereign grace of God did not blot out the tie that was formed, but designed out of that connection, when the sin was thoroughly detected and judged, to raise up the chosen son of David, who sets aside the others that might have pleaded a prior claim after the flesh.

It is a chapter profitable for the soul to consider well and often, the bitter grief of David, his exercise of heart when the child was smitten, and his admirable conduct after God had taken away the child. Then it was that he hears his servants' entreaty, and is comforted. Just when affectionate men naturally would give themselves up to unrestrained and hopeless grief, in the wisdom which grace inspired his tears were stayed, his heart turned with confidence to the Lord, and he partook of the refreshment provided for him. What a warning, yet what consolation, for him! David, however low he had fallen, was a real man of God; not only the object of grace, but as a rule one deeply exercised and habitually formed by it. He returns therefore to the spring of his strength and blessing. Accordingly we shall find in the sequel that God had good things in store, in the midst of sorrow and chastening, for the penitent king of Israel.
In the sketch proposed of these books of scripture there is of course no pretension to notice every point of interest they contain, but only a general comprehensive view, as far as the Lord enables me to present, of their main course and objects. The most careless reader must perceive, that as Saul holds a considerable place in the First Book of Samuel, so Absalom occupies not a little space in the Second, and both of them in collision with David. Now the nature of inspiration supposes that God, in selecting such persons or facts as are regarded there, had a divine object before Him. It is the main business of an interpreter to learn and set out according to his measure the design that the Spirit of God appears to have had in view.

It is clear on the face of it that the chief feature of Absalom’s history is, in the end of it at least, opposition to David: he stood in the nearest relationship to the king, but he was none the less an antagonist. Now as David all through, whether in the First or in the Second Book of Samuel, is a type of the Lord Jesus, there ought not to be a question, as it appears to me, that the Spirit of God is giving us, in the adversaries of David, antichrists. Only the antichrist has qualities in his type, which differ quite as much as those of the antitype will, in express scripture or in reality. Thus in the New Testament, where he is brought before us directly and as a matter of doctrine or prophecy, John describes the antichrist first as one that denies the Christ; then as going on with a growing audacity (and this is more particularly his opposition to the Christian revelation) to deny the Father and the Son [1 John 2:22]. For he is the liar and the murderer. The woman of Tekoah was employed by the subtle malice. The nearness and character of his relationship to the king made the guilt of his conduct the more dreadful before God and man. It is this which to my mind explains the large space that is given both to king Saul’s jealous persecution on the one hand, and to Absalom’s attempt at usurping the power of David on the other. It is true that at first Absalom by no means shows out the violent form which his wickedness was finally to take. He uses a certain craft which no doubt succeeded with the simple though repulsive to the upright. Before his treason we hear the details of his blood-thirsty cruelty, which no provocation could palliate, not even that most gross conduct of Amnon towards his sister Tamar. He will be so with antichrist. All his evil will not come out fully at once. Surely then it is a most solemn consideration for all our souls -- the moral principle which we see in these cases. Nearness to what is good invariably develops evil in its worst features. There could be no such thing as antichrist if there were not Christianity and Christ. It is the fulness of the grace and truth that is revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus that brings out the worst evil in man. And even Satan himself could not accomplish his designs against the glory of God save by rising up against the Man who is the special object of God’s delight and of His counsels in glory.

Hence we find a pretty full answer to all this in the twofold type: first, Saul the adversary of David in his earlier career, when he had not been yet seated on the throne; then Absalom, not all at once, but by degrees coming out, though no doubt full of craft and blood-thirstiness before be turned against his father. The liar and the murderer is betrayed even in the earliest account of him which scripture brings before us. God, on the other hand, was judging the family against his father. The liar and the murderer is betrayed even in the earliest account of him which scripture brings before us. God, on the other hand, was judging the family of David, and speaking to David’s own heart and conscience in the sin and shame and scandal that covered as a whole the family with reproach; and this it is that lets us see Absalom. He will avenge his sister’s wrong himself. He has made up his mind to shed his brother’s blood; he cloaks it under fair pretenses. Amnon is ensnared to his ruin (2 Sam. 13).

But there is more than this; there is a magnificent display of divine mercy shadowed in the way in which Absalom was brought home; and here again we have another witness of the same truth that has been often referred to. It is only after God has shown His rich mercy that Satan and man mature and work out their deepest malice. The woman of Tekoah was employed by the subtle Joab, who knew well that the heart of the king was yearning
after his guilty son. At the same time he knew that the king had difficulty in conscience, for he was the executor of the law of God. To him God had entrusted the sword in Israel, and Absalom had brought the stain of blood on the people and the land of God, as well as on the family of the king.

On every ground therefore David was called upon to assert what was due to God against his own son. But this is only one of a number of instances that shrew the whole line of divine history where God, while He does insist on righteousness and resent all failure in maintaining it here below, never abdicates grace, but always holds the title of divine mercy above the claims of earthly righteousness. And certainly David was one who could not resist such an appeal. There might be a certain struggle; and the very fact too that Absalom was his son would to an upright mind make the struggle harder: was it really possible for David to deny that grace which was his only ground and chief boast before God? This then was what Joab, who had not the slightest appreciation of grace himself, would nevertheless know to be the surest avenue to David’s heart: and this it was that the woman of Tekoah therefore pleads. She comes before the king, who asks her what was her sorrow. She puts in a parabolic way the position in which she stood, saying,

Thy handmaid had two sons, and they two strove together in the field, and there was none to part them, but the one smote the other, and slew him. And, behold, the whole family is risen against thine handmaid, and they said, Deliver him that smote his brother, that we may kill him, for the life of his brother whom he slew; and we will destroy the heir also: and so they shall quench my coal which is left, and shall not leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the earth. And the king said unto the woman, Go to thine house, and I will give charge concerning thee. And the woman of Tekoah said unto the king, My lord, O king, the iniquity be on me, and on my father’s house: and the king and his throne be guiltless. And the king said, Whosoever saith ought unto thee, bring him to me, and he shall not touch thee any more. Then said she, I pray thee, let the king remember Jehovah thy God, that thou wouldest not suffer the revengers of blood to destroy any more, lest they destroy my son. And he said, As Jehovah liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth [2 Sam. 14:6-11].

Having thus secured the ground, the woman begins to open the secret. The king had now pledged his royal word. Grace was very dear to his heart. His feelings were moved and stirred deeply. It was no new thing for him, as his procedure to Mephibosheth could attest. Who knew or valued so highly the kindness of God [2 Sam. 9:3]?

He had known the need of it himself. Of this then Joab had taken advantage in putting forward this woman to plead before David the imaginary trouble of her house. Now the king’s conscience might be relieved. If he would spare another’s house, spite of guilt, would he not spare his own? This was what calmed his fears. Nothing could be more artfully devised. Hence we see how the woman gradually begins to explain what it was that was really aimed at.

Then the woman said, Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak one word unto my lord the king. And he said, Say on. And the woman said, Wherefore then hast thou thought such a thing against the people of God? for the king doth speak this thing as one which is faulty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished {2 Sam. 14:12-13}.

It was no question of her son, but of the king’s banished.

For we must needs die, she adds,

and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again: neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished may not be expelled from him {2 Sam. 14:14}.

It is the way of grace she pleads. Impossible for David to resist this. If God devises means that His banished should return, who was David to differ from God? If God, with all His unstained holiness, with all His jealous regard to righteousness, nevertheless devises His efficacious means (and David knew it well), who or what was David that he should hold out against the pitiful case of his banished one? of Absalom driven to another land because of the blood of Amnon, the blood of the guilty brother that he had shed in avenging his sister’s dishonor? So it was then that the king, moved by it, listens to her.

The word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable: for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad: therefore Jehovah thy God will be with thee {2 Sam. 14:17}.

Yet righteousness was not guarded here, as God does perfectly in Christ. Hence a suspicion arises that all was not straight. The king accordingly says,

Hide not from me, I pray thee, the thing that I shall ask thee. And the woman said, Let my lord the king now speak. And the king said, Is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this? And the woman answered and said, As thy soul liveth, my lord the king, none can turn to the right hand or to the left from ought that my lord the king hath spoken: for thy servant Joab, he bade me, and put all these words in the mouth of thine handmaid: to fetch about this form of speech hath thy servant Joab done this thing: and my lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth {2 Sam. 14:18-20}.

Where the eye is single, the whole body is full of light. There could be no doubt that the allegory was admirably drawn. Alas! it was the parable of one whose heart was not in the matter. How solemn a thing it is, my brethren, to see from time to time in the course of scripture history, as we
may in fact now, that there are natural minds who can sometimes see more clearly what becomes a saint of God than saints themselves feel. But it is only those who know how to turn the grace of God to their own purpose when it suits them. This is what Joab was now doing by the woman of Tekoah. He held the truth in unrighteousness, we shall see with what result as far as Absalom was concerned.

But the king, when he did discover the aim, did not swerve from his word. He says to Joab,

Behold now, I have done this thing.

He, indebted to grace, and to nothing so much as grace, could not possibly disavow the appeal of grace. Hence his command,

Go therefore, bring the young man Absalom again
(2 Sam. 14:21).

Joab thanks the king, and acts. But David is not indifferent to the guilt contracted by the past, and Absalom is forbidden to come near.

The king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king’s face
(2 Sam. 14:24).

Next the Spirit of God gives us the description of the person of Absalom. There was everything to attract the eye, everything to meet the natural desires, of one who would wish the comeliest person in Israel to be the king. Nature had wrought formerly in the choice of Saul. It was repeated again with Absalom (2 Sam. 14).

In the next chapter (2 Sam. 15) the wicked plans of the traitor begin to ripen and unfold themselves, and this, it will be marked, only after the richest grace had been shown him. This indeed was necessary. It was not till the banished one had found means in the grace of the king to return; it was after that which answers as much as anything could to the grace of God in the gospel. Then, consequent on all the mercy shown him, does a more terrible character of antichrist display itself in Absalom than had ever been seen in king Saul. What then appears to be the distinction intended? Is it not that Saul shows us antichrist more as the consequence of Jewish apostasy; Absalom more as the consequence of Christian apostasy? Both these traits must be found in the antichrist of the last days; and this is one reason too why, although there were antichristian features when the Lord Jesus was found here below, the full display of the antichrist could not be until after all the grace of God in Christianity had been fully brought out.

This also explains why there should be a double type of antichrist -- one in each of these two Books of Samuel. We have the display of the fullest possible evil of man -- one in pride and real envy and affected contempt, and at last of murderous hatred toward David. All this was found in Saul. But in Absalom’s case there was a still deeper character of lawlessness, as there was a nearer and more dependent tie to the king. Besides, there had been the richest manifestation of mercy to himself. The most dreadful wickedness on his own part had been met by greater love and grace on the part of David. After all this then we find Absalom laying his plots and carrying out his schemes for the purpose of supplanting the king his father.

This was the manner of the man:

And it came to pass after, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee
(2 Sam. 15:1-3).

Two principal objects are apparent: the undermining of the king, and this in order to the glorifying himself. Hence as the readiest way he flatters the people, whom he never loved as David did, but despised, and assuredly none so much as those taken in his nets of fair words and good speeches.

Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel [2 Sam. 15:4-6].

It need not be argued at length that there was neither righteousness nor love in all this; neither the righteousness that discriminated the mutual relationships of himself and of those that came, and yet more of all to the king, without which there could not be anything right; neither was there the love that sought the good of others instead of its own things, but unbridled will and the loftiest ambition. His object was himself, and himself too for the vilest purposes -- for his own exaltation by the overthrow of his father, whom God had anointed king of Israel.

And it came to pass,

it is said

after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto Jehovah, in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If Jehovah shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve Jehovah
(2 Sam. 15:7, 8).

Observe here the profanation of the name of Jehovah, which always accompanies the worst evil of men on the earth.

And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as
ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron. And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing. And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom (2 Sam. 15:9-12).

Another character is here which was necessary to complete the character of antichrist; that is, the combination of kingly power in Israel with spiritual pretension. There will be the highest assumption of a religious sort. The antichrist is not barely infidel. Infidelity there will be, but always a show of religion along with it, whether in the same personage or in one that is joined with him in type. That which brings in an evil spiritual power is necessary to give the true and full character of the antichrist. Hence Ahithophel is associated with Absalom. So, as we know, the second beast, or false prophet, in the Revelation symbolizes this same personage. Notably he has two horns like the lamb. There is a double character of power. It is not simply that he is or has a horn. He is not a mere king, but a beast with two horns. And at this time it would seem that it is no longer a question of imitating the priestly power of Christ, but he will pretend to have not only a kingly place but a prophet-character, an understanding of the mind of God, just as Ahithophel here, as we see, who had been David’s counsellor before but is now Absalom’s. There is thus a combination of the false prophet with royalty. These at the close will be united in the antichrist.

I am not now speaking of the great imperial power, the beast {Rev. 13:1-10}, in those days that bring on judgment. For this we must look elsewhere; for it will not have its seat in Jerusalem, nor will the sphere of its dominion be the land of Israel. There will be the place where the final conflict takes place; there the scene of the destruction of the beast and the false prophet, and of the associated kings that are with them.

Such are a few of the leading points which may help, not only to guide souls, but also to preserve from mistakes too often made, to which we are as liable as any. There is no power of preservation in the truth except by simple subjection to the word of God. If we begin to give ourselves credit for anything like a definite system of truth, more particularly when it takes a traditional shape carried on from one to another, I am persuaded that the Lord will not be with the enterprise. Of all men, we need most to walk in sustained subjection to God and His word. No doubt all the children of God do; but if God has brought us out from the creeds and stereotyped forms of human arrangement, be assured we are not the less in danger. It is not meant in the least that there is no security. Who can overlook the fact that those who have trusted creeds and formularies have little to boast of their orthodoxy at this present time? We can well see too that there is no end of inconsistency; yea, the grossest contradiction of that which is avowed and confessed may be and is carried on, though one may be thankful for whatever check there is to deadly error; for the value of a creed at best is chiefly in its protest against heterodoxy.

Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God {Rom. 10:17}, not by a creed. And the infidelity of men who subscribe all the old creeds is so glaring that mere lawyers and men of the world in general are ashamed at the scandal. This is not said to wound any one, nor as a busy body in other men’s matters, but rather for our souls’ profit, believing that there are none whom God will hold more decidedly to what we profess.

But is it not our joy, and the sure means of security, to cherish continual and unqualified subjection in our souls to the truth of God as He has revealed it -- not to the thoughts that we may receive through others, however striking or helpful? Let us be grateful for their help; yet it is our duty to judge all by the word. Let us thankfully enjoy whatever of truth the Lord’s servants can minister to us, but no deductions can ever be a ground of faith. Whatever may be taught by this one or preached by that must be brought to the touchstone of scripture, instead of being taken out of its place and made a test of the truth. The word of God is not only the great source, but the only standard, of the truth. Do we desire from God the truth? We have His precious word to teach us that truth with certainty. Ministry in the word is a blessed help; and it would be proud and base to despise the help of God’s servants -- ungrateful towards Him, haughty toward them, and injurious to our own souls.

They shall be all taught of God {John 6:45, see also Isa. 54:13} is true of all saints, but it in no way excludes teachers and other ordinary means, though there may be extraordinary instances where they are taught without this or that aid. But it is in general an unfounded pretension to have learnt directly from God through His own word, independently of those He has set in the body of Christ for this express purpose. And it will be found, in fact, that those who boast of not having learnt through such means as He usually employs know little, being really too proud to be taught. To the word of God then we need to pay heed if we would have the assurance of divine teaching, even if it be only a question about the antichrist. It is, of course, apart from those foundation truths that are immediately bound up with our own relationship to God; and we may bless Him that so it is and must be in His wisdom. Still we must remember that it is by the truth that we are sanctified. Nor can we afford, for the Lord’s name sake, any more than for our own souls’ good, to admit lightly any thought into our minds which is not of Him. Indeed, no matter how distant, where any thing is received into the heart that is not the truth of God, as being false, and a foreign ingredient, it will work evil in various ways; it will surely embroil other scriptures, and make us to confound things that differ. The
consequence will be that we know not what the effect of even a trifling departure from the truth may be in thus destroying the symmetry and the perfectness of the truth of God in His word. The fact is that the truth is one, and therefore, where any one part is misapprehended or rejected, there is danger of weakening the rest. I am now speaking, of course, not of that which concerns our own souls with God, but merely of profitably using every part of God’s word.

Thus then, if we have been guided aright in what is before us, there is in the type the union of both -- on the one hand royal power (and this was what Absalom was affecting for himself); but along with it there was joined with him a falsely prophetic character typified by Ahithophel. The two were connected together, just as we saw Saul himself at the last finding his resource in the witch of Endor. There was an evil spiritual adviser of the lowest kind to which he was driven. See too Pharaoh and the magicians, also Balak and Balaam. So constantly are these two characters linked in opposition to the Christ of God.

However this be, Absalom is seen successful apparently at first; and there speedily follows the solemn sight of the king obliged to be a fugitive from the throne, and the capital, and the sanctuary of Israel.

David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that were with him. And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness. And lo Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God; and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city [2 Sam. 15:22-24].

How beautiful the contrast with a former scene, but too familiar! The people and priests in their panic before the Philistines brought out the ark of God, if peradventure it might serve as a charm against the swords of their enemies; but here David refuses to employ it selfishly and irreverently, whatever his need and peril -- a man, if ever there was one of old on earth, with living faith in God, and real reverence for the sign of His presence in Israel; for there was no one that ever showed such a value, and this believingly, for the ark of God, as king David. Nevertheless in this supreme hour of his deepest extremity and greatest humiliation he refuses to jeopard the ark of God. He will not allow for his own sake the smallest shade cast upon it. What! he, David, call the ark of God out of Jerusalem? Far from it! David bids the sons of Zadok and the Levites carry it back to the city, where it is destined for ever to rest, once the Lord Jesus establishes it, and on this affecting and unselfish ground:

If I shall find favor in the eyes of Jehovah, he will bring me again, and show me both it, and his habitation: but if he thus say; I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him [2 Sam. 15:25, 26].

Was not this a heart, my brethren, which in the face of all his faults accepted his humiliation, taking it from the hand of God to justify Him? He was one who knew that, whatever the grace of God already shown to him, it was not exhausted yet. Far from yielding to a suspicion of God’s goodness to him, questioning his own manifold shortcomings, or palliating his gross failure, we see one prepared to bow to whatever God would do, and to bless Him for it. David would plead for the honor of God, cost what it might to himself. And this is faith, which appropriates to its own need and joy what it sees in God. But just because it is faith, it will never allow that what its little range of vision takes in can equal, but must ever be surpassed by the grace that is in Him. In short, faith, as it always gets what it seeks, so it is always assured that there is more, never pretending to reach up to the fulness of the grace of God. At the same time it does not listlessly stop short, satisfied with what it has, however thankful. But it confesses that faith in man is never a match for grace in God, so to speak; draw as it may, it can never fathom His goodness. It may dive more and more in, but it can never get to the bottom.

In this spirit it was that we find the king going up by the ascent of mount Olivet. It may remind us of a greater than he; but the One greater than David, though He knew tears as none ever did, did not then go up weeping. Not that His heart was not filled with the deepest feelings of love yet of sorrow for man and Israel; for His own too in their midst, soon to enjoy the Comforter He would send down from heaven as the seal of redemption. But for David it was a day of shame, not only for the people and his guilty son, but not without ground for himself personally; it was a day when he could not deny the righteous hand of God stretched out over him and his seed in the correction of faults neither few nor light. He wept therefore

as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up [2 Sam. 15:30].

But furthermore one told David, saying,

Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom [2 Sam. 15:31].

David turns to God. He knew the gravity of the tidings, but this very thing brought before him the spring of his confidence, as surely as he saw the hand of Satan in it. A father’s love might abstain from pleading against Absalom; but David could now unburden his heart to God. Therefore he says,

O Jehovah, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness [2 Sam. 15:31].

And Jehovah heard, and answered.
Nevertheless, the king was not without comfort and joy. He was not without that which consoled, soothed, and cheered his spirit in the day of his calamity. This is brought out before us in the next chapter (2 Sam. 16), where

Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine. And the king said unto Ziba, What meanest thou by these? And Ziba said, The asses be for the king’s household to ride on; and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink [2 Sam. 16:1, 2].

And so it is, beloved friends, that, where grace is in the heart, the Lord will give the opportunity to show it. This He is giving to us at the present time, while Jesus is still despised; and He is despised, although they own Him in words to be seated on the throne.

So too, when we are gone to heaven, will He give to the godly remnant at the end of this age, and accept the sweet fruits of faith which shall display themselves in those that refuse what is false and of the enemy, as they look through clouds and difficulties, no doubt, but not without assurance, to the bright day of the kingdom that is about to be set up here below. This is what is figured by the faith that wrought by love, that we are shown in thus providing for David. But when the king arrives at Bahurim, he is subjected to a fresh trial in the way of insult; for these two things may now be together, fruits of grace and works of flesh inspired by Satan. Here Shimei cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left [2 Sam. 16:6].

The mighty men naturally knew no small indignation; but we hear the voice of the humbled king reproving his followers, too hasty to shed blood. No; it was from God that the humiliation came, and David accepts it thoroughly. Shimei shall not provoke him so as to lose a grain of the profit. The arm that would have crushed Shimei in a moment would have deprived David of a lesson never to be forgotten. If then a trusty warrior proposes to punish the wanton insolence of Shimei, the king breathes the spirit of meekness, even at that moment when the basest of men poured contempt on him.

Then said Abishai unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, and pray thee, and take off his head. And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because Jehovah hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so? [2 Sam. 16:9, 10].

We must remember that, before the Lord Jesus comes out as King, others will be put to the proof, and their faith and patient grace be tried in their measure as truly as ours. For us indeed the trial of our faith should be always. They will have it for a brief season, and severely. But now there is everything calculated to seduce us into the world, and cause us to overlook the moral glory of our calling, to forget Christ’s rejection and cross.

Indeed, the relationship seen here will apply fully to the latter-day saints, whereas it can only be ours in general spirit. For Christ is our Lord and Head. David was truly the king, and there was none other. But we know that, although the Lord Jesus be not yet sitting on His own throne, He is crowned with glory and honor. We know Him on what is after all a greater throne, and on a deeper title than that of Messiah; we know Him possessed of a larger glory and in a higher sphere; we know that it is He that will confer glory on the throne, instead of merely receiving glory from it; but for this very reason we have the opportunity of showing how far our faith in Christ exceeds and makes as nothing all Satan’s allurements to serve the world and forget our rejected Master. But the same thing in principle will be true for those that shall follow us. They will not, of course, have the same form of relationship to the Lord Jesus as we have; and the special part of the word of God that will bear on their souls and circumstances will be quite different from that which God intends for us now. There is a common groundwork, but much that is distinctive of each. And this is of great importance. It shows convincingly that it is not merely a question of God’s word, but of His Spirit; and the same Spirit who brings out the truth, and leads into our relationship with Christ above, will bring out to the souls of the righteous godly Jews by and by the expectation of the true King to come for the overthrow of antichrist with every other enemy at the close of the age, and to reign over Israel and the earth in the age to come.

This will furnish them with opportunities similar in principle to those which the Lord gave to Mephibosheth on the one hand, and of which Shimei took advantage on the other. There will be room both for despite and for reciprocation of grace between the Messiah and all who have waited for Him in that day.

In the end of the chapter we have another scene still reminding us of the great crisis. Hushai goes to Absalom and opposes in every way the counsel of Ahithophel. Thus also in those future days will the Lord know how to defeat all the plans of the devil. There was no doubt that Ahithophel of the two was the subtler -- the one best of all calculated to further the plans of Absalom; but the time was not yet come for anything but a shadowy effort.

There was then as now one

that letteth {see 2 Thess. 2:7}.

It was not yet the hour for apparent success. God confounds the plans accordingly, and Ahithophel is vexed to the utmost, and more and more as he finds there is one near Absalom who brings to nothing all his devices. This is set fully before us in 2 Sam. 17. The result was that

when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him
home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father {2 Sam. 17:23}.

The next chapter (2 Samuel 18) brings the solemn crisis before us. The battle takes place, and he that lifted himself up so proudly, he that had fawned on Israel to gain them over as his partisans against his father, he who sought dominion but not from God, setting himself against the glory of God and the king of Israel, dies a death of special shame and curse, hanging on a tree. Lifted up, as we know, by the very hair of his head which had been his vanity, as it was a part of his personal beauty, Absalom died as a fool dies; so had Jehovah Himself in His providence ordered the result, as he fled from the scene of his defeat. The king betrays the natural affection of a father’s heart, but, it may be, with too little sense of his son’s impious rebellion, or of God’s righteous retribution. This is brought before us in the most touching manner.

What need of details now? Suffice it to say that Joab comes in to reprove the king as he gives way to unmeasured grief, and cries with a loud voice,

O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son! {2 Sam. 19:4}.

The very people that had gained the victory for him could not but be vexed as they read an implied reproof in the king’s laments and tears. Joab therefore ventures to say,

Thou hast shamed this day the face of all thy servants which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; in that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well. Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by Jehovah, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night {2 Sam. 19:5-7}.

How evident that not yet did the king reign in righteousness; else Joab had never dared so to speak. Thus every type falls short of the truth. It must be so in the nature of things; and is it for us to find fault with the plain truth that the Lord Jesus is thus unapproachable? For what does it tell? The tale of all scripture -- the failure of the first man. The only one worthy of all homage and praise, of all confidence and love, is the second Man, the last Adam.

Then the king was pleased to sit in the gate.

And all the people came before the king, for Israel fled every man to his tent {2 Sam. 19:8}.

And then king David sends

to Zadok and to Abiathar the priest, saying, Speak unto the elders of Judah, saying, Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house. Ye are my brethren, ye are my bones and my flesh: wherefore then are ye the last to bring back the king? And say ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bone, and of my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab. And he bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man; so that they sent this word unto the king, Return thou, and all thy servants. So the king returned, and came to Gilgal to go to meet the king to conduct the king over Jordan {2 Sam. 19:11-15}.

And there it is that the blaspheming Shimei cowers before the returning king; for now those that had rendered a feigned obedience are being made manifest. Here too the king shows that he was by no means equal to the task that will be taken up and carried out in full by the true David only; for, wrought on by his feelings, he swears to Shimei that he shall not die -- an oath that could not avail when Solomon comes to the throne, as we learn from another book of scripture.

Next we find Mephibosheth and his sorrowful tale; and Barzillai the Gileadite comes before us with his grace in due season. The result of all is that the men of Israel come to the king and say,

Why have our brethren the men of Judah -- for it becomes now a rivalry of care and affection and honor for the king --

Why have our brethren the men of Judah stolen thee away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David’s men with him, over Jordan? And all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, Because the king is near of kin to us: wherefore then be ye angry for this matter? have we eaten at all of the king’s cost? or hath he given us any gift? And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye {2 Sam. 19:41-43}.

The king is now their portion and boast. If here we find nature again, nevertheless what a change as the king returned! He is borne forward to Jerusalem by the returning affections of the people. Another traitor is discovered in the person of Sheba -- overthrown still by the prompt zeal, as well as by the courage of Joab -- and all was order afresh in the kingdom. The latter part of this chapter shows us that the efforts of the enemy only turn to the greater honor of king David now reinstated in Jerusalem and the throne.

But in 2 Sam. 21 an instructive scene is introduced to us to which we may turn our attention for a moment. Whatever may be the grace and faithfulness of God, for the very same reason God is jealous of His word, and deals righteously wherever His name is pledged. We are all familiar with the fact that in the days of Joshua the Gibeonites had deceived the heads of Israel. They had palms themselves off on Joshua as coming from a far country, having for their own ends hidden the truth that they belonged to the accused
races of Canaan. The result was that Joshua and the other leaders of Israel committed the name of Jehovah, through the deceit of the Gibeonites, to sparing their lives, though in consequence of that deceit they were reduced to the condition of hewers of wood and drawers of water for the sanctuary. But Saul in his spurious zeal for God lost sight of what was so solemnly assured to the Gibeonites. Are you surprised that the king who would have taken away the life of his own son because of his rash oath, which Jonathan knew not, should feel lightly the oath that had been sworn by Joshua and the other leaders of Israel in the olden time? Wonder not; for the flesh, which here overstrains, there breaks down altogether.

It was no doubt long ago, and there are those who would ignore what is past for present ease. But time makes no difference, any more than place, in the things of God. What He looks to is His name, and by this are we also bound to keep His word and not deny His name. Saul forgot it. Can we not easily understand this? In him was no living faith whatever. There was only form, and this will sell the name. What He looks to is His name, and by this are we also bound to keep His word and not deny His name. Saul forgot it. Can we not easily understand this? In him was no living faith whatever. There was only form, and this will sell the name. The chastening fell not in the days of Saul, but at the same time when it suits for the price of a slave, though it may at the same time make the greatest show of devotedness. Doubtless Saul could vaunt his own superior zeal for the Lord in this -- that he at least was not going to be carried away by a mere name, and an obligation so long ago as to be obsolete. If the Gibeonites were Canaanites, woe be to them from king Saul! And so it was that there was a famine, not immediately after, but now in the days of David for three years. Two things particularly may well arrest attention in this as a great moral truth. It was a long time since the name of Jehovah was pledged; but does God ever forget? Secondly, it was by no means a short time since Saul had done the bloody deed, and yet no chastening had yet come from Jehovah. The chastening did not follow till a considerable time after. Such patience tests souls thoroughly. The chastening fell not in the days of Saul, but in those of David. Why? Because God will have all to enquire of Him; He will exercise His people in their common and continuous responsibility; He will make us feel and judge our forgetfulness of heart, our lack of looking to Himself. The evil might have been dealt with personally on Saul; but the patience of God on the one hand, and the solidarity of the people on the other, was more impressively taught when the blow fell in the days of David. People and king were thus forced to review what had been soon forgotten because taken too lightly when done. He at least is occupied with our ways, and the discipline may tarry a long time. He would have His people learn the reason why His hand was upon them.

If they confide in His righteousness, they will learn why it was the fitting time, and according to the wisdom of God, that the chastening should fall in the days of David rather than in those of Saul. If it had fallen in the days of Saul, the Lord had not been so enquired of. Here was one that felt for the honor of Jehovah. The blow came. If David had felt the sin, if the people had confessed it, if Jehovah's name had been cleared about it, the famine might not have befallen them as it actually did. The evil was done by another who was personally guilty. It is granted that neither David nor they were responsible for his acts, but they were responsible to feel and confess the wrong. It was done publicly by king Saul in Israel. Had they mourned the deed as tarnishing Jehovah's glory? There is no appearance that there was any such confession; and the Lord now will compel them to take up that sin most seriously under the pressure of a famine, repeated till He was glorified in the matter where the wrong was done. In fact the king was guilty, but had the people shown godly horror at his profanation of Jehovah's name? They were careless about it, one cannot doubt; and David wakes up now in answer to the call; and he, chastened of God, does truly feel it, as all Israel had at any rate to smart under the consequences. So then the famine comes, and David enquires of Jehovah. It is very evident that it required a heavy and prolonged dealing from God to make them feel; for it is said,

The famine came in the days of David three years, year after year (see 2 Sam. 21:1).

It is not that God takes pleasure in inflicting a sore plague on His people; but anything is good that leads us to draw near to God in self-judgment for a dishonor done to His name. It seems plain then that this scourge was required year after year to rouse the conscience of Israel, possibly even of David also. At length he enquires of Jehovah, who distinctly answers,

It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites (2 Sam. 21:1).

What a solemn lesson that God will not only not suffer unrighteousness to be done to the people that He loves, but even to the enemies that deceived them!

The righteous Jehovah loveth righteousness (Psa. 11:7).

It would be hard to see or ask a more patent proof of the delicacy and also the tenacity of God's holding to righteousness than His dealing in this very case with Israel for the oath passed to the Gibeonites. Every one can understand how He must feel about Israel or about David; but that God should be jealous for a wrong done under such circumstances, and so long ago, to the Gibeonites, is to my mind a most wholesome lesson of the God with whom we have to do.

Nor this only.

And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them, . . . What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make an atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of Jehovah? (2 Sam. 21:2, 3).

This is another important point: their consciences must be satisfied, their hearts consoled and at rest for the wrong that had been done to them. Yet there is no disguise as to the people in question. Now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel. The Spirit of God expressly calls our attention to their origin and race. They were of the remnant of the Amorites.

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– and you know what the Amorites were –
and the children of Israel had sworn unto them, and
Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children
of Israel and Judah [2 Sam. 21:2].

An excellent thing, is it not -- zeal for the people of God?
But zeal only for God's people, or nominally for God
Himself, can never sanctify disrespect to His name, even if
through trickery only that name had been pledged to His
worst enemies. For in truth it was not a question of those to
whom the name was pledged, but of His name that was
sworn thus. If Jehovah's name was given as a shield to any,
Jehovah would be the unsparing and most righteous
guardian of its sanctity.

Then of the Gibeonites when they come, David asks,
What shall I do for you? And wherewith shall I
make the atonement, that ye may bless the
inheritance of Jehovah? And the Gibeonites said unto
him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of
his house; neither for us shalt thou kill any man in
Israel. And he said, What ye shall say, that will I do
for you. And they answered the king, The man that
consumed us, and that devised against us that we
should be destroyed from remaining in any of the
coasts of Israel, let seven men of his sons be
delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto
Jehovah in Gibeah of Saul, whom Jehovah did
choose. And the king said, I will give them. But the
king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the
son of Saul, because of Jehovah's oath that was
between them [2 Sam. 21:3-7].

We must carefully look to this, and we shall always find
God with us in it. Never should we sacrifice one duty in
doing another. However important it may be for instance to
pay God homage outside, we must never let slip God's
honor at home in the family. It is a blessed thing to serve
Him abroad, but there will be a sorry maintenance of His
glory outside the house if He is not honored within. And if
we find therefore the Gibeonite's oath from Jehovah on one
side, there was no less the oath to Jonathan, Saul's son and
his seed on the other. No doubt a hasty spirit would have
sacrificed the one for the other; the wisdom of God enables
us to maintain both. This is fairly seen in the conduct of
David.

And further, the very execution of divine judgment
introduces the deeply pathetic story of Saul's concubine:
And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth,
and spread it for her upon the rock, from the
beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them
out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the
air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field
by night. And it was told David what Rizpah the
daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done
(2 Sam. 21:10, 11).

This was not a slight thing to David. No doubt God's name
demanded vindication, and it was right. It was due to the
Gibeonites that they should be satisfied. God was
compelling them to judge the case that the guilt might be
expiated; but it was more than right -- it was beautiful and
suitable that Rizpah should thus spread the deep sorrow of
her heart before God. At this juncture David shows too
on his part what was lovely and becoming in the king of
Israel. Far was he from insulting the memory of the late
king; for the very one that had given up his sons to die went
and took the bones of Saul: this was the very time that he
took them -- showing the last honor to the departed king of
Israel and his family.

And David went and took the bones of Saul and the
bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh-
gilead, which had stolen them from the street of
Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them,
when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa: and he
brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the
bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the
bones of them that were hanged. And the bones of
Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country
of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his
father: and they performed all that the king
commanded. And after that God was intreated for
the land {2 Sam. 21:12-14}.

The close of the chapter tells us of the prowess of some
of David's servants on behalf of the waning strength of the
king.

But at this point it were well to heed the remarkable
manner in which the Spirit of God has put together the two
next chapters. Certainly such a conjunction is not after the
manner of men. 2 Sam. 22 consists, as is well known, of
portions substantially given again in the Book of Psalms.
Thus Psa. 18 is made here more striking because it is put
along with the last words, as they are called, of David, in
2 Sam. 23. Now a comparison of these two will reward
every spiritual mind. For what is the distinctive point of
2 Sam. 22? The identification of Israel's history with David
as the type of the Messiah, Nothing can be more striking to
any person that would patiently and intelligently meditate
the chapter than the remarkable way in which the grand
events of the history of Israel -- their deliverance from
Egypt, their being brought through the Red Sea, the defeat
of their enemies -- are all blended with the Messiah, first
entering into the sorrows and troubles of the people, then
brought out of them at last to be their deliverer, the head not
only of Israel but of the Gentiles. Here therefore we find a
course of sorrow and of suffering that ends in joy and
triumph.

How different is the character of 2 Sam. 23!
These be the last words of David. David the son of
Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high,
the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet
psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of Jehovah spoke
by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of
Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that
ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of
God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds (the anticipation of the day of Jehovah Himself); as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow [2 Sam. 23:1-5].

Thus we find two things -- the bright expectation of the kingdom, with the solemn sense that the time was not yet come. No man felt it more than king David. The fact that God put into his mouth the anticipations of the Messiah -- that he himself knew that he in a striking manner (the most so of any man up to that day) was made the progenitor and type of the Messiah -- this very fact made his own shortcomings, errors, and sins more poignantly felt. Well he knew that those failures of himself were darkly shadowed out, and retributively brought to mind, in the grief and shame and dishonor of his house. Thus we find a double current in the heart of David -- his faith bright and undimmed in the joy that was coming with the true king who would surely sit upon his throne; but meanwhile his was the softened spirit, the broken and the contrite heart, of a man that knew what moral humiliation means as regarded himself and all his house. What in David could be more lovely in itself, or more suited to the actual state of things, than these two facts, both made true in his soul? And should it not be the very same thing with us now? Is it not important to see that the sense of our failure, as well as of what we are, is never meant to interfere with the brightness of our confidence in the Lord? Conscience must be exercised unhinderedly; and so must faith also. Grace provides for both in the believer’s heart. It is excellent thus to look onward, the eye filled with the glory of the Lord Jesus, and the heart resting on His grace. But there should also be the unsparing judgment of ourselves in the light, and consequently due and suited confession. Where this is, there will be the lowliness that becomes men who have no standing-place but in grace. God forbid that this should be wanting in any Christian. It is hard to preserve the balance of truth; but at least it is well to desire it. Let us beware of having the appearance of one-sidedness. To be cast down with the constant sense of shame because of what we are, to hang our heads as bulrushes, is a poor testimony to the love of Christ, and to the victory God gives us through Him. But it is a worse state where the recognition of His grace is misused to enfeeble conscience and destroy sensibility as to sin, above all as to our own sins.

It is well that we should know that the path of faith is far removed from either of these two things. For we are entitled to enjoy the brightness of what Christ is and has done for us; but there is also the unfailing and never-to-be-forgotten sense of what it cost Him so to suffer for us.

David then anticipated the two things as perhaps no Old Testament saint as far as I am aware up to that day had ever done. It is evident too that, as he began with a very simple confidence in the Lord, so he went through a most heart-breaking process in his experience.

The kingdom is before him here. He sees clearly the judgment of the wicked.

The sons of Belial, as he says,

shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands: but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place [2 Sam. 23:6, 7].

This will never be till Jesus execute the judgment.

Then follow the names of his mighty men, and certainly there is one act among them that may well read a lesson of the gravest kind to us. I do not allude now to the brave men that broke through the army of the Philistines, and brought to David of the water of Bethlehem that he longed for. I speak of the grace which, when it was brought, refused to touch it, of the faith that could look on that water, much as he had longed for it, as the blood of those mighty men that had risked their lives. Oh far more of this self-renouncing power of faith!

On the great deeds of these heroic men we need not dwell now, save to make this simple remark: God looks for another kind of might now. It is not so much the worth of doing that He values as the lot of suffering, what one of our own poets has called in prose “the irresistible might of weakness.” We may well covet this in the name of the Lord Jesus -- that power which is most of all shown in being nothing that Christ may be magnified, in accepting whatever of scorn, shame, loss or persecution, the Lord sees meet for us to bear, because we take our side unqualifiedly with Him and with His truth in a day when not merely the world, or man in general, but even Christendom is departed from Him. And there is no trial so great as this, because in it we see those that the Lord loves taking part against His name with those that hate Him.

To appear even to blame the children of God ought to be a pain to us. To differ from, and by differing to condemn, in word or deed, those we esteem better than ourselves, must lead to searching of our own heart, but not to question the unerring word of God -- rather to confirmation of faith; but not the less ought the testimony He gives us to be taken up and borne unflinchingly, only let us be sure that it is the will of the Lord. There is nothing that gives such firmness both to do and to suffer as the certainty of what the will of the Lord is. May we learn it! This was what these brave men felt and proved. This assurance nerved their arm with might; this by grace gave them victory. It was not their strength, nay, it was their faith, and there are no victories so precious in the eyes of God. But, beloved brethren, I believe that we have and that all the children of God have as bright an opportunity, yea a brighter still. For have not you now the path marked out for you in the world? Oh, may your faith win victory! But
remember the only victories that God now registers as precious in His eyes are those won under the shadow and in the power of the cross of Christ -- those that most take their stamp from His death. This is our one sign: with this let us conquer in faith. We shall reign with Christ by and by; let us be content to suffer with and for Him now: what can the world do if we suffer? To it an evident token of perdition, to us of salvation.

2 Sam. 24 brings before us one scene more, with which the book closes.

And again the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah. For the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which was with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people {2 Sam. 24:1, 2}. Oh, what a forgetfulness of the Lord! He was everything to David, and everything to Israel, yet David was now repeating the sin of Saul in principle. The people would have a king, when God was their king; and the king thinks of the people only as his own. The people forgot their highest portion was God, and wanted to be like the nations; and the king whom God gave now sought a people just like a Gentile. It was the worst unfaithfulness in David, now evidently a snare to the king. It was judged in Israel; how much more judged in David! Even Joab was alarmed and shocked. He felt that it was not only a crime, but (what he cared for far more) a blunder. Joab would not have stuck much at a sin if it had seemed useful politically; but Joab was too good a politician to be guilty of a blunder, and his quick eye soon perceived that the numbering of Israel was a fatal mistake; not that he cared to please Jehovah, but he would avoid His displeasure, and felt for the interests of the kingdom of David his uncle.

The king proceeds, spite of Joab’s remonstrance; the number is taken, and God seems as if He saw it not and heard it not. Months and months passed on, and the king’s will and word was still being carried out; but then comes the heavy sentence from God, and David has to choose which of three strokes of His anger he will have. David, guilty as he was, chose like a man of faith; for the believer shows his faith even after he had been so faulty. David under any circumstances prefers God’s hand, though it were stretched out against him, to man’s hand. But God’s hand did not slacken. For very love, for His own name’s sake, God could not, would not, spare; and the plague swept over the land and people as a terrible scourge. But in the midst of judgment mercy rejoiced against it, and that very Jerusalem from which the guilty order went forth was the place where the hand of judgment was stayed; and if grace thus would prove itself mightier than judgment -- and it always will -- grace would prove itself in every way, for it was to David that God listened. The guilty one that had brought the plague on Israel pleads and is heard. It was at the threshing-floor of a poor stranger -- of a Gentile -- that the uplifted hand of the angel was stayed. This purchased possession of the king God would make the site of His house, the blessed connecting link between heaven and earth, between God and man, in days yet to dawn on a world still groaning, but to be surely blessed under the Lord Jesus.

To dwell further on the book is scarcely my task now. I leave the blessed subject with yourselves. God alone can give you a taste of the sweetness and of the power of His own truth through our Lord Jesus.
Lectures Introductory To

the Study of

The Minor Prophets

by

William Kelly

1874
Preface

It seems due to the reader that he should be apprised that the following remarks on the Twelve Minor Prophets were not so formally delivered in the shape of lectures as those which compose the companion volume that appeared in the beginning of this year, on the Five Books of Moses. Lectures indeed the one may be called no less than the other. But in the case of the prophetic books there was an opportunity for questions which led to long digressions. These have been retained in the volume now printed rather in deference to the strong wishes of some who heard them, than in accordance with the feelings of the author, who cannot but acknowledge that they somewhat awkwardly interrupt now and then the course of the observations on the books immediately before the mind. Though this is a defect beyond doubt in a literary point of view, it is trusted that what is here presented to the reader, even in answer to questions diverging from the subject, will be found to promote edification through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

It may be added here that I have availed myself of Dr. Pusey’s publication on the earlier of the Minor Prophets. His researches, especially on the Hebrew idiom, are entitled to respect; but he is far too much swayed by patristic and medieval commentators. With his reverence for the Holy Scriptures, with his piety, one entirely sympathizes. I humbly think, however, that he fails as much as anywhere else in a province where he least suspects it. Instead of censuring his church views as too high, I avow that they seem to my mind incalculably lower than what the New Testament teaches us, especially in the development given by the apostle Paul to the mystery he reveals in the Spirit as to Christ and as to the church; for modern high-churchism is but an effort to revive that system of early departure from rationalistic adversaries, little as either seem to be aware of.

The intelligent Christian reader can hardly overlook that this is the grand truth which pervades the writings of St. Paul; that up to the cross the trial was being made in every form, whether man as such, no matter how helped by law, ordinance, priesthood, at last even by the mission of Messiah Himself in flesh, could retrieve what was lost; that the result then above all was man’s complete and proved inability to remedy the evil, or to hold fast any favors bestowed meanwhile; and that thereon, in the rejection of Christ by the Jew and the Gentile, God effects redemption by His blood, and raises Him up -- the beginning, the firstborn from the dead -- head of a new creation, and of the church His body. Incarnation presented the person of the Savior; but it is only in resurrection, after having finished the work given Him to do in His atoning death, that He became head over all things to the church, which is His body. It is no question of reinstating Israel or man: the rejected person and ministry of the Lord demonstrated all flesh to be too far gone for this; for even the incarnate Son of God was refused and put to death, having labored in vain, as He Himself says in Isa. 49, and as the Gospels abundantly show.

Hence it became a question of sovereign grace on God’s part in Christ as the Second Man risen from the dead and gone into heaven. He is thus the life-giving Spirit who, having won the victory over all temptation, and annulled the power of Satan, and endured the righteous judgment of God due to the first man, is now in resurrection become the head of a new family.

And as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly; and as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly (1 Cor. 15:48, 49).

Thus, and thus only, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord, and this founded on the redemption which is in Him.

The more this is weighed, the more will its importance be felt: and the very grave difference between theology in general and the revealed truth of Christianity. I do not speak only of the gross ignorance displayed in the idea of a constant sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ continued in the Eucharist, which obscures as much as is conceivable the truth of God both as to the close of the first man in death
and as to the setting up of the Second in resurrection, and thus leaves no room (save by the most glaring inconsistency) for the new creation and the Holy Ghost uniting us to the head in heaven. No thoughtful mind can wonder that the system which let in this error went farther, and deprived all but the clergy of that cup which bears witness to the shed blood of the Redeemer, and to the sins of believers washed away thereby. No wonder that it fell into the notion of concomitancy; and that, to justify its bad practice in this respect, it took refuge in the equally bad principle that in the consecrated bread or body is the blood of Christ. It is thus therefore consistently characterized by its comparatively modern sacrament of non-redemption, as another has well said. For without the shedding of blood is no remission; and if the blood as a doctrine be still in the body, that their sins are forgiven but that they are dead to sin, and deprived all but the clergy of that cup which bears witness to the shed blood of the Redeemer, and to the sins of believers washed away thereby. No wonder that it fell into the notion of concomitancy; and that, to justify its bad practice in this respect, it took refuge in the equally bad principle that in the consecrated bread or body is the blood of Christ. It is thus therefore consistently characterized by its comparatively modern sacrament of non-redemption, as another has well said. For without the shedding of blood is no remission; and if the blood as a doctrine be still in the body, so that the laity eating only the wafer partake of both flesh and blood, it is clearly enough implied that the blood can not be shed. They do not believe that all Christians are priests.

It is remarkable, too, that Puritanism is as deaf to the voice of the revealing Spirit on this head as either of its adversaries; and this in all its forms, Calvinistic at least as much so as Arminian. They both think that the flesh is not so bad that it cannot be acted on for God by Christ using the law of God, and giving it power through the Spirit. The Puritan school trust not to rites or ordinances like the Patristic; but they cling with even greater tenacity to the rule of the moral law. It is evident that on one side or the other it is but a renewal of the old question of the Galatian brethren, who, having been beguiled by an infusion of both, are censured by the indignant apostle as fallen from grace, and summoned earnestly to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ made us free, instead of entangling themselves again in a yoke of bondage. To the dead and risen Christ we now exclusively belong, in order that we may bring forth fruit to God. Even had we been circumcised the eighth day, and were we of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Judah, of the family of David, Hebrew of Hebrews, we ought as Christians to recognize with joy that we have been made dead to the law by the body of Christ in order to our being for another, Him who was raised from the dead. The Puritan scheme, no less than the Patristic, is adulterous according to the emphatic figure of the apostle; for they wed us to both husbands, the law and Christ, instead of owning that we have died to the one, and belong now freely and holily to the other.

Christianity stands in the brightest contrast; and as it treats all who believe as already brought nigh to God, made kings and priests to God even now, so it calls all such to eat of the bread and drink of the cup, and thus to show forth the Lord’s death till He come. It tells the baptized, not merely that their sins are forgiven but that they are dead to sin, baptized not to a living Messiah like the disciples in the days of His flesh but to His death, and therefore by it buried with Him to death: so that we know that our old man has been crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be annulled that we should no longer serve sin. For he that has died is freed from sin.

The contrast of this is as complete with Protestants as with Romanists. Not a single creed, article, or service in Christendom sets forth the truth which the apostle shows to be signified in the initiatory institution of Christianity! Not seeing the total ruin of man as such, and still regarding him as in a state of probation like the Jew under law (not as lost), they fail to seize and confess the mighty deliverance which grace has wrought in Christ and gives to those who believe. They ignore Christ’s assurance that the believer does not come into judgment, but is passed from death into life; for they assert their faith that He will come to be their Judge. They do not hold that all believers are saints now on earth responsible to walk accordingly, but they pray that God may make them to be numbered with His saints in glory everlasting. They beseech Him to save His people and bless His heritage, as if they were Jews waiting for Messiah’s advent, instead of Christians already saved by grace and blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. Instead of worshipping our God and Father in spirit and truth, with the happy consciousness that they are in Christ, and that the law of the Spirit of life in Him has freed them from the law of sin and death, they cry to God rather out of distance and misery, as tied and bound with the chain of their sins. Hence the habitual tone of what is imagined to be Christian worship is really a poor iteration of the Psalms of David, and by some a wholesale accommodation of the entire collection to their use, instead of drawing near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, as those who have boldness to enter into the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, and offering continually to God the sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of the lips confessing Jesus’ name.

Far from working any deliverance in the present fallen estate of Christendom, Dr. Pusey and his fellows have made no small accession to one of the leading currents of unbelief in our day, which are all flowing fast toward the predicted apostasy. I do not doubt that he and a few others of pious feeling in the party shrank from the growing worldliness, the carnality, and the irreverence of ordinary Protestantism. But how did they seek to remedy the mischief? Not by searching the living word of God, but by a revived study of the Fathers; not by a renunciation of all they found in their own ecclesiastical position or ways condemned by Scripture, but by a vain effort to amend ill by rubrical punctiliousness; not by a deepening entrance into the truth and grace of God revealed in the apostolic writings, but by turning again to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto they desire again to be in bondage -- a resuscitation of that Judaizing of Christianity against which the blessed apostle of the Gentiles fought all through his ministry so vigorously as to show this to be the true hinge of a faithful or falling church. This system of course tinges deeply Dr. P.’s commentary on the Minor Prophets, and necessarily vitiates its character for those who distinguish the church of God from the Jew no less than the Gentile.

For the consequence of this error is that the proper and
distinctive privileges of the Christian and of the church are never enjoyed. A disorganized family is not set right by losing sight of their own relationship; and while conscious in measure of their faults, trying to walk better -- not as children, but as servants, with whom they have insensibly confounded themselves. And this confusion I press, not only as a grievous loss to the children of God, but yet more as an unbelieving dishonor done to the incomparable grace wherein we stand; above all to Him whose accomplished redemption is the only key to our blessing, and the righteous ground of reconciliation to God.

Along with ignorance of our own heavenly relationship in union with our glorified head goes the denial of the call of Israel to earthly supremacy. This God reserves for His ancient people. They failed to make it good of old, because they tried to hold it under condition of their own obedience, and so broke down completely -- a failure aggravated incalculably by their rejection of the Messiah and of the gospel. But divine mercy has pledged itself to give them repentance and restoration, yea, far more than all they lost, under Messiah returning to reign over the earth and under the new covenant. Meanwhile the Gentile, wise in his own conceit, flatters himself that the branches were broken off that he might be graffed in; he is highminded, and does not fear, because he sets Matt. 16:18, ill-understood, against the plain warning of Rom. 11. The Gentile has not continued in God's goodness; and yet he presumes that he shall not be cut off, and that the Jew cannot be graffed in again, in the face of the clearest prediction that blindness in part (for it has never been total) is happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, when all Israel shall be saved, the Deliverer coming out of Zion and turning away ungodliness from Jacob {Rom. 11:26}.

Christendom denies these truths; and consequently we see not Romanism only but Protestantism seeking earthly glory and influence: the latter, it is true, willing for it to be the world's slave, the other ever seeking to be the world's mistress. But the church, rejoicing in her own place as the heavenly bride of Christ, was so much the more bound to confess the earthly place of power and dignity in store for converted Israel in the future, instead of coveting it now for herself, and straining after it by force or fraud. If we have Christ's mind in intelligence, we ought to have His mind in moral purpose, who, though divine, emptied Himself, taking a bondman's form, being born in likeness of men; and when found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself, becoming obedient as far as death, yea, death on the cross {Phil. 2}. We are all Christ's epistle, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God: how are we manifesting Christ?

Those who fail to hold fast and rightly apply these truths are, in my judgment, incapable of soundly expounding the Old Testament, and the Prophets in particular, whatever may be their merits in other respects, which I trust I should not be slow cordially to own and profit by. They are necessarily wrong more or less as to the government of the world no less than as to the church, and even as to salvation. They confound law and grace, heaven and earth, present and future, because they confound Israel with the church which is now called out for spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. The interpretation of the entire Bible is deeply affected by this difference; and so is our spiritual communion and our daily walk and worship. The Savior remains unchangeable in person (blessed be God!); for He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever; but it would be hard to say what else does not suffer by the common traditional ignoring of revealed truth. And even the Savior is far more obscurely seen and less enjoyed as the rule.

If this be true, as I am firmly persuaded, no apology is needful to press the importance of that truth which may by grace deliver from such a swamp of error, and help to set the Christian in view of his own proper heritage. The reader of this book will find that I have by grace sought throughout rightly to divide the word of truth, striving diligently to stand approved to God, and not as a workman that has to be ashamed. May the same grace bless the reader abundantly!
As for the chronological order of the Minor Prophets, it appears to be substantially maintained in the common arrangement, of course leaving room for such an exception as proves the rule. Hosea, for instance, is very properly put first, followed regularly by Joel and Amos. Of these two I cannot but think that as Joel did not begin to prophesy as early as Hosea, so on the other hand the beginning of Amos marks that Joel’s testimony was already complete and known. (Compare Joel 3:16 with Amos 1:2.) In the Septuagint the order is Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel; but there need be no hesitation in adhering to the Hebrew arrangement, which puts Hosea first for all Israel, especially Ephraim, Joel next but the first for the narrower range of Jerusalem.

Obadiah seems to have his date the least defined by internal marks. What has been employed to prove a late date is invalid, from forgetting that the prophetetic vision presents things future as already seen. For present time with a prophet is when a prophecy is accomplished, not when it is given. I believe he was early, not late. Obadiah naturally brings in Jonah, 84 who may have been placed exceptionally as already referred to. Jonah is usually set earlier, but there is a good deal tending to show that his visit to Nineveh was under the reign of Pul (= Vul-lush or Iva-lush of the Assyrian monuments), which would reduce the date by more than a half a century, and place Jonah regularly in the order of time among the prophetic books. Then he has such a very peculiar place of witness that it would not at all have suited this glorious constellation of twelve stars if he had been put at their beginning; it would have seemed to give prominence to what was by the way, so to speak. Hence it appears to me that Jonah is ranged, if not chronologically, at least with moral beauty, exactly in the proper place. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah; but the less yields to the greater. And so they are classed in the Bible. Nahum, with Nineveh as the object of judgment, naturally precedes Habakkuk, who looks at the Chaldee; and Zephaniah is the last of those lesser lights before the captivity of Babylon.

First then come the Greater Prophets, each in his own order, -- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, without entering now upon the place assigned to the latter in the Hebrew Canon, which the Jews have variously sought to explain. But if we speak of Greater Prophets, we must beware of the error which would impute to the least an inspiration inferior to the greater. It is a question only of extent and variety in their written testimony. And it is worthy of note, as has been observed, that the three longest were led of God to adopt the language and thoughts of some of the shortest prophecies. It is also to be noted, that four or five of the earlier Minor Prophets preceded even Isaiah.

Then follow the twelve Minor Prophets, beginning again with the earlier and closing with those after the captivity. Thus if Zephaniah followed Isaiah, he is necessarily excluded from such a place, because he is classed with the shorter Prophets. Isaiah naturally and strictly takes the first place among the Greater Prophets, who are put exactly in their chronological order from first to last. And if Ezekiel lived at the same time with Jeremiah, the former was out of the land, while Jeremiah was in it or only swept down with the last remnant into Egypt. Daniel, as is known, lived the latest of the four Greater Prophets. Then we begin the Minor Prophets and go through a similar series, the only one who can be said to be taken out of his order being Jonah for the reason just suggested, though it is not improbable that the chronological place is preserved as well as the moral in the wisdom of God.

Hence any arrangement which places Zephaniah before Habakkuk would seem more than questionable. He appears for several reasons, minute in themselves but not without weight, to have been a trifle later, but substantially there is but little difference. On the whole I consider that the order (as they stand in the Hebrew Bible and English as in other versions) is entitled to respect, and that the Jews were more right than those who put Zephaniah before Habakkuk. It seems to be most probable, to say the least, that, though contemporary, Zephaniah was rather the later of the two. But the difference is only of a few years; if it were after all about half-a-dozen, there is no great matter for contention in it. Unhappily those who toil so keenly for perishable food like this, which profits in nothing those occupied therewith, are apt to overlook or refuse the food that abides to life everlasting.

Then Haggai clearly comes first in order of time among the last, worthily followed by his contemporary Zechariah, as both were by Malachi, who concludes the roll not more certainly in fact than in the tone and character of his message. The godly from among the Jews are left awaiting Jehovah-Messiah and His immediate forerunner.

Archbishop Usher was certainly a justly valued authority on these matters; but his chronology was, it is understood, adjusted not always for the better by those charged with going over the Authorized Version for the last time less than a hundred years ago. Even Usher’s own

84 Jonah stands alone among the prophets in being sent to the chief city of Assyria, the great Gentile antagonist of Israel while still owned as the people of Jehovah. It is remarkable that, standing thus isolated among the prophets, it is the only one of the Minor Prophets which begins with “and,” translated “now” in the Authorized Version.
arrangement has not always commanded the assent of those who believed the scriptures as firmly as himself. We may however come to the conclusion, and, I think, with fair if not always full evidence, that substantially the Greater Prophets and the Lesser are in their chronological order with the single exception of Jonah, if indeed this when fully considered be really one. The three later in the last series, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, were unquestionably post-captivity prophets; as Zephaniah brings us down to the latest point before the captivity. We are perfectly certain of the general epoch of most because they state it themselves so distinctly as to leave scarce any room for that misdirected ingenuity of unbelief which amuses itself and perplexes the simple by incessant efforts to shake all that is received, small or great; but which alas! exerts itself not least when it can hope to shake what most glorifies God and abases man.

As to subject-matter, the following sketch of these twelve prophets may suffice.

HOSEA is divided into two sections. First, he gives us Israel and Judah rejected after the warning of Jezreel, a dim intimation of the call of the Gentiles, and a distinct prediction that Judah and Israel should be restored and even re-united; a pleading and a promise; a sketch of their anomalous state at present, and an assurance of their final blessedness as a nation seeking Jehovah and the true David their King. Next, he sets out the wrongs of Israel, with the expostulations and threats of God; and, finally, their repentance and communion with Him.

JOEL, from the ruin caused by various insects, warns of the northern army and its devastations, partially then, fully in the last days of this age, followed by the day of Jehovah, as a ground on both sides for humiliation before Him; and predicts the outpouring of the Spirit, deliverance in Zion, and the general judgment of the nations.

AMOS rehearses the ways of God not only with Israel, but with the neighboring nations; then takes up Israel specifically -- not on broad grounds of a moral kind only, but of peculiar favor; points out their guilt of refusing His testimony, which should none the less be verified in the judgment of the mass, and in the deliverance of the righteous few; and promises in the end the rearing up again of the fallen tabernacle of David and the renewed blessing of Israel.

OBADIAH, in a singularly vivid strain tinged with pathos yet stern, sets out God’s call among the nations against Edom, who, spite of his pride of strength, must come down and be spoiled beyond precedent by treacherous hands, his wisdom and might failing to stave off destruction, because of heartless malice against his brother Jacob; for in truth the day of Jehovah was near on all the nations, but on Zion should be deliverance, and Jacob should inherit the earth, Esau being put down and judged; for the kingdom shall be Jehovah’s.

JONAH next shows by his mission to the Gentiles that God reserved His title to pity the worst of the nations when repentant at His word; that effectual service needs the previous lesson of death and resurrection; and that even so he who is most nearly bound up with Him must bow to His grace to others and bless Him, instead of resting in his own privileges to the falsifying of His name.

MICAH judges the people as a whole, Samaria and Jerusalem being prominent, not only for iniquity and idolatry, but for refusal of Jehovah’s words. He pronounces the land polluted, and holds out, especially for the heads and princes, the desolation of Zion, but its establishment in the last days by Jehovah, when they are hard pressed in the last siege after having been given up because of their rejection of Christ, who is to be their peace when the Assyrian reappears in the end, and who is to make the remnant of Jacob a blessing as well as an object of fear in the day when Jehovah cuts off all evil of men or demons. Then he concludes with a final homily on the immutably righteous ways of Jehovah, who could not be put off by rites or sacrifices, but hates and must judge a people so false, yet will perform to the children in the last days the truth to Jacob, the mercy to Abraham, which He sware to their fathers from the days of old.

NAHUM, in contrast with Jonah, declares the vengeance of Jehovah on Nineveh, but does not keep back His goodness to such as trust in Him. Did the Assyrian imagine against Jehovah a counsellor of Belial? Utter destruction should come such as the world never saw before, such as will be seen again when the last Assyrian falls for ever. No storm of lightning or thunder ever burst with such images of judgment like our prophet’s scathing denunciation of Nineveh, especially in Nah. 2, 3.

HABAKKUK furnishes the exercises of one troubled by the iniquity of the Jews crying for judgment, and then because it is executed by those more wicked than they; who is told to wait for the judgment, but meanwhile to live by faith. He then details the wickednesses of the wicked which ensure his destruction; and, finally, to Jehovah in His holy temple, and all the earth enjoined to keep silence, he pours forth his prayer with a full vision of divine judgment, which at length falls unsparingly, and expresses his joyful trust in God, come or come not what will of His outward blessings meanwhile.

ZEPHANIAH proclaims the utter destruction of the land of Judah and Jerusalem, in the approaching day of Jehovah, for their idolatry, violence, and deceit, when incredulity would save no more than filthy lucre; but he lets the
righteous see

(it may be ye shall be hid in the day of Jehovah’s anger {Zeph. 2:3})

that, as it is the day of Jehovah, none should escape, whether around them like the Philistines, Moabites, or Ammonites, or afar off like the Assyrians; least of all she that was filthy and polluted, the oppressing city, clothed with privilege, yet so much the guiltier -- Jerusalem! He concludes with the richest comfort to the godly remnant, who are called to wait on Jehovah till He executes His sentence on the assembled kingdoms, delivers His people now poor and meek, rejoices over Zion, rests in His love, and makes them a name and a praise among all people of the earth.

+++ HAGGAI reproves the people for their lack of faith and zeal in building the house of Jehovah, and convicts them of His controversy with them for occupation on behalf of their own houses; comforts them with the assurance of the Spirit’s permanency of action with them; declares that the latter glory of the house will be greater than the former when Messiah shakes all the nations, and assures of the overturning of all kingdoms when the heavens are shaken, but of the choice of Zerubbabel as representing Christ in that day, a signet for Jehovah.

+++ ZECHARIAH regards Jerusalem as under the imperial powers, one power ousting another till the due time is come, and after the glory Jehovah dwells in Zion. Jerusalem is pardoned and justified; the sign of wisdom in government is there when He brings forth Messiah the Branch, as well as perfect administrative order; iniquity and idolatry are judged; the powers pass in review; and the Branch is to build the temple, and sit a priest on His throne. In the second part of the book the restoration of Jerusalem is pledged when the question is put as to facts; but they are still under responsibility, though a vision of glory follows. Jehovah assures that He will protect His house; introduces Christ in humiliation, but connects Him also with the day of glory and deliverance, when Judah puts down Javan or Greece, and the houses of Judah and Joseph shall be as though He had not cast them off. Then follow the details of Christ’s rejection, and of Antichrist judged; the gathering of all nations against Jerusalem, which is delivered by Jehovah-Messiah, once pierced, now mourned by them; but a fountain is opened in Jerusalem for cleansing. Then false prophets are judged, and Christ’s humiliation once more in view, and a remnant spared, and Jerusalem captured in part but delivered by Jehovah, who makes her the holy metropolis of the earth when He reigns and judges all nations.

+++ MALACHI bears to us the burden of the word of Jehovah to Israel: His reproaches fill the prophet’s spirit. And no wonder, for the returned remnant had failed completely, as left by Zechariah on the ground of responsibility, whatever long-suffering or active grace from God might do for them. Jacob, though loved, profaned and was weary of His service and holiness; the priests too had corrupted the covenant of Levi, and He had made them to His own grief contemptible. There remained nothing but for Him to send His messenger and come Himself; but who should abide the day of His coming? Yet He owns with tenderness and complacency the remnant that spoke often to one another in His fear, surrounded by the incredulous hypocrisy of the Jews. And those righteous ones should be His in the day that should burn as an oven for all the proud; but for those that feared Him the Sun of righteousness should arise with healing in His wings, and they themselves go forth as calves of the stall treading down the wicked in that day. Finally, he reminds them of the law of Moses, and promises Elijah the prophet before that day to turn the hearts of the people, lest His coming should be only for a curse.
Lectures on the Minor Prophets

Lecture 1

Hosea

The prophecy of Hosea naturally divides itself into two principal divisions with minor sections. The first consists of Hosea 1, 2, 3; the second, of the rest of the book. Within these greater divisions, however, we have distinct parts.

The first chapter presents the prophet with his ministry in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel {Hos. 1:1}.

He was therefore a contemporary of Isaiah, who prophesied during the same kings, save that in the case of Hosea only do we hear of the then reigning king of Israel, of whom, rather than Judah, our prophet treats. For the word of Jehovah to him takes into account the condition of Israel as a whole, and particularly uses the dismal condition of Ephraim for the moral good of Judah. This is true of the whole book, which is remarkable for its occupation simply with the Jew, without noticing (as do other prophets) the Gentiles either for judgment or for blessing.

Hosea is, one might say, exclusively devoted to the ancient people of God, with a very slight but remarkable exception in the first chapter; but even it is couched in terms so enigmatical (and this, I believe, with divine intention for a special end), that many have failed to discern the truth contemplated in consequence of not using the light supplied in the New Testament. But there cannot be a more striking example than this very instance affords of the all-importance of using one part of scripture, not to correct indeed -- this were impossible and irreverent -- but better to understand another. In order to profit by the fuller revelation of the mind of God, we do well to read the earlier communications in the strongest light vouchsafed to us. It is one mind conveyed by one Spirit; and God can give us grace by dependence on Himself to guard us, as far as is consistent with our moral condition, from that narrowness to which we are all too prone, making certain portions of scripture our favorites, so as to interfere with due heed to the rest of the word. Those who indulge in these thoughts cannot be expected to understand the word of God, and, in what they make their one-sided study, are apt to fall into singular and sometimes fatal mistakes. The most precious truths of God, if they are used in an exclusive way, may by the enemy be turned to the support of serious error. Thus there would be danger if there were, for instance, the systematic limiting of the mind to the resurrection or heavenly side of divine truth. Or again, take prophecy; and how withering to the soul when that part of scripture practically becomes a monopoly? Take the church -- for it does not matter what -- and in it there is no security one whit more. The reason is simple; the secret of power, blessing, security, and communion is found, not in resurrection or heaven, not in prophecy nor in the church, nor in any other conceivable branch of truth, but in Christ, who alone gives the whole truth. Consequently we see that what we all know to be a doctrine and a necessary principle in God’s revelation is true also as applied to every detail of practical experience.

In this case, then, the date of Hosea indicates his interest in Israel, and the work that God assigned him in reference to the twelve-tribed nationality of His people, when the ruin of Israel was at hand, and that of Judah was before long to follow. Brief as his handling of his subject is, there is a remarkable completeness in the prophecy; and the moral element is as prominent in the second part, as the dispensational is in the first. The parenthesis of Gentile empire is quite omitted throughout. He is filled with the afflictions and the guilt of Israel as a whole, and, more than any other of the twelve shorter prophets, breaks forth into passionate and renewed grief over the people. The book accordingly abounds, as none other does so much, in the most abrupt transitions, which therefore make the style of Hosea singularly difficult in some respects, and, it may be added too, far more so to us just because of its intensely Jewish character. Not being Jews, we do not come under their character of relationship; but those who are to be called as Jews by and by will understand it well. They, having that position, and being thus called (though through the sense of the deepest sins on their part, at the same time knowing the yearnings of the Spirit of God over them), will enter into, as I believe they will profit by, that which to us presents difficulty because we are not in the same position.

The first chapter mainly consists of symbolic action, which represents the course of God’s purposes.

The beginning of the word of Jehovah by Hosea.
And Jehovah said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms 85 and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from Jehovah

85. The very least we can say is that the expression intimated to the prophet what Gomer was going to be. But it must be allowed that the phrase naturally conveys the impression that she had already been guilty of an impure life too common where idolatry reigned. If Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab the harlot, it is not hard to conceive the Lord commanding the prophet to take Gomer to wife as a symbolic parable to Israel. It may be worth noticing that, while in Hos. 1:4 the word is said to have borne “him” a son, this is not the phrase, but one more vague, in Hos. 1:6, 8. The mother’s character might suffice to stamp itself on the children; but the absence of the pronoun in the case of Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi, as contrasted with Jezreel, is under the circumstances remarkable.

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Nothing can be more evident than this declared object. The prophet is commanded to do that which was necessarily most painful in itself, and suggestive of what he as a man of God must have felt to be humbling as well as repulsive. But such was the attitude of Israel to their God, and Jehovah would make the prophet and those who heeded the prophecy to understand in measure what He must feel as to His people.

So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son. And Jehovah said unto him, Call his name Jezeel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezeel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezeel {Hos. 1:3-5}.

This was the first great blow. Israel was to be smitten in the house of Jehu, the avenger of the bloodguiltiness that had been brought in by the idolatrous Jezebel. Jehu was a rough man, vain and ambitious, suited notwithstanding to deal in his rude fashion with that which had dishonored Jehovah -- a man far enough outside the current of the feelings of the Spirit of God, but none the less employed in an external way to deal with the evident and open evil of Ahab’s house and Israel.

Nevertheless this, as it had no root in God, so it had no strength to maintain itself against other evils. Hence, although it suited the policy of Jehu to deal with certain gross idolatries, the political-religious evil that characterized the kingdom of Israel seemed necessary to sustain him against the house of David. Consequently, as he had no conscience as to the sin of Jeroboam, this was judged of Jehovah in due time. God smote not only Jehu’s house, but Israel. The kingdom was to pass, though it might linger for a little while afterwards; but it was smitten of God. This is what is represented by Jezeel. God would scatter in due time. The Assyrian broke the power of Israel in the valley of Jezeel (afterwards called Esdraelon), a scene of covetousness and blood from first to last.

Then again we find a daughter appears, whose name was to be called Lo-ruhamah, a name which expresses the absence of pity towards the people. No more mercy was to be shown. Thus the failure of the kingdom of Israel, which soon followed after the dealing with Jehu’s house, was not then complete. There would be still more judgment from God for He says,

I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel {Hos. 1:6}.

Jezreel was but the beginning of the judgments of God.

I will utterly take them away {Hos. 1:6}.

It was not therefore the collapse of the kingdom of Jehu only, but Israel as a whole was to be swept from the land, never more to be restored as a separate polity.

But, says He in the very same breath,

I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by Jehovah their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen {Hos. 1:7}.

The Assyrian was allowed to destroy the kingdom of Israel, but was himself checked by divine power when he hoped to carry off Judah.

Thus there was a lengthening of the tranquillity for Judah. They, at least for the time, exhibited fidelity to Jehovah in their measure. Afterwards another child is born - a son; and

then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be to you {Hos. 1:9}.

It was no longer therefore simply a case of breaking up Israel completely, but Judah now comes into judgment. As long as the royal tribe stood, there was still a nucleus round which all the people might be gathered. As long as the house of David was true in any measure with Judah attached yet far from being true, God could (morally speaking) yet work recovery, or at any rate He could make them, as it were, swell out into a great people. But now, on the proved faithlessness of the innermost circle, God represents the solemn crisis by the birth of the son called Lo-ammi. Yet there is no notice of the Babylonish conqueror. The prophet abruptly passes by the captivity of Judah, and at once goes forward to the glorious reversal of all the sentences of woe. It is the re-union of all the tribes, but not the scanty return under Zerubbabel. A greater is here, even Messiah. Undoubtedly He is chosen, given and appointed to them by God; but it was important also to show that they will yield willing and active subjection. Gathered together, Israel and Judah shall make (or appoint) themselves one head, and shall come (or go) up out of the land: not Babylon or Assyria, or even the earth at large, I think, but rather an expression of their union religiously in the same solemn assemblies and feasts, as we have already seen them one people under one head. It was accomplished neither after the captivity nor when Christ came, but strikingly the reverse. It remains to be fulfilled when He comes to reign over the earth.

For,

great shall be the day of Jezreel {Hos. 1:11}.

God shall sow His people in His land, not scatter them out of it. It is the day not of humiliation but of manifested glory.

Yet,

says He in His very sentence of judgment on Judah,

the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, in the place where it shall be said unto them, Ye [are] not my people, it shall be said unto them, [Ye are] the sons
of the living God {Hos. 1:10}.

Observe the remarkable change here. It is the scripture already referred to as the mysterious intimation of the call of the Gentiles in pure grace. This, though distinctly taught in Rom. 9, surprises many readers. The reason is because we are apt to regard all as an antithesis in a merely human or limited fashion. If any man of God on the face of the earth had had the writing of the sentence left to himself, had there not been the full power of God which is meant by inspiration in its true and proper sense, it seems quite inconceivable that this sentence could ever have been written. Who would have said it, let him be supposed the best of men, if he loved Israel as a good Jew? Least of all surely Hosea, whose heart was all on fire for the people, both in horror on account of their wickedness and in yearning after their blessedness. But for that reason he of himself would have said, not

Ye are not my people {Hos. 1:9, 10},

but Ye shall be made my faithful people. No, this is not what God says, but something quite different. The strong bias so natural even to a good man would have rendered it out of the question to speak as Hosea does. We find it hard to take in, even when written plainly before our eyes, the distinct teaching of God, conveying as it does an unexpected form of thought and an altogether new subject. The Spirit inspired him and can teach us.

This, as hinted before, is the scripture which the apostle Paul employs in Rom. 9, as is well known. There he is vindicating, as is plain, the sovereign call of God -- the only resource for man where all is ruined. How beautifully this fits in with our prophet is evident. The ruin of Israel was already there; the ruin of Judah was impending. All was doomed. What then can man fall back on? If the people of God on the earth turned out only a mass of ruins on one side or another, what was there to look to? Nothing and none but God, not His law, but His sovereign grace. Accordingly this is exactly what does come in; as indeed the sovereignty of God must always be the help and sustainment and joy of a soul that is thoroughly beaten out of itself when its evil is truly judged before God. But it often takes a long while to break a man down to that point. Hence it is that many feel difficulties about it, unless perhaps on their death-bed. Then at least, if anywhere, man is true. God is true always; but man (I am speaking now only of such as are born of God) then parts company with those visions, or rather fitful shadows, which had disordered and misled him during the activities of life. Then indeed he realizes what he is as well as what God is. Accordingly, if he lose all confidence in himself in every possible way, it is only to enjoy a confidence, never so well known before, in God Himself.

This is precisely what we find here in the reasonings of the apostle Paul. It is naturally offensive to the pride of man’s heart, and more particularly to a Jew’s. For had they not received magnificent promises from God? It was a great difficulty to them, and it sounds very natural and formidable, how it was possible that the promises of God should -- I may not say fail, but -- seem to fail. But this came from looking simply at themselves with the promises of God. We must remember that the Bible does not contain merely the promises -- it largely consists, and particularly the Old Testament, of a divine history of the responsibility of man. We must leave room for both, so as not to let the responsibility of man overthrow the promises of God; but, on the other hand, not to neutralize the responsibility of the one because of the promises of the other.

The tendency of all men is to become what people call either Arminians or Calvinists; and a hard thing it is to hold the balance of truth without wavering to either side. There is nothing, however, too hard for the Lord; and the word of God is the unflagging preservative from either one or the other. I am perfectly persuaded -- spite of partisans who think only of their own views, or freethinkers who have no difficulty in allowing that both are there -- that neither Arminianism nor Calvinism is in the Bible, and that they are both thoroughly wrong without even the smallest justification. The fact is, that the tendency to either is deeply seated in unrenewed minds -- that is, the same man may be an Arminian at one time and a Calvinist at another; and it is likely that, if he has been a violent Arminian one day, he may become a violent Calvinist to-morrow. But the roots of both lie in man and in his onesidedness. The truth of God is in His word as the revelation of Christ by the Spirit, and nowhere else.

So it will be observed in Rom. 9 how completely the apostle sets aside the Jewish misuse of the promises of God. By a chain of the most convincing facts and testimonies of the Old Testament urged in this wonderful chapter, he compels the Jew to abandon the flattering conceit of national election, used absolutely and exclusively as was his wont; for really it is a conceit of himself after all. If they hold to the exclusive pretensions of Israel as simply deriving from Abraham in the line of flesh (which was their point), in that case they must accept others to be their companions; for Abraham had more sons than Isaac, and Isaac had another son than Jacob. The ground of flesh therefore is utterly indefensible. A mere lineal descent would have let in the Ishmaelites, for instance; and of them the Jew would not hear. If he pleaded that Ishmael sprang from Hagar, a slave, be it so; but what of Edom {i.e., Esau}, born of the same mother as well as father, of Isaac and Rebecca, twin brother of Jacob himself? Consequently the ground taken was palpably unsound and untenable. We must therefore fall back upon the sole resource for man’s evil and ruin -- God’s sovereignty and gracious call. This was so much the more in point, because there was a time, even in the early history of the chosen people, when nothing less than God could have preserved it and given a ray of hope. It was not the Ishmaelites, not the Edomites, not the Gentiles, but Israel, who made the calf of gold. Had God dealt with them according to what they had been there to Him, must there not have been utter and immediate destruction? It is referred to now because of the moral principles connected with the
citation of Hosea in Rom. 9; and indeed all these truths appear to me to run together in the mind of the Spirit of God. If therefore we would understand the prophecy, we must follow and receive that which may seem discursively pursued in the New Testament, but which really was before the inspiring Spirit here too.

Consequently we have in the prophet what was true morally from the beginning of their sad history. It was now verging towards the bitter end of Israel, with Judah’s ruin in full view. The very fact of prophets being raised up proved that the end was approaching; for prophecy only comes in with departure from God. There is no such form of revelation as prophecy when things run smooth and fair; nor is it then, morally speaking, required. What we have in days of comparative fidelity is the setting forth of privilege and duty; but when the privilege is despised and the duty not done, when God’s people are in evident guilt, and judgment must follow, prophecy comes to tell of God’s judging the evil, but with mercy and yet better blessing to the obedient remnant. This is true in principle even of the garden of Eden. God did not speak of the Seed of the woman till Adam was fallen; and so when Israel had transgressed like Adam, prophecy shines out. If the ruin were before Moses’ eyes, as indeed it was, prophecy was vouchsafed to the lawgiver himself, as we see conspicuously in the end of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, not to speak of the wondrous burst through Balaam’s mouth in the close of Numbers. Afterwards, when God had brought in every new form of blessing to kings raised up in grace to sustain the people, the ruin was only more decided. Prophecy too assumes a more comprehensive, systematic, and complete shape. A whole host of prophets, one might say, appears at this time; mighty prophetic utterances warned the people when outwardly things seemed strong but all was over before God, who therefore caused the alarm to be sounded with a remarkable and persistent urgency. The trumpet, as it were, was blown for Jehovah all over the land; and thus Hosea, as we know, was the contemporary of Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and perhaps other prophets at this time. There had been one even earlier still, as we may see if we compare the history. There was a peculiar reason for not putting the earliest first in order, which I hope to explain when I arrive at his book.

Already then the ruin was such that God’s sovereignty was the only sure ground which could be taken. Hence we have seen that the apostle Paul uses this to point out, not merely the resource of grace for Israel, but that on Israel’s failure it was perfectly open to God to go out to the Gentiles. For this is what Paul quotes the passage for in Rom. 9:

That he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only {Rom. 9:23, 24}.

From the moment God falls back on His own sovereignty the ground is as open for a Gentile as for a Jew. God is not sovereign if He may not choose whom He pleases. If He is sovereign, then it is but natural that His sovereignty should display itself where it would be most conspicuous. The call of the Gentiles furnishes this occasion; for if they were worst, as they certainly were utterly degraded, for this very reason they were most fit objects for the exercise of the divine sovereignty in grace.

Even us whom he called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people which were not my people, and her beloved which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called the children of the living God {Rom. 9:24-26}.

It is evident that Rom. 9:25 the apostle interprets of the future call of Israel, the reinstatement of the people of God on a better footing than ever in sovereign grace; but he also applies Rom. 9:26 to the Gentiles.

Thus all is here set out in the most orderly method.

Even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only

(shown in Rom. 9:25),

but also of the Gentiles {Rom. 9:24} (referred to in Rom. 9:26).

And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called the sons of the living God {Rom. 9:26}.

Consequently sonship is far more characteristic of the call of the Gentile than of the Jew. Thus in the change (not a little one, as I was going to say, but very great indeed), in the avoidance of the expression “people” and the employment of

sons,

God with the most admirable propriety, intimates by His prophet that when He was going to work in grace He would work worthily of His name. He would bring Gentiles not merely into the place of Israel, but into a better standing. Granted that they were the vilest of the vile: even so grace could and would raise them into the nearest relationship to God Himself. Then they should be, not a mere substitute for Israel, but the sons of the living God – a title never given in its full force to any but the Gentiles who are now being called.

In a vague and general sense, as compared with distant Gentiles, Israel is called son, child, first-born; but this merely as a nation, whereas “sons” is individual. The expression,

Ye are the sons of the living God

{Hos. 1:10},
in the latter part of Hos. 1:10, is what has been already spoken of as the dim allusion to the call of the Gentiles, but
it is so dim that many persons swamp it all together, making it bear on Israel. It might have been viewed as referring to Israel if God had said, “Then they shall be Ammi.” He does not, however, say this, but sons of the living God.

Such is the point of the apostle Paul; and what confirms this as the true interpretation is, that Peter also quotes from our prophet, and indeed was writing to a remnant of Jews only, as the apostle Paul was writing in his own proper place to Gentiles. Peter, however, though he does quote Hosea, omits the words,

They shall be called the sons of the living God. See 1 Pet. 2:10:

Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

For his object he quotes from Hos. 2, not from Hos. 1. This strikingly falls in with what has been already observed, that Hos. 1 shows not merely the restoration of Israel (perfectly true as this is, and therefore in no way to be combated), but in a mysterious way room left by God for the bringing in of the Gentiles too. By the form of the allusion, which might very easily be overlooked, He proves His perfect knowledge beforehand, and makes a communication to us of the call of the Gentiles in their own proper distinctive relationship as sons of the living God; and not merely His people.

Hence it is that Peter, writing to Christian Jews, only gives the latter. Although they had lost their place of people of God through idolatry -- and certainly the rejection of the Messiah did not mend matters, but rather confirmed the righteous sentence of God, that the little remnant which had come back were as bad as their fathers, or even worse, for they certainly perpetrated a greater crime in the rejection of their own Messiah, -- yet grace is come in, and they who have received the Messiah rejected but glorified, are now the people of God.

But he does not go farther, because he simply takes them up as persons who had by grace entered in faith into the privileges of Israel before Israel. They had received the Messiah; they were the remnant of that people. They who were not a people had become now a people; they who had not obtained mercy have now obtained mercy. But Paul, writing to the Gentiles, avails himself in a most appropriate way of what Peter passes by -- not of Hos. 2:23, but of Hos. 1:10, which intimates the call of Gentiles in yet greater depth of mercy. At the same time he takes care to show that the Jew will require the very same ground of sovereign grace to bring him in by and by as we have for coming in now.

The prophet, it is well to observe, appears to point out Israel’s future restoration immediately after in a slightly different phraseology, which I think ought to be noticed.

Then, he says (that is, when God has brought in the Gentiles, as we have seen),

Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land {Hos. 1:11}.

Their restoration to the land is made evident here, their being joined -- not only Judah, but even reprobate Ephraim -- into Israel as a whole.

For great shall be the day of Jezreel {Hos. 1:11}.

The very name of Jezreel, which was before a term of reproach and initiatory judgment, is now turned by the grace of God into a title of infinite mercy, when they shall be indeed the seed of God, not for scattering only but for the rich harvest of blessing that is to characterize the millennial day. Such is the first chapter of Hosea.

Hosea 2 begins like the end of the first. In the rest of the chapter we have God carrying out a part but not the whole of the wonderful principles that are so compressed in the first chapter. We begin with the message:

Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah. Plead with your mother {Hos. 2:1, 2}.

It is a call to those who like Hosea could feel, speak, and act according to the Spirit of Christ, with the courage inspired by the certainty of such relationships, though for the present the state of the people was as far from comforting as could well be conceived, as indeed is plain from the next and following verses.

Brethren and sisters look at the Jews (I think) individually.

Your mother looks at them corporately as a body.

Plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight.

Here then we behold a most painful picture -- Jehovah threatening to put Israel to shame, and to have no mercy upon her children, because their mother had behaved shamelessly towards Himself.

For she is not my wife, nor am I her husband {Hos. 2:1, 2}.

She must put away her scandalous unfaithfulness, lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day when she was born, and make her as the desert, and cause her to die of thirst. On her children I will have no mercy; for they are lewd children, because their mother hath committed lewdness, their parent hath acted shamefully; for she said, I will follow my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my
wool and my flax, my oil and, my wine {Hos. 2:3-5}.

Accordingly Jehovah threatens to hedge up her way with thorns.

Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and raise a wall, that she may not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now {Hos. 2:6, 7}.

There was compunction occasionally, a little revival from time to time even in Israel; but the people never really repented or consequently abandoned their course of sin. Their good resolutions were the proof of God’s goodness and the fruit of His testimony, but they never effected a thorough repentance of Israel.

For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they made into images of gold {Hos. 2:8}.

Thus all was perverted to the service, and it was imputed to the favor of false gods.

Therefore, says He,

I will take my corn in its time, and my new wine in its season; and I will recover my wool and my flax designed to cover her nakedness. And I will expose her vileness before her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of my hand {Hos. 2:9, 10}.

Then He threatens that all her mirth shall cease,

her feast-days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn assemblies. And I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees {Hos. 2:11, 12}.

Even her natural blessings must be cut off which her unbelief made an excuse for the idols she set up.

And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them {Hos. 2:13}.

All her luxurious and idolatrous sins therefore would come up in remembrance for judgment.

Nevertheless Jehovah remembers mercy, and immediately after announces that He will allure her, and, though leading her into the wilderness, speak soothingly to her. But it should not be the past renewed, the old and sad history of Israel rehearsed once more; for to her He would grant her vineyards thence, the valley of Achor for a door of hope. The very place which of old was a door of judgment under Joshua becomes a door of hope in the prophetic vision.

And she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt {Hos. 2:15}.

Nor shall this freshness of renewed youth fade away as then.

And it shall be at that day, saith Jehovah, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali {Hos. 2:16}, (that is, “husband” in love instead of mere “lord,” were it in the best and truest sense of dominion and possession from her mouth); also the many and false lords should no more be remembered by their names.

And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword {Hos. 2:18}.

Thus we see that, coincident with the return of Israel to Jehovah, and this flowing out of His grace towards them, there shall follow universal blessedness. God will make all the earth to feel to its own joy the gracious restoration of His long-estranged people. With the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven, and the reptiles of the earth, Jehovah declares He will make a covenant for them in that day. It is infatuation to think that all this was fully accomplished at the return from the Babylonish captivity. The result is that even Christians, misled by this miserable error, are drawn away into the rationalistic impiety of counting God’s word here mere hyperbole to heighten the effect, as if the Holy Spirit deigned to be a verbal trickster or a prophet were as vain as a litterateur. No; it is a brighter day when the power of God will make a complete clearance from the world of disorder, misrule, man’s violence and corruption, as well as reduce to harmless and happy subjection the animal kingdom at large.

On the other hand, it is not the epoch of the Incarnation, as some pious men say; though how they can venture on it is marvelous.

That day is still future, and awaits the appearing and the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. It is distressing to confound such a prophecy with Peter’s vision in order to apply all to the church now.

The bow and the sword and the battle I will break and remove out of the earth or land; and will make them to lie down safely {Hos. 2:18}.

But, better than all,

I will also betroth thee to myself for ever;

for what is the worth of every other mercy compared with this nearest association with Jehovah Himself?

Yea, I will betroth thee to myself in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies,

says He for the third time.

I will betroth thee to myself in faithfulness; and thou shalt know Jehovah {Hos. 2:19, 20}.

Then comes a final and still fuller assurance.

And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith Jehovah, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel
What an uninterrupted line of blessing, from the heavens down to every earthly blessing in the land of Israel! Every creature of God shall then reap in full enjoyment the fruits of the restored and consummated union of Jehovah with His ancient people.

And I will sow her unto me in the earth [referring to the name of Jezeel]; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy (or Lo-ruhamah); and I will say to them which were not my people (or Lo-ammi), My people thou; and they shall say, My God {Hos. 2:23}.

Alas! the heavens had been severed, necessarily and long severed, from the earth by the sin of man, and Satan had gained power not merely on the earth, but above could claim a seeming title of righteousness as accuser before God; and thus the heavens were turned into brass against His people, whom the same enemy so often deceived, perverting that which ought to have been the constant governing power and symbol of all that influenced men in relation to God into his mainspring of corruption. For instead of looking up to God in adoration, man adored the heavens and their host, rather than God as the highest object of his worship. Such was the earliest form of idolatry. It was there that Satan’s power particularly developed itself, in the turning of the highest creatures of God, the most significant parts and signs of His blessing to man, into instruments of the worst corruption. In that day Jehovah will show His power and goodness in destroying and reversing the work of Satan.

Instead therefore of longer hearing his accusation in the heavens who had only sought to dishonor God and involve man in his own ruin, Jehovah will clear the heavens. There will be restored freedom between the Creator and the higher creation, which speaks to Him as it were on behalf of the will be restored freedom between the Creator and the higher man in his own ruin, Jehovah will clear the heavens. There

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serpent’s wiles, desolation justly inflicted by God because of its fallen head, Satan will be effectually gone and all the effects of his power effaced. For the Second man will establish peace on a righteous ground for ever between God and Israel, and all the creatures of God, from the highest down to the lowest, enter into rest and joy.

Thus there is a total reversal of what Satan had done by sin throughout the universe, but especially in view of Israel; so that the names of the first chapter, which then betokened divine judgment, are now converted into mercy and blessing.

The earth [or land] shall hear the corn, and the

wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezeel {Hos. 2:22}, as Israel is styled, the seed of God. Lo-ruhamah God calls Ruhamah; and to Lo-ammi He says,

Ammi thou {Hos. 2:23}.

No doubt there is an allusion in Jezeel to their antecedent dispersion; in no way to anything Israel has been during their days of shame and sorrow, but rather to a fresh sowing of them in the land by Jehovah’s grace to His glory. The proper fulfilment of this (whatever be the verification of its principle in the Christian remnant, as we see in 1 Pet. 2) awaits the future and manifest kingdom of Jehovah and His Anointed. Then, not in pledge but in fulness, will it be seen by all the world that Hosea has not written in vain:

I will sow her unto me in the earth {Hos. 2:23}.

It is granted that Jehovah intends to take all the earth under His manifest sway (Psa. 2, Zech. 14), but a great mistake that the land {Hos. 2:23}

will not have a central place in this vast scheme of earthly blessing. The church will be the New Jerusalem, the heavenly metropolis, coming down from God out of heaven, to which she properly belongs as the bride of the Lamb. But the earth is to be blessed, and pre-eminently the land of Israel under Christ’s glorious reign; for the divine purpose is to sum up all things in Him in whom we have obtained an inheritance -- all things, whether they be things in heaven or things on earth. He, the Son in a way quite unique, is Heir of all in the truest and fullest sense, and the kingdom at His coming will display what faith believes while it is unseen.

Hosea 3 presents a still more concise summary of Israel’s past, present, and future, yet with fresh and striking features in this new outline, brief as it is. Even such Jews as acknowledge their own prophets as divinely inspired confess that Hosea in Hos. 3:4 describes exactly their present state, as it has also been for many centuries: neither altar of God nor idolatry, no consultation by the true priests or by idols; though they flatter themselves that they still adhere to Jehovah notwithstanding their sins 86. How blind to overlook the teaching that they are out of relation to Jehovah, and that it is only after the present long-lasting anomaly in their state that they are to seek their God!

This chapter winds up, as has been stated, the introductory portion of our prophecy. Hosea is still occupied with the purposes of God.

Then said Jehovah unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress {Hos. 3:1}. Again that most distressing contrast; the object of Jehovah’s affection, and withal the base and gross return of Israel represented by Gomer, who had been unfaithful to the prophet, as was intimated before the marriage that she

would be. The precision of the language, and the purity of God’s servant even under so singular an injunction, are equally beautiful. She is called no longer thy wife but a woman;

but her impurity was after marriage, and so she is justly named an adulteress. He is told to go again, and love her, a woman beloved by a friend.

Conjugal love is not intended; yet was she to be loved, as indeed she had been: there was no excuse for her sin in any failure of his affection. The exhortation was not after the manner of men, nor even of the law which regulated Israel’s ordinary ways. It was grace, and

according to the love of Jehovah toward the sons of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons or cakes of grapes {Hos. 3:1}.

For the connection of cakes with idolatry, see Jer. 7:18, 44:19. The purchase-money, half in barley, half in money, is that of a female slave; which marks the degradation to which the guilty woman had been reduced; it was of course not a dowry, as she had been married to him already.

And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide [lit. sit] for me many days,
said the prophet to her;

thou shalt not commit lewdness, and thou shalt not be to a man [i.e. neither in sin nor in lawful married life]: so I also toward thee {Hos. 3:3}

– his heart and care here, not “to her” as her husband, but toward her in affection as a friend. The bearing of this on Israel is next explained:

For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek their God, and David their king; and shall fear Jehovah and his goodness in the latter days {Hos. 3:4, 5}.

Here are many important points which we could not have gathered from either the first chapter or the second. We have seen the general position down to the end in Hos. 1; we have had certain details about Israel in Hos. 2; but Hos. 3 furnishes the solemn evidence that the humiliation of Israel was to involve a most marked and peculiar isolation, and that it was not to be a passing visitation but a prolonged state, while grace would bless more than ever in the end.

For the sons of Israel shall abide many days.

This could not have been concluded from the language of the preceding chapters. The picture therefore would not have been complete without it. Hence the Spirit of God, true to the divine purpose, gives us enough in these few words to meet the objections of him who might complain that Christianity supposes such an immense time as the period of Israel’s blindness and departure from God. The answer is that the Jewish prophet says as much, and thereby the Lord leaves room for all that had to come in meanwhile. Not of course that many days would convey the thought of ages as the necessary meaning at first, but that as the time lengthened out, it would be seen that it had been all foreseen and predicted.

But there is more. For they are to remain without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without a teraphim.

Further, they were not to take up idolatrous statues or images, as they had so often done up to the captivity; and as they should be without an ephod, the distinctive priestly apparel, so they should not fall back on tutelary divinities as they used to do for anticipating the future. They should not have a king as before the captivity, nor a prince as the Jews had after their return from Babylon. Israel afterwards had neither; and even the Jews lost what they had not long after Christ came. Again, they were to be without a sacrifice,

their sacred as well as civil polity was at an end; for what is the law without a sacrifice? Thus it is a state of things far more true now since the rejection of the Messiah, than up to that transitional period when Messiah came to them; for, although they had not a king, they had a sort of princely ruler. Certainly in the days of the Lord there was under the authority of the Roman empire a subordinate king or ruler, who might be called prince in a certain sense. They were also to be not only without the worship of the true God, but even without the false gods to which they had formerly been victims. Clearly then this describes the present condition of Israel -- the most anomalous spectacle the world has ever seen -- a people who go on age after age without any of those elements which are supposed to be essential for keeping a people in existence. For they have lost their king and prince, they have neither God nor an idol. They are not able to present a sacrifice, having nobody that they know to be a priest. Partly since Babylon carried them into captivity, entirely since Titus destroyed Jerusalem, they are literally without those genealogies which the priests must possess and produce in order to prove their title to minister in the holy place. Whatever their pretensions, they can prove nothing, and yet they are upheld by God.

Thus we have here in a single verse of our prophet the most complete picture of their present state found in the word of God -- a picture which no Jew can deny to be a likeness of their actual state. The more honest they may be,

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87. The authorised version by giving “for me” and “or thee” seems slightly to injure the force by its vague sameness of rendering.
the more they must acknowledge the living truth of the representation. Now, that God should have no connection with anything on the earth -- that He should be effectuating no purpose in a distinct manner for His own glory -- would be a monstrous notion, only fit for the wildest Epicurean dreamer, and a practical denial of the living God. Consequently, that God should use this time of the recess of Israel for the bringing in of other counsels is the simplest thing possible, which we can all understand. The Jew by and by will confess that he was inexcusably faithless in his ways and mistaken in his thoughts; he had here at least the negative side of the picture, his own enigmatic state, the people of God not His people, a nation without a government, and, stranger still, with no false god and yet without the true, having neither priest nor sacrifice. The Spirit of God gives the positive side in the New Testament, where we have the call of the Gentiles meanwhile, and within it the gathering of the faithful into the church -- Christ’s body.

But in addition to all, the last verse furnishes another most distinct disclosure, which none but prejudiced men could overlook, that God has not done with Israel as such. It is not true, therefore, that the sons of Israel are to be merged in Christianity. They are said (Hos. 3:5) afterwards not to turn but to return, and seek Jehovah their God. This is not a description of becoming members of Christ, or of receiving the new and deeper revelations of the New Testament. They will never as a nation form the heavenly body of Christ, either wholly or in part. They will be saved in God’s grace through faith in the Lord Jesus, but rather according to the measure vouchsafed to their fathers than to us now, with the modification of the manifest reign of the Lord. Compare Isa. 11, Luke 1, Rom. 11. Individuals merge in Christianity now of course, and are brought out of their state of Judaism consequently; but here we have a different and future state of things quite distinct in some material respects from anything that was or from anything that is, though there be but one Savior, and but one Spirit, and but one God the Father.

Afterwards shall the sons of Israel return and seek -- not the exalted Head in heaven nor the gospel as such, but -- Jehovah their God {Hos. 3:5}.

I grant you it is the same God, yet as Jehovah. It is not the revelation of His name as the Messiah (when rejected, and above all dead and risen) made Him known as His Father and our Father, His God and our God {see John 20:17}.

It is not the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit into which we are baptized with water. Here it is rather the form and measure vouchsafed to the nation of old. In short it is God made known after a Jewish sort. And what confirms this is the next expression, and David their king {Hos. 3:5} -- that same blessed person, even the Messiah as such, who unites these two glories in His person, though the former of course not exclusively.

Evidently therefore a state of things is before us quite distinct from Christianity. The Targum and the Rabbinical expositors own that David here means the Messiah.

And they shall fear toward Jehovah, and toward His goodness in the latter day {Hos. 3:5}.

Thus we have clearly in this passage, not only the present abnormal condition of Israel, but the future restoration of their blessedness, yea, more than they ever yet possessed. 88

If the latter days mean, according to the well-known rule of Kimchi and other Jewish doctors, the days of the Messiah, the New Testament demonstrates that the question has still to be decided between the days of His first advent or those of His second. The context proves that in the Old Testament these days always look on to His reign in power and glory; but various parts of it in the Psalms and the Prophets attest His profound humiliation and death as clearly as His reign over Israel and the earth. The Jews and the Gentiles are quite if not equally wrong for want of simple-hearted intelligence without confusion of the New Testament with the Old.

The rest of the prophecy consists of the indignant appeals of the Holy Spirit to conscience because of the increasing evils of Israel -- not so much the judgment of God on a grand scale, and His grace at the end, but His people caused to see themselves over and over again, and in every class, in presence of His patient but righteous ways with them. I do not mean that we shall not find here, especially at the end, what Jehovah will do in His goodness, but it consists much more of presentation sketches of Israel in a moral point of view. His dealings and denunciations compare the actual state then with the past, but the Spirit of prophecy launches into the future also. This, in fact, will be found in the rest of the prophecy, which closes with not a call only to repentance, but Jehovah’s final assurance to Israel of His mercy, love, and rich blessing. Thus the two divisions end alike with Israel blessed inwardly and outwardly on earth to the praise of Jehovah their God, wound up with a moral appeal and a warning at the conclusion of all (Hos. 14:9).

In this second or remaining part, the opening chapter (Hosea 4) begins to set out the ground of complaint against the sons of Israel. They are called to hear Jehovah; for He hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land,

88. Dr. Henderson renders the last clause, “shall tremulously hasten to Jehovah and to his goodness.” His goodness will attract but overawe their souls. It is real and pious feeling, but in accordance with their relationship -- hardly with that of the Christian; and so the New Testament never speaks in exactly the same way. It is unwise and unfaithful to force the scriptures.
because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land [Hos. 4:1].

It is well to note this. In the hypocrite or the theorist there may be a certain knowledge without good fruit; but, in those who are simple and real, knowledge of God cannot be separated from holy and righteous ways, as practical evil goes with ignorance of God. As the first verse puts their state negatively, in the second we have the positive wickedness charged home with amazing energy:

Swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, burst out, and blood [lit. bloods] toucheth on blood [Hos. 4:2].

There was to the prophet nothing else. Profanity against God, corruption and violence among men, filled the scene; and this in the land where Jehovah’s eyes rested continually, whence He had destroyed the former inhabitants because of their iniquities.

Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away [Hos. 4:3].

God marked His sense of all by desolation in the lower creation, down to those which might seem farthest from the control or influence of man. Such was the havoc and misery under God’s hand through Israel’s sin.

Yet let not man strive, and let not man reprove; for thy people [are] as they that strive with the priest [Hos. 4:4].

It was vain for man to speak now: God must take in hand a state negatively, in the second we have the positive.

Therefore shall thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother [Hos. 4:5].

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I also will reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: because thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I too will forget thy children (Hos. 4:6).

The true meaning seems to be Israel’s loss of their relative nearness to God as His people (Ex. 19), not to such sons of Aaron as might pander to irregularities in worship or connive at sin. Not individuals but my people are in question; as those who bring priests into the verse seem to see in the following clause. We shall hear of priests presently. Here it is the people.

As they increased, so they sinned against me: I will change their glory into shame. They eat up the sin [perhaps sin-offering] of my people, and long after [lift up their soul to] their iniquity. Therefore it shall be, like people, like priest; I will visit upon him his ways, and make his doings to return to him [Hos. 4:7-9].

Here imperceptibly we come from the people to the priest, who are singularly identified, as in wickedness so in punishment, in the latter clauses of Hos. 4:9 -- not “them” but him [Hos. 4:9].

They were alike evil. No class was exempt from pollution: people and priests were indiscriminately corrupt. From their position the priests might be more guilty than the people; but they were all morally at one. But God would not fail in judgment.

For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit lewdness, and shall not increase: because they have left off to take heed to Jehovah. My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of lewdness hath caused them to err, and they have gone lewdly from under their God [Hos. 4:10-12].

Thus moral laxity and indulgence play into the hands of idolatry, as Satan takes advantage of the passions to hold men in his religious toils. Hence we see how well the expression for uncleanness morally suits the heart’s going after false gods.

They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains, and offer incense on the hills, under the oak and the poplar and the terebinth, because their shade is good therefore your daughters commit lewdness, and your daughters-in-law commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they commit lewdness, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery; for they themselves go aside with harlots, and sacrifice with prostitutes (literally, consecrated to this demoralising false worship, which made their debasement a religious duty and a gain):

therefore the people not understanding shall be cast headlong [Hos. 4:13, 14].

Whatever their faults and ways against each other, deepest of all was their sin against Jehovah their God. And this furnishes the opportunity and necessity for the warning that they must lose their priestly character as a nation; that is, their distinctive nearness in relation to God. Further, let their ruin be a call to Judah to beware. This brings us face to face into the actual state of Israel when Hosea was on the earth.

Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend; and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither
The allusion is to the notorious idolatry of Israel and its chief seats, where God had once given the nation to judge their own evil, or near the spot where their father, prince with God, received promises of grace from Himself. It was now, however, not Bethel (house of God) but the neighboring pollution, Beth-aven (house of vanity).

Nor swear, Jehovah liveth {Hos. 4:15},
thus adding insult against Jehovah to the injury done towards His truth; for idolatry is in no way mitigated, but the less excusable in him who even outwardly owns His name. This very recognition, and the attempt to mingle Jehovah with what was contrary to Jehovah, form the gravamen of their guilt, and its exact measure and worst aggravation at that epoch in the sight of God. The same principle applies now. To accredit with faith an offender is no ground whatever to count his sin less but rather more heinous. For there cannot be a more immoral or destructive principle than to allege the fact or hope of one’s Christianity as a reason for slurring over his sin: on the contrary moral judgment and separation would be but due to the name of God, not to say in love to his soul whose deliverance and restoration we desire. For we have to do with God’s will and ways; according to which a man’s faith and confession characterizes these days, and is, under the show of grace, real evil in God’s sight.

Take notice of another solemn principle in Hos. 4:17 after warning Judah from the sad ruin of Israel: a desolate land of exile was before them.

Ephraim is joined to idols [lit. toils]: let him alone .
God chastises as long as there is the smallest feeling; but when He ceases to deal with the guilty, all is over morally speaking. When to Ephraim or any other He gives such rest as this, it is because hope is abandoned, and the evil is allowed to run its course unchecked.

Their drink is turned; her rulers greatly love infamy {Hos. 4:18};
that is, they give themselves to nothing else than that which is and brings inevitable shame.

The wind hath bound her up in its wings, and they shall be ashamed of their sacrifice {Hos. 4:19}.
They refused to learn of God in peace and righteousness, and must be given up to the winds, dispersed afar off by their enemies, and there be humbled, seeing they refused it in their own land.

There is a triple summons in Hosea 5:1. We begin with a distinct address to the priests, then a call to the people, and lastly to the house of the king. The last chapter was occupied with the people, and only by gradual transition came to the priests. But now the leaders are appealed to, religious and civil.

There is a notion that Hosea is disorderly, some going so far as to say that there is no regular method in the book. One can understand men owning that they have failed to comprehend a prophet so concise and so rapid in his changes. But it is grievous to add that a bishop who was considered to possess learning ventured to pronounce it merely the leaves of the Sibyl; as if any inspired words could with reverence be compared to mythic oracles of no heavenly birth, written on leaves and dispersed by the wind. When will men learn modesty as to themselves as well as reverence when they have to do with the word of God? If they cannot explain a passage or a book, why not confess their ignorance or hold their peace? For a man professing to be a chief shepherd of Christ to dare thus to speak of writings beyond his own measure evinces certainly anything but the lowly faithfulness which becomes a steward of God. Such, however, is the spirit of man increasingly in this age. To my conviction, though with abundant ground for feeling my own shortcomings, the prophecy is beyond doubt knit together so as to indicate a systematic chain, profoundly dealing with the whole people, and pointing the moral for Judah from apostate and callous Ephraim.

Idolatrous evil, with every other in its train, had perverted all grades and men in Israel up to the priests and the king’s household -- the one controlling religious matters, the other acting as the fountain of authority here below. Where now was the saint of Jehovah, or the witness of the true David that was coming? Reckless impiety and self-indulgence reigned. There was wickedness everywhere. The judgment was now towards those who should have judged righteously. Alas! they were a snare on Mizpah and a net spread on Tabor. East or west of the Jordan made no difference; and the scenes of former mercies which ought never to have been forgotten were remembered but to give effect to actual enticements of idolatry. And the revolters made the slaughter deep, though Jehovah had been a rebuke to them all. Little as the guilty people thought it in their headlong self-willed madness, He well knew Ephraim, and Israel was not hidden from Him: defiling corruption wrought everywhere. Their doings would not permit them to return to their God; for the spirit of lewdness was in their bosom, and they had not known Jehovah. Therefore should the pride of Israel be humbled before His face; and Israel and Ephraim should stumble in their iniquity, Judah too falling with them (Hos. 5:1-5). They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek Jehovah; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them. They have dealt treacherously against Jehovah: for they have begotten strange children: now shall a month devour them with their portions {Hos. 5:6, 7}.

No offerings in such a state would avail: God stood aloof. Their treachery against Him was extreme; and the evil was perpetuated: but now, says the prophet in warning of speedy and sweeping judgments, shall one month devour them together with their portions [possessions]. Hence, says the prophet:
Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah, and the trumpet in Ramah: cry aloud at Beth-aven after thee, O Benjamin. Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke: among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be (Hos. 5:8, 9).

Alas! Judah, instead of repenting, sought their own profit; and divine wrath must be poured on them. Ephraim, disobedient to God, was subservient enough to him who made Israel sin against God, who thereon is like a moth to him, and to Judah like rottenness. Chastening did not lead them to God, but to the Assyrian: could he heal or cure? It was bad enough to be treacherous to God; but it was worse that they must expose their impiety and unbelief by having recourse to the stranger. It is a distress when the children of God behave ill among themselves, but it is an awful thing when there is no shame in seeking the resources of the world that hates them. With Israel this was the case. They exposed themselves; they exposed God, so to speak, in His own people, the only link, we may say, with God on the earth.

When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound {Hos. 5:13}.

In fact it was God who was inflicting it: no wonder it was incurable.

For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah {Hos. 5:14}.

Thus, we see, they are both now joined, as in sin so in punishment, first slow decay, and then fierce violence. Judah would take no warning from the sin of Ephraim or from his judgment now at hand. Hence says Jehovah,

I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early {Hos. 5:15}.

This draws out a remarkable appeal from the agonized prophet {Hosea 6}:

Come, and let us return unto Jehovah; for he hath torn, and he will heal us (Hos. 6:1).

Is there any disorder here? What more proper? We have had the proof of the guilt of them all; not only the solemn warning of the Lord, but the distinct statement that He was going away from them to leave them to themselves -- not absolutely as if He had done with them, though they had done with Him for the time; for He says,

In their affliction they will seek me early.

There He gives them up. But this draws out the prophet. If such was the divine character, if God felt so keenly their adultery and spiritual treachery towards Himself, it nevertheless showed that His heart was towards them.

Come, and let us return.

Why wait? Why go to the end of wickedness?

Come, and let us return unto Jehovah: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up {Hos. 6:1}.

and with how much delight! It was God’s hand that had brought them low, but He was able to heal.

After two days

– a sufficient witness, it would seem –

After two days he will revive us: in the third day

– the witness was now complete; for

in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established {Matt. 18:16}

– in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight {Hos. 6:2}.

He first gives enough proof of what we are; then He will prove what He is in raising His people up nationally as from the dead.

Can it be doubted that the passage does in an indirect and hidden but real way refer to the resurrection of Christ? He became the true Israel. Consequently, just as He went down in grace and perfectness into the depths where they had fallen justly for their sins, under the persecuting power of the Gentiles, and was called out of Egypt, as they had been of old (a scripture which is given later in Hosea, and applied by the Spirit of God in Matt. 2), so I do not doubt here similarly we have the resurrection of the Lord in mysterious view. Nevertheless its plain and immediate bearing is rather on Israel than on the Messiah. To Him it only refers, inasmuch as the Holy Ghost cannot but bring Him everywhere in the Bible. No matter what He may treat of -- if it be only loops or taches, badgers’ or rams’ skins, pillars, curtains, or anything else, revelation must always turn on Christ. His name lies at the bottom and is the top-stone of all. So it is here. Whatever the Spirit may hold out to Israel, Christ is the One fixed and guiding star to which we are directed by the Spirit of God. The chosen people may wax, wane, or disappear; but He abides, occasionally behind clouds, the Sun that never sets. The Spirit is come to glorify Christ; He is now sent down, takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us. Even in the Old Testament, when coverings and a vail hung over all that was within, His words might be given, as remarked, in a kindred style: still Christ was ever underneath the vail.

Next we have from Hos. 6:4 Jehovah’s grief, to which Hosea gives expression:

O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.

Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and

89. There seems no good reason to regard: (2’7”) as a proper name, but rather as an ordinary appellation, meaning the king “that should contend,” “plead,” or avenge” the hostile king: so many ancients and moderns. It was the Assyrian.
There were instructive lessons, and of the greatest importance for us to heed, nevertheless Israel have a peculiar place, as under probation, that was found in no way between the two. Hence there need not be the slightest doubt that, although the word is capable of meaning “men” as well as “Adam," the context proves the true meaning to be what is given in the margin, not in the text:

But they [that is Israel], like Adam, have transgressed the covenant {Hos. 6:7}.

Scripture never so speaks of man in general. Man is called a sinner. The Gentiles as such are not, I think, called transgressors. We hear of “sinners,” never “transgressors, of the Gentiles.” Men generally were not in a position to transgress; but they certainly were sinners and did nothing but sin. Transgression, dreadful as it is, supposes that those guilty of it have had a known revelation of God’s revealed mind and will, and hence stand on a definite ground of relationship, the limits of which they have overpassed. Hence it is that “transgression” suits the state of man not when outcast, but when they break through the bounds that God has been pleased to set them. Certainly Adam was under a law, which he broke; he thus became a transgressor. Israel were under the law, which they broke likewise, and thus became transgressors. But the people between Adam and Moses, although they were sinners just as much as either, were not transgressors as both were.

This appears to be the ground taken here. Therefore the passage does not, I am persuaded, mean men, but Adam.

But they like Adam have transgressed the covenant.

The relation of Adam with God may be regarded as a covenant with God, though not the covenant. There was certainly a law given to Adam, but not the law. Israel had the law and the first or old covenant, in contrast with that new one of which Jeremiah speaks under the Messiah’s reign of peace and glory. But Israel rebelled, or, as it is said here, transgressed the covenant.

There have they dealt treacherously against me {Hos. 6:7}.

The region of Gilead, which was across the Jordan, is next specified. No city of the name is known: if none, the name is given by a bold figure to their corporate union in corruption and violence.

Gilead is a city of them that work iniquity, and is polluted with blood {Hos. 6:8}.

Nor is this the worst: for the priests banded privily to waylay and destroy.

And as troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent {Hos. 6:9}.

Those that ought to have been a city of refuge and active intercessors for the needy were themselves the ringleaders in evil, and on every ground the most guilty of all. They murder in the way of consent (or “toward Shechem”): for they commit deliberate crime {Hos. 6:9}.
This was the heart-breaking sorrow. Had it been among the heathen, it were not so surprising. But

I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel: there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled {Hos. 6:10}.

The chapter closes with the assurance of sovereign mercy on His part who must judge iniquity according to the holiness of His nature.

Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee, when I returned [or rather return] the captivity of my people {Hos. 6:11}.

It is impossible fairly to apply this to the return from the captivity in Babylon; for it is striking to observe that the post-captivity prophets never speak of the Jews who returned as “my people,” save in predictions of future blessedness under their Messiah reigning in glory and power over the earth. The return of the Jews by the decree of Cyrus was an unparalleled event, contrary to the policy of the East, and only to be accounted for by the power which wrought in the conscience of Babylon’s conqueror through the divine word, and (it may be) the personal weight of Daniel. But those who returned were never called “my people.” It awaits another and very different day when the Jews shall look on Him whom they pierced. Compare chapters 1, 2, 3. For that day awaits the real fulfillment of Psa. 126:1, 5, when the harvest of joy shall come after many and long sorrows.

Hosea 7, in a most solemn description, follows up the same proof and reproof of sin against them all, and shows that, spite of the patient mercy and touching appeals of God, they would only get worse and worse. The day of deliverance was as yet far off. God’s intervention in goodness only manifested the people’s sin.

When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the evils of Samaria: for they practise falsehood (cf. John 3); and the thief cometh in, a troop of robbers plundereth without. And they say not to their hearts, I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings encompass them; they are before my face. They have made the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies {Hos. 7:1-3}.

What can be more graphic, though somewhat obscure from the singular compression of the style and rapid changes in figure, than the description which follows in Hos. 7:4-7, where the heart burns with the fire of passion, and indulgence and flattery furnish fuel?

They are all adulterers, as an oven heated by the baker, who ceaseth from raising after he hath kneaded the dough until it be leavened. In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners. For they have made ready their heart like an oven, whiles they lie in wait: their baker sleeppeth all the night; in the morning it burneth as a flaming fire. They are all hot as an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings are fallen: there is none among them that calleth unto me {Hos. 7:4-7}.

Ephraim is shown to have been mixed up among the nations to the dishonor of Jehovah. There might have been some hope, if he had judged such a self-willed slight and confusion and had repented; but he is become a cake not turned (Hos. 7:8).

Therefore, it is only a question of getting so burnt as to be good for nothing.

Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are sprinkled about on him, and he knoweth it not (Hos. 7:9).

It was plain enough their heathen idols were proving their ruin.

And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face; but they turn not to Jehovah their God, nor seek him for all this {Hos. 7:10}.

This is confirmed in Hos. 7:11 by the proof of their folly. The grey hairs beginning to show themselves here and there held out no promise of a crown of honor for his head -- far from it. They were but the sign of death-working decrepitude, and of distance from God. Hence it is said:

Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria {Hos. 7:11}.

That is, they look anywhere and everywhere rather than to God. Jehovah had dealt with them, no doubt, punishing them in His retributive righteousness.

Hence it is said,

As they go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven; I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard. Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me; though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me. And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds: they assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me. Though I have bound and strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against me. They return, but not to the most High: they are like a deceitful bow: their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue: this shall be their derision in the land of Egypt {Hos. 7:12-16}.

Egypt, to which they called in vain, not only fails them, as against Assyria, but mocks at their captivity and ruin. Such is the world against God’s guilty people. Whatever favors God gave them, they turned against Him; whatever judgments He sent against them, they never cried to Him. How dreadful was their condition when justly given up to their folly and its punishment!

They have not cried unto me,
He says,

from their heart [Hos. 7:14].

They cried out when punished, but they never cried to God with their heart when they howled from their beds. Judgment had no more moral effect upon them than mercy.

In Hosea 8 accordingly, Jehovah warns aloud of unsparing judgment.

Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an eagle against the house of Jehovah [Hos. 8:1].

They are the same figures used by our Lord in Matt. 24, where the disciples are told of the loud sound of the trumpet and of the eagles gathering together at the end of this age. The trumpet is clearly the announcement of the purpose of God in any given case. Here it is the sound of imminent judgment, as in the Lord’s later prophecies it assures of the time come to gather the scattered Jews, or rather Israel. The eagles are a figure of the instruments of divine vengeance surely and rapidly coming to their prey. I only refer to both now to illustrate the surprising unity of scripture, and show how the employment of figures from beginning to end is governed by the perfect wisdom of God. This is no inconsiderable help to interpretation; because if the prophets had only employed each his own peculiar phrases, it would have been incomparably more difficult to understand scripture. As it is, there is a definite language of symbol used right through the Bible; and when you have seized it in one place, it remains for use in another, and thus become a means of helping us through what would otherwise prove more difficult. But it is well to remember that in point of depth the New Testament exceeds the Old; and although many complain of difficulties in Hebrew, they are not of the same nature but are mainly owing to a difference of relationship.

To me will they then cry, My God, we [Israel] know thee [Hos. 8:2].

It was but lip-confession.

Israel hath cast off good; the enemy shall pursue him. They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes and I knew it not; of their silver and their gold have they made them idols that they may be cast off. Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off; mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be before they attain to purity? For from Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces. For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall reap it; the strangers shall swallow it up. For Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces. For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall reap it; the strangers shall swallow it up. For Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces. For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall reap it; the strangers shall swallow it up.

The prophet in spirit sees the people already captives, yet not extinguished, among the Gentiles, yet never coalescing as others, utterly despised as none ever were, yet surviving all cruelty and shame to this day.

For they are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim hath hired lovers. Yea, because they hire among the nations, now will I gather them, and in a little they shall sorrow for the burden of the king of princes [Hos. 8:9-10].

This was one great offence with God, whom they forsook and forget: else surely He had appeared for their deliverance as He did for Judah. They sought the shelter of Assyria, and there should they be carried in shame.

Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin, many altars shall be unto him to sin [Hos. 8:11].

This was their other great transgression, the parent of fruitful evil and sorrow.

I have written to him the great things of my law: they were counted as a strange thing. They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat it: Jehovah accepteth them not; now will he remember their iniquity, and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt. For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities; but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof [Hos. 8:12-14].

There might be thus a difference in degree of departure. Israel had abandoned the true God, Judah trusted her fortified cities; but judgment would prove that God is not indifferent in either case to His own dishonor. The denunciation here is too plain to call for explanation.

Hosea 9 sets out the joyless doom of Israel for their lewd departure from their God; for they had taken their corn as a harlot’s hire from their false gods: all such outward mercies should fail, and they should not dwell in the land of Jehovah, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and in Assyria they should eat of unclean things -- some fleeing voluntarily to the former, the mass captives in the latter. They should not pour out wine to Jehovah, nor should they be pleasing to Him -- their sacrifices unto them as the bread of mourners; all that eat thereof should be unclean; for their bread should be for themselves -- none should come into the house of Jehovah [Hos. 9:1-4].

What will ye do on the day of assembly -- on the day of Jehovah’s feast? [Hos. 9:5].

They should be not only incapable of keeping holiday after the manner prescribed, but alas! without the heart and conscience exercised, seeing man’s power, not their own sin nor God’s judgment.

For, lo, they are gone because of destruction.

To avoid the Assyrian they escaped to the south; but

Egypt shall gather them, Memphis shall bury them [not the land of their fathers]; as for their desired silver, nettles shall inherit it -- thorns in their tents [Hos. 9:6].

Impatience had long stupefied them. They should awake to suffering if not repentance.
The days of visitation are come, the days of retribution are come; Israel shall know it [not yet themselves, nor Jehovah]. The prophet is foolish, the man of the spirit frantic, for the greattness of thy punishment and the great hatred {Hos. 9:7}.

Such had been Israel’s taunt against the true prophet; and such was meted again to the false. Of these deceivers it was true.

Ephraim [was a] watchman with my God; the prophet is a fowler’s snare on all his ways -- hatred in the house of his God. They have gone deep, they are corrupted, as in the days of Gibeah: he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins {Hos. 9:5-9}.

As the Spirit compares their state as a whole to that frightful epoch when one tribe all but perished for its obstinate espousal of an evil most offensive to Israel, so now He dwells on Jehovah’s love for the people and their sad return.

I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first-ripe in the fig tree at her first time: but they went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved. As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away as a bird, from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception. Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left; yea, woe also to them when I depart from them! Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, is planted in a pleasant place: but Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer. Give them, O Jehovah: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for their wicked audacious doings Jehovah would drive them out of His house, and love them no more; all their princes are revolters. Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit; yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb. My God will cast them away, and their glory in their children perish, but woe to themselves forsaken of Jehovah! Murder and barrenness should befall Ephraim, who dared to make Gilgal itself the sink of their wickedness: for their wicked audacious doings Jehovah would drive them out of His house, and love them no more; but they should not wander only, but be wanderers among the nations {Hos. 9:10-17}.

Thus not only should a blight fall on their national prosperity, and their glory in their children perish, but woe to themselves forsaken of Jehovah! Murder and barrenness should befall Ephraim, who dared to make Gilgal itself the sink of their wickedness: for their wicked audacious doings Jehovah would drive them out of His house, and love them no more; but they should not wander only, but be wanderers among the nations. How truly accomplished to the letter! and the more strikingly because they do not form a separate community, but mix with the Gentiles within and without Christendom, chiefly abandoned to the lust of gain.

In **Hosea 10** we have Israel judged as an empty 90 vine in accordance with all that precedes. For it is clear that this answers to the outward state in the days of the prophet. There was ample religious show, such as it was -- profession, but nothing for God’s acceptance -- the plain contrast of Christ, who alone was the true vine. This is another instance of the way in which Christ takes up in His own person the history of Israel, and renews it for good in obedience to God’s glory; as all the fruit Israel brought forth was to lusts, multiplying altars as his fruit multiplied, and making goodly statues or images as his land was made good. It is always thus where prosperity accompanies an unrenewed mind.

Their heart is divided; now shall they be guilty. He will cut off their altars; he will spoil their statues [or images]. For now will they say, We have no king, because we fear not Jehovah and the king: what can he do for us? They have spoken [mere] words, swearing falsely, making a covenant, and judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field {Hos. 10:2-4}.

It was poison they planted, cultivated, and would reap. For the calves of Beth-aven the inhabitants of Samaria fear; yea, the people thereof mourn over them, and the priests thereof [that] rejoiced over them for its glory, because it is departed from it. This also shall be carried to Assyria a present to the contentious king [or king Jareb]: Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel be ashamed of his own counsel {Hos. 10:5, 6}.

Their idol, far from helping, was taken captive with the besotted people who gave up Jehovah for the likeness of a calf which eats hay.

As for Samaria, her king is cut off as foam [or a chip] on the face of the water. The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us {Hos. 10:7, 8}.

**Hos. 10:9-11** are a most animated appeal, putting Israel now in as bad or a worse light than guilty Benjamin when all the other tribes punished his iniquity.

O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood {Hos. 10:9}.

They were fallen now; and that battle or worse must now overtake them. The nations will be used of Jehovah to

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90 Dr. Henderson and others render יִתְבָּשֵׁס “luxuriant,” and argue that the idea of emptying, which the verb also has (derived) from that of pouring out entirely or abundantly the contents of a vessel, does not suit the present connection. But there is no need for the smallest violence. For inasmuch as the sense is clearly a vine that is luxuriant in everything but fruit, pouring out, as it literally means, its wood and leaves, the authorized version is justified, not those who overlook the connection, and take it in the sense of fruitfulness. The Targum of Jonathan is decidedly in favor of this; the old versions are divided, like the moderns.
chastise Israel, only harmonious and earnest in toiling at sin. Whatever might have been the gentle training of God before, He would place a rider on Ephraim [not make Ephraim to ride], but Judah, yea, all the seed of Jacob, should be broken down under the hand of the enemy. Under kindred figures an exhortation follows in Hos. 10:12, and a reproof in Hos. 10:13; but internal tumult would surely come, and ruin from without ensue, on Shalman (= Shalmaneser’s) in the day of battle; and all this destructive devastation Bethel should procure them for the wickedness of their wickedness: in a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off {Hos. 10:15}.

**Hosea 11** exemplifies a remark made repeatedly, for here again the Spirit intermingles Christ and Israel very strikingly.

When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt {Hos. 11:1}.

The allusion is clear to the past history of Israel, when they were the object of Jehovah’s love and delivering power and special government. There seems an intimation of what He may do for His people by and by; for great things are in store for that people preserved providentially now for the work of grace at the end of this age. Meanwhile the Lord Jesus comes in between the two, enacting as it were the history over again in His own person, and becoming the basis for the future restoration of Israel. It is here that the principle applies so admirably. He resumes in grace their leading points, and thus comforts faith in Israel by the testimony of God’s care for His people. [He] then called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them {Hos. 11:2-4}.

Thus, spite of all His goodness in every suited form, He was in their eyes as those that put the yoke on the Jews, feed them as He might.

At the same time Egypt is not, strictly speaking, the place where the great bulk of them lie hidden, though those who may be there will surely be called out. Thus was Christ when His parents fled of old from Herod. But as a whole the tribes were carried into Assyria; and Hosea says here, He shall not return into the land of Egypt: but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return {Hos. 11:5}.

The meaning implied is that in rebellion against God some would have liked Egypt as a refuge from the Assyrian spoiler. We know that in the time of Jeremiah there was such a resource in order to avoid submission to Babylon. God commanded the king and people to submit to the head of gold; but they would not, keeping by Egypt, which was tolerably near for escape. In vain! they perished; and Egypt was humbled under His hand. It was not that Israel had reason to love the iron furnace whence they had come out, - their house of bondage till God delivered them by Moses; but man is ever perverse; and even Egypt, when displeasing to God and about to be judged after Israel, seems to their blind unbelief a desirable shield from the sword of the Assyrian when it comes, as it surely will. What we fly from in opposition to God’s will becomes our severest scourge.

He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return. And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels. And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him {Hos. 11:5-7}.

The prophet’s language is picturesque, though compressed. The supposed Sibylline irregularity is nowhere in Hosea. There is often difficulty, because we are ignorant, and it may be added, because we do not read with the feeling and ground of Jews; for this prophet is intensely Jewish. The time is not yet come when Israel will be awakened to appreciate his rapid transitions, his solemn reproaches, his mingled recalls of divine favor. When that time comes, all difficulties of this kind will disappear. The Israelite will delight in and sympathize with these impassioned changes. Gentiles are but little capable of entering into such experience, and more particularly too when they confound, as they generally do, what belongs to Israel with the Christian’s portion.

Here then, just as before, the announcement of these sweeping judgments of Jehovah, as well as of their humiliating causes, is pressed on the conscience and heart of Israel; at one time they are inflicted morally by the prophet, at another they are from their foes. Of course moral judgment comes first. Now we have it in a more external form. Their punishment is threatened to the last extremity out of the land, slaves of the heathen, which they assumed never could be; for so superstition dreams, as once in Israel, no less in what calls itself the church. But it is most just and retributive punishment. Nevertheless we have a new burst of sorrow on God’s part, who grieved though compelled to strike, and would not utterly destroy the people He had chosen.

How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine auger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city. They shall walk after Jehovah: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west. They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt,
and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith Jehovah. Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints {Hos. 11:8-12}.

Were they not really as bad as the devoted cities of the plain? Yet would He spare in sovereign mercy, not like man returning to complete the work, nor entering into the city that He might do it thoroughly; for He is God and not man, the Holy One in the midst of Ephraim. Here He assures not only of His intervention, but of their submission and answer to His summons, from the west, south, and north-east; for the Assyrians represent the north as decidedly as the east. The last verse however judges the present moral state of the two houses of Israel. How far from what grace will yet work though Judah stood?

Accordingly Hosea 12 pursues the reproof of Ephraim, and charges Judah also with offences in His sight. Thus Jacob is brought in not only as guilty in his sons, but personally as an object of divine dealing in order to counsel the people now. And a most interesting appeal it is, where Jehovah now pleads with His people, not so much appealing to conscience, nor letting them know His own pain in smiting them, but urging on them the reminiscences of past mercy to their father Jacob as a present lesson to his sons. How many a soul has been brought back to God by mercy to their father Jacob as a present lesson to his sons. This gives the link reminding them of the ancient history of their common father.

Ephraim feedeth on wind
– what folly!
And followeth after the east wind,
– of all winds the most fierce and scorching.
He daily increaseth lies and desolation,
deceitful evil and its recompence even now, as well as by and by.

And they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt {Hos. 12:1}.

They might like to curry favor again with the mighty; but their false heart, breaking the covenant, and seeking to win Egypt also by presenting what they could expect abundantly, only made the Assyrian their enemies; and so end all efforts at setting one power against another to one’s own advantage. It is unworthy even of a man, how much more of the people of God!

Jehovah hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him {Hos. 12:2}.

It was not Ephraim only but Judah too which was in question, though not yet so far gone as the rest. This gives the link reminding them of the ancient history of their common father.

He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God {Hos. 12:3}.

From the first Jacob did that which indicated the supplanting of his brother on the one hand, before it could be set down to developed character, but on the other God recalls what grace did when it gave him strength beyond his own in his weakness. When he was shrunk up in the sinew of his thigh he was strengthened of God to prevail with the angel, and acquired the name which pledges the blessing of grace and all overcoming to the seed of Abraham.

Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him.

What! The man who cowered and wept for fear of Esau? The self-same man on that very same occasion, when full of plans though not without prayer at the alarming approach of Esau, learns the sufficiency of grace, and has this strength made perfect in his weakness.

He found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us [identifying strikingly and touchingly the children with their forefathers] even Jehovah the God of hosts; Jehovah is his memorial. Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually {Hos. 12:4-6}.

What a withering rebuke in Hos. 12:7, 8!

A merchant [Canaan], the balance of deceit in his hand, he loveth to overreach! And Ephraim said, I am simply become rich; I have found me out substances: it is all my labors. They will find no iniquity in me that is sin.

How often prosperity blinds to evil, and God’s judgment those who should know both.

In Hos. 12:9 Jehovah binds together His deliverance of Israel from Egypt with that mercy which will yet make good what the feast of tabernacles pledged; in Hos. 12:10 He reminds them of this extraordinary testimony when they ruined themselves by breaking this law and forsaking Himself; in Hos. 12:11 He sets before them the lamentable and ruinous witness of their idolatry. Then in verse Hos. 12:12 their father Jacob is once more held up to rebuke them, who fled in weakness, but served faithfully -- sad contrast of his sons; and yet, though brought by God’s word and power out of Egypt, most bitterly did Ephraim provoke to anger now therefore should his Lord leave his biолодguiltiness on him and requit his reproach to him.

In Hosea 13 we see that when Ephraim spoke, there was trembling, so exalted was he in Israel:

When he offended in Baal, he died. And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen; they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves {Hos. 13:1, 2}.

Hence was so great a change, and the downfall of his power; their prosperity was as evanescent as the lightest things men speak of in proverbs. Yet again Jehovah reminds
them of His relation to them from the beginning. Himself
the only true God and Savior. His very mercy was too much
for them. He should now show Himself an avenger
(Hos. 13:7, 8). Truly, as it is so earnestly put,

O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is
thine help \footnote{91}{Hos. 13:9}.
The sovereign grace of God is the only hope and help for
His sinful people. Of this Israel will reap the benefit, as we
are doing.

Where was now their king to save? where their judges?
Alas! the words recall another early history of sin and
rebellion and of God’s displeasure. Yet Ephraim clung only
to his sin (Hos. 13:12), hid instead of confessing it. The
very patience of God only makes the blow the more sudden
and felt when it falls. What folly not to come forth when
safety depends on promptness? But man’s extremity is
God’s opportunity, who will deliver when all hope is gone.
How unlike the king whom He gave once in wrath, who
brought them into such a state of degradation that they could
not even sharpen the mattock in the land of Israel, but were
obliged to their bitterest enemies for the barest means of
subsistence! Jehovah assuredly will take the matter in hand,
and then not merely their enemies, but death and the grave
would be put down. Let them summon plagues and array
pestilence as they may, Jehovah will conquer on behalf of
His people.

To apply this to any thing past in Israel’s history is
extravagantly poor. But it is a mistake to think that they will
not be accomplished magnificently in Israel’s future
deliverance. Gentile “conceit,” as the apostle warns in
Rom. 11, easily falls into such oversight, in its eagerness to
take all the blessings to itself, leaving all the curses, and
only these, to Israel. The New Testament gives a still richer
turn, and reads a deeper truth in the words; but this in no
way warrants our alienating the ancient people of God in the
latter day from their predicted blessing through Jehovah’s
grace, when our Lord reigns, the all-conquering King of
Israel, Jesus the Christ. Deliverance will come when the last
Assyrian, the king of the north of Daniel, strikes his last
blow -- not as of old carrying off the people, but himself
falling far more miserably than Samaria then met her
punishment at his hands.

Then most beautifully winding up the prophecy, we have in
\textit{Hosea 14} no scattered leaf of the Sibyl, but what
ought to be here and nowhere else -- the final operation and
effect of divine grace on the long-guilty, long-hardened
people of God. The appeals, the reminiscences, the
warnings, and the mercy are no longer in vain; but at length
by the Spirit poured into the heart of Israel (who bow at last
to that gracious Jehovah whose long-suffering had waited
upon them many days -- ages of His own dishonor through
them -- waiting for these latter days) the blessed time of
Israel’s restoration to their God in their own land. Fitly
therefore at the end, and assuredly not in vain, comes the
call:

\begin{quote}
O Israel, return unto Jehovah thy God; for thou hast
fallen by thine iniquity \{Hos. 14:1\}.
\end{quote}

\textbf{How true and wholesome is the word of God!}

Take with you words, and turn to Jehovah: say unto
him, Take away all iniquity.

He would not leave them without a suited word to Him, for
He loves to provide all; He would put no words less than
these into their lips:

\begin{quote}
Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously
\{Hos. 14:2\}.
\end{quote}

Would they have ventured to ask so much? Lord, teach us
to ask from Thee -- we need this -- as well as to act for
Thee.

\begin{quote}
So will we render the calves of our lips
\{Hos. 14:2\}.
\end{quote}

\textbf{All is judged now aright; because self is judged before
the God who brings them near Him. Their repentance is
genuine and the fruit of grace.}

Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon
horses.

\textbf{All their vain resources are now and for ever abandoned.}

Neither will we say any more to the work of our
hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless
findeth mercy \{Hos. 14:3\}.

\textbf{Idolatry had been the inlet of all mischief at home, as well
as the outlet to pride in the world. Then comes Jehovah’s
answer:}

I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely:
for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as
the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and
cast forth his roots as Lebanon \{Hos. 14:4, 5\}:

\begin{quote}
What mercy in the face of wayward inconstancy and hearts
only firm in rebellion! What tender love as well as mercy!
Love free and full whose motive is in God Himself, who
once smote His people in anger, but now will be as the dew
to them so long without one drop of moisture to refresh
them! How will not Israel then flourish! As the lily for form
and graceful elegance; as Lebanon for stability; as the
unfading olive for beauty (no longer under the morning
cloud), and with the fragrance of Lebanon.
\end{quote}

They that dwell under his shade shall return; they
shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine; the
scent as the vine of Lebanon \{Hos. 14:7\}.

\textbf{What will the receiving back of Israel be to all the world but
life from the dead?}

\textbf{True and faithful is the sovereign grace of God. It is
not salvation in the meagre sense that the Jews will be
screened from deserved destruction. If Jehovah saves, He
will do it evermore for earth or heaven in a way that is
worthy of Himself.}

91. The words probably mean, literally, “Thy destruction, Israel, [is] that
thou art] against me, against thyself.”
Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir-tree. From me is thy fruit found {Hos. 14:8}.

It appears to be a conversation between Ephraim and Jehovah.

Ephraim [shall say], What have I to do any more with idols?

To this Jehovah answers,

I myself have heard and observed him.

Thereon Ephraim replies,

I am like a green fir tree;

to which Jehovah rejoins,

From me is thy fruit found {Hos. 14:8}.

What a blessed change for Ephraim! and what communion with their God!

The whole of this terse prophecy ends with the searching question of the closing verse –

Who is wise, that he may understand these things? intelligent, that he may know them? for the ways of Jehovah are right, and the transgressors shall stumble thereon {Hos. 14:9}.

May this wisdom be given to us, that we too may understand Himself and His ways!

He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever {1 John 2:17};

and this being the desire, he

shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God {John 7:17}.

None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand {Dan. 12:10}. 

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Lectures on the Minor Prophets
Lecture 2
Joel

The word of Jehovah that came to Joel the son of Pethuel {Joel 1:1}.

Like Hosea, Joel is one of the earliest prophets (being earlier even than Jonah), but differs essentially in this, that whereas the former looks at the whole people, the latter was led of God to restrict himself to that portion which outwardly cleaved to the house of David as well as the ordinances of the law. This gives us accordingly a much more contracted sphere, but for that very reason contributes to a greater definiteness in the objects noticed, which is also helped by a characteristic vividness of style. Indeed the contrast is striking between these two earlier prophets, Joel being as remarkable for smoothness of language, fulness of handling, and easy transitions, as Hosea for a certain rough negligence, pregnant brevity, and sudden turns, highly expressive but to Gentile minds somewhat obscure.

The grand subject of our prophet is the day of Jehovah, and this in all its extent, but with special application to the Jews, and above all to Jerusalem. At the same time Joel shares the habit of all the prophets, one may say, in taking some present fact, or that which was close at hand, as a groundwork for what was future. Thus the prophecy had an immediate bearing or a practical aim not far off, while along with it we see how far the Spirit of God is from confining Himself to what was either actually at work or of a transient nature. No prophecy of scripture is of its own solution; it is constructed so as not to be. To limit it to the past would be an oversight; to set aside the future would destroy the most momentous object God has in it. Thus if to deny the past be an error, to deny the future is a still greater one. The one would have cut off somewhat of interest and profit then; the other shuts out its permanent witness to God’s glory. In both respects divine wisdom is most apparent. He provided that which was a warning or encouragement to His people when the prophet was in view of the circumstances which surrounded him; but He pointed onward to a time that was not yet arrived, when the just results of what was in His own mind will be made good and manifest. Now those results never can be till the kingdom of God come in power and glory. It is impossible that the Spirit of God could be satisfied with anything which either has been among men or is now. All that man has achieved, all that exists, although there be a witness in various ways of what God is toward man, affords alas! still larger and more constant evidence of the failure of man to use aright what God has given him. We shall find these general principles fully borne out, not only in Joel but in all the prophets; for they are invariable.

Among the readers of Joel there has been not only difficulty felt, but one, may say misapprehension; yet this rather from their own want of perception of the subject than from any lack of point or of pure and direct language in the prophet. Some have regarded these locust infestations as merely symbolic; others again deny anything beyond the literal swarms of insects which successively preyed on the products of Palestine. But God, because He is great, can take notice of what is little, while obviously He cannot be limited to it. Hence it is a mistake to suppose that God would in any way be demeaned by noticing the depredations of these various locusts. He takes the liveliest interest in His people for their joy and blessing. He concerns Himself about every sorrow which weighs them down, and deigns to use that which is afflicting for good. Consequently the Spirit of God does not think it beneath His notice to bring before the people of God that which God intended by these successive depredations. Joel 1 brings them before us; but the connection which follows shows that they were only admonitory facts then. It is to be doubted that they represent the enemies who would surely fall on a people in due time if impenitent. They might well suggest such a result to the thoughtful mind. They were past; worse was coming and at hand.

In Joel 2 the literal locusts are left behind (save of course in the blessing, Joel 2:25, which reverses all), and the prophet goes forward to that which the locusts represented. Thus the first chapter gives us actual facts, nothing but the various creatures which committed depredations on all the vegetation of the land. It does not appear that in themselves any ulterior meaning is definitely meant to be gathered. The successive desolations caused by the insects are distinctly presented to us. From Joel 1:15 God uses them as an introduction for the purpose of warning His people of a still greater and more momentous burden. The details of this begin to be brought out in Joel 2, with a promise of spiritual power couched in such terms that the New Testament could apply it to the great privilege and power which signalised the godly remnant of Jews who called on the name of the Lord in Jerusalem at Pentecost, but in its full and precious import awaiting its fulfilment when all the accessories of the prediction will be realized at the end of the age.

Joel 3 looks to the full issue in judgment and blessing,
the characteristic features of the day of Jehovah. Here again may be seen that, instead of the prophecy consisting of uncertain prognostication and of exaggerated terms, such thoughts are only due to men who do not understand its scope. Would it not be more becoming for them to abstain from an opinion till they do? In my judgment nothing can be less reverent or more inconsistent with modesty than such off-hand and random statements about the word of God. The truth is that scripture is always perfect, but men are not competent to speak unless taught of God. Thus, humanly speaking, there are those who could appreciate the wonders of the heavens, but are dull to perceive the divine construction of a daisy; yet to any one that esteems aright, the perfect hand of God even in a daisy is just as clear and certain as in the solar system. It is only a question of the place which each creature of God occupies in His own immense scheme. His wisdom and power are displayed no less in the minute than in the grand and massive and sublime. Thus there is no doubt that, if the telescope opens many a wonder to man, the microscope is not less impressive. They are both important instruments in the hand of man, and they are both intended, doubtless in God’s providence, to show man from the natural world a witness of divine power in what is above and also in that which is beneath. But in all things what ought to be gathered from it is not incense for man (without denying the great dignity of him who is the head or natural chief of creation), but the wonders of God in what He has wrought. A similar principle applies to the word of God; for therein if God displays Himself in what is vast, quite as much does He appear in ways whose minuteness might easily escape observation. Everywhere perfection is claimed for God, whether in what He has made or, above all, in that which He has written, and in what He has written beyond that which He has wrought, because His mind and ways must transcend His outward works. For the word of God is claimed the very highest place as the expression of His wisdom -- His inner wisdom. For that which is connected with matter must yield to what has to do with mind and the affections, and above all the display of the divine nature.

Now prophecy is a notable part of this expression of His mind, though it is far from being the highest. But I do not think that any sufficient reason appears to suppose a link of connection between the ravages caused by these marauding insects and the providential judgments previous to the day of Jehovah, which some assign to the earlier part of the cut off seventieth week after the church is taken to heaven. That both chapters must be understood in the same manner, either as alluding to locusts or to a hostile army invading Judah, is a rash and unfounded notion, with no other source than man’s will added to a contracted mind. Closely connected they undoubtedly are, but there is much beauty in taking the past calamity as the occasion of warning the Jews of a far more awful infliction, and connecting it with the future day of Jehovah.

Nor do I see any solid reason for considering the four swarms respectively allegorical of Tiglath-pileser, Shalmaneser, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar on the one hand, nor on the other of the Assyro-Babylonian power, the Medo-Persian, the Macedonian or Syro-Macedonian, and the Roman, or of this last modified. These are speculations which found favor among certain early Christian writers as well as the Jews of their day. But the more we assert the value of the prophetic word, the more resolutely should we set our face against every scheme of interpretation which savors of fancy. We do well to dread speculation in the things of God. It is the rash guess-work of men not subject to His mind as revealed in scripture, and too hasty in coming to conclusions. If we are not sure, it is wise to wait on One who does not disappoint. The basis of scripture for such views it would be desirable to weigh if it can be produced. Hitherto none has been produced, save the analogy of the four with the four beasts and four carpenters, of which we read in the visions of Daniel and of Zechariah. Can any evidence be conceived more precarious? The prophet draws a warning lesson from actual events that had occurred and were before all eyes; and then proceeds to speak of incomparably grave events in grace and judgment, most of which yet remain to be fulfilled. But we must not confound with any part of Joel 1 the plague of locusts in Rev. 9 under the fifth trumpet. The ravages in the holy land furnished the occasion for a figurative description of a mighty foe in Joel 2; the literal locusts being but a passing visitation from God, certainly not to be slighted, but very different from the trouble described afterwards. There may be a connection between Joel 2 (not Joel 1) and Rev. 9, but the latter introduces symbols of a far more complicated nature and pointing to deeper evil. Both refer to men under the symbol of locusts, and in the use of the locusts in Joel 1, I see little more than God’s interest in His people. If He dealt a blow, He meant them to humble themselves and ask and learn of Him through the prophet why it was dealt. He was chastening the people He loved that they might be partakers of His holiness, and escape the heavier blows which would otherwise be their portion.

Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? {Joel 1:2}.

Go back as might the oldest, and search as every inhabitant might, no such thing had been in the days of themselves or their fathers. What had occurred then was to be told from one to another of their descendants. Yet was it a scourge easily attributed to second causes, and all profit lost, because God was thus shut out. If He were heard, that which had just befallen the land would arouse to repentance; if despised, the prophet warns of greater ills.

It is familiar to most of us that prophecy always supposes a state of ruin. It comes where there is such unfaithfulness in the people of God as indicates approaching or actual ruin. Prophecy is then God’s special and exceptional intervention, not so much because men have failed in doing their duty as when they have been guilty of general and fatal departure from their place, consequently it will be found to have a twofold character. It convicts of the
state of ruin on one hand, specifying wherein men have sinned against God, and pronouncing His judgment; but, on the other hand, it bears witness of a better state of things in God’s grace, which will displace what is now in ruins. This I believe to be true of all prophecy. It applies even to the garden of Eden. Prophecy always holds out a blessing by a divine judgment that is coming, and has thus a serious aspect towards conscience. God does not give the fulfilment of the hope of something better till present evils already morally discerned are actually judged. It would disparage what He had already given if He brought in a system to displace it otherwise. Judgment therefore must come not in word only, but in deed and in truth. And this judgment in the Old Testament is first temporal -- a palpable infliction of blows on the evil of this world, and especially of His own guilty people. Thus when things work out to still greater evil, a partial present judgment becomes an earnest of a much more severe rebuke, till God’s final dealing come, with its full unsparing judgment on the world.

But we must remember that in these prophecies before our Lord came we do not read of the judgment before the great white throne. It is never the judgment of the soul and body in a risen state. I am not aware of any Old Testament prophecies which bring in the eternal judgment of man raised and consigned to the lake of fire as the second death. This is as characteristic of Christianity as the judgment of the world or living men on the earth (that is, of nations, tribes, and tongues) is the proper subject of Old Testament prophecy. The Revelation of John, which is as peculiar in its themes as in its style, embracing subjects from Old and New, and in Hebrew-Greek phraseology most appropriately sets both fully before us.

Herein we may see that traditional teaching is extremely defective and doubly misleading, because men try to bring in mere providential judgments into the New Testament state of things, as they would also graft eternal judgment upon the Old Testament predictions. The consequence is that a strain is put upon both Testaments, and confusion ensues; for the true way to understand the Bible is not to confound things that differ, but to accept divine revelation as discharging in each of its two distinct parts the function for which God inspired those raised up to communicate His mind. The Old and New Testaments are perfectly harmonious, and there is not a line or word of one that contradicts the other; but they are very far from being or saying the same thing. God takes particular pains to mark the difference, in fact writing each in a different tongue -- the one Hebrew, having its groundwork in the family of Abraham after the flesh -- the other Greek, used when God was sending the gospel to the Gentiles as such. Thus the Greek was just as much a representative of Gentile objects as the Hebrew found its fitting object in Israel. But for all that God shows His mind in both. Only the distinctive feature of the Old Testament is His government, while the distinctive truth of the New Testament is His grace. Government and grace are totally distinct; for government is always a dealing with man, whereas grace is the revelation of what God is and does. Consequently the one invariably supposes judgment, and the other is the full display of mercy and goodness; and both find their meeting-point in Christ. As He is the King, He consequently is the head of the government. As He is the Son of God, full of grace and truth, He consequently is the one channel for all the blessing peculiar to the New Testament. His glory, now that the mighty work of redemption is done, accounts for all our characteristic privileges.

But here, in our prophecy, it is evident there was something more defined and painfully different from past times. God had used in former days, no doubt, Midianites and Philistines and other enemies to chastise Israel when guilty especially of idolatry. But here He shows that His hand was stretched out to deal with it in a most humiliating way. Instead of blessings in the basket and the store because of fidelity to His government, they had on the contrary been most unfaithful, and now Jehovah would use even the very insect world, so to speak, to deal with His people.

That which the palmworm [or gnawing locust] hath left hath the [swarming] locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm [or licking locust] eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar [or consuming locust] eaten [Joel 1:4].

All this I take in its plain literal import, as having actually occurred then.

Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth. For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion [Joel 1:5, 6].

It is not to me doubtful that the locust depredation is alluded to; but the manner is peculiar, though Prov. 30:25, 27, might well prepare us for it. If the ants could be described as a people {Prov. 30:25}, surely the locusts as a nation {Joel 1:6}.

Besides the phraseology paves the way as a transition for something more, of which we shall hear more, preparatorily in Joel 1:15-20, fully in Joel 2. That is, Joel uses the present visitation as a fact, but withal employs language which forms an easy passage to the prediction of a nation that would deal with the Jews in an unparalleled way. There need be no doubt that the nation in question is the Assyrian. Thus Joel 1 starts with the repeated and frightful depredations of the locusts in the prophet’s day, but looks on to the trouble of a terrible day. Joel 2 directly notices no such havoc from insects, but mingles figures taken from them with the Assyrian who should surely come up. This appears to be the true bearing of the earlier half of the book.

Hence is shown, still in figurative language, how everything was dealt with -- the vine wasted, the fig-tree
barked, the branches cast away and made white. The prophet calls on them accordingly to lament. Nor was it only that the country and men suffered the destruction of their natural resources as a chastening from God, but everything else was affected. The religious oblations felt the blight over the land -- the meat-offering and the drink-offering -- the one the witness of devotedness, and the other of joy before God. Both these were clean cut off from the house of Jehovah.

Lament as a virgin girded with sackcloth on account of the husband of her youth. The meat-offering and the drink-offering are cut off from the house of Jehovah; the priests howl, the ministers of Jehovah. The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth {Joel 1:8-10}.

Every mark of fertility was now disappearing; and hence the very husbandmen are called to shame, and the vine-dressers to howl, on account of the wheat and the barley -- for that which constituted the staff or even the barest necessaries of life (Joel 1:11). Assuredly fruit-bearing trees did not escape.

The vine is dried up, and the fig-tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men (Joel 1:12).

It is granted that to a Christian all this may seem somewhat outside his line, and for the obvious reason that our blessings are so entirely apart from nature. It should be remembered that the Jew enjoyed natural blessings from God, while the Christian’s blessings are supernatural. He may of course have along with his privileges in Christ external mercies; but these are not the substance of his heritage at any time. God may give or withhold them, without any mark of approval whatever. But now for us proper blessings are of a spiritual sort. It was not so with Israel. Hence clearly there was an appropriateness and force in these visitations, which is lost for the Christian; and therefore he is accordingly tempted to explain away such prophecies as these whenever he applies them to himself, which he is apt to do. Maintain their proper fulfilment in the sphere of Israel and Palestine, and there ceases all need of doing violence to scripture. One can then take all such prophecies exactly as they are. Not that this means limiting them in a servile literalism. Be assured that mere alliteration is just as wrong as allegorizing without warrant. It is a false principle of interpretation. The letter, if there be only the letter, kills. The great point is not to divorce letter from spirit, but to hold them together. We must retain the exact meaning of every word of God. We must not tie it down only to what is on the surface; we must remember that while it is the word by man, it is essentially the word of God. It may come in part through Moses, but this is none the less the word of God. Prophets were employed, but it is His word, no matter by whom it may be given.

Hence therefore to say that we must only interpret scripture like any other book is a fallacy, yea, falsehood, on the face of it. That God is pleased to convey His mind in the language of man is perfectly true; but if it flows down to me it springs from God. Unless therefore its true source and character are always maintained in view, it is impossible to interpret the word of God justly. Those who forget it will assuredly be guilty of reducing scripture to its lowest meaning, under the delusion that the least part is the whole.

It is evident that this would be unworthy even in dealing with a man. For if I have to do with a person of decidedly superior parts to my own, it were a folly to suppose that my mind must be the sufficient measure of what is in his. It is natural to suppose that his capacity might conceive deeper thoughts than I have yet received, and that words which I use on a lower level might suggest if not convey more to him. With how much stronger reason this applies to the mind of God! Therefore we would do well to bear this always in memory as to scripture; for after all the true principle of interpreting God’s written word must be gathered from His own account of it.

Now we find in the New Testament that there may be a passing application included within the scope of a prophecy, but also an ultimate and therefore more complete fulfilment. They are of course both true. It is a mistake to deny the imminent and lesser application: it is still more grossly erroneous not to look for more. These views when severed into two opposing schools of interpretation; but it will prove the wisest course for us to eschew particular schools, and to hold the fulness of scripture, which contains in harmony what such parties set in opposition to each other. We should take the word of God in its largest import, bowing to it as known to be His, but always leaving room for more, because it is God and not man who has written that word.

Now we know in part {1 Cor. 13:12}.

We cannot take in the whole at once. But if it be only possible for us to learn as disciples, the God who makes the application of His word precious and profitable may lead us into an enlarging apprehension of it as we can bear it. So far from thinking this a defect in the word of God, it is rather its distinguishing characteristic and its admirable and exclusive property. Being the word of God, it is capable of very large and various application. Any illustrations of man can indicate it but in a small measure. The truth is that scripture savors of what is infinite, being the expression of God’s mind, although clothed in the words of men. It is therefore really unique; for though it may have on its surface what meets the passing need of the day, below this runs a deep and swelling stream, which flows onward to the full ocean of the accomplished purposes and glory of God.

Returning to our chapter, the call comes not merely to lament and sorrow, which was all right, and the intended effect of so grave a visitation of God, but more –

Sanctify ye a fast

It is more than appointing one. Sanctification always supposes separation to God. Sanctified ourselves by grace,
we are entitled so to deal even with the most ordinary matters by the word of God and prayer, as we are exhorted to do in 1 Tim. 4. It brings God in. Without this it cannot be.

Call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of Jehovah your God, and cry unto Jehovah {Joel 1:14}.

Then follows for the first time a phrase of great moment:

Alas for the day! for the day of Jehovah is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come {Joel 1:15}.

Now, it is an especially important thing to get a clear view of the day of Jehovah. The prominent truth involved in that day is, it supposes the manifest judgment of the world by God. The choice of the expression “day” involves this. It is not a question of secret judgments or providential dealings. That might be during the night, and unseen. Indeed, the fullest proof and the most beautiful illustration of providence is when He makes use of ordinary matters to bring about the most surprising results, but results that play a distinct part in the maintaining, shielding, vindicating, justifying of God’s own people, or in bringing condign punishment on their enemies.

Take for a plain instance the entire book of Esther. Perhaps there is no more remarkable development of the grand truth of divine providence in the Bible. As a striking concomitant of this, observe how the name of God does not appear throughout. This ignorant men have supposed to be a defect; whereas in truth, if the name were openly named in its course, the book would be materially spoiled. The prime object is to evince His hand secretly working where His name could not rightly be proclaimed. Far from being a fault, this is one of the most strengthening considerations when we remember that we have to do with a similar secret providence every day.

It is not meant assuredly that this is all; for now we know God has been revealed fully and personally in His Son. God’s name not only has been proclaimed to us, but, so to speak, is named upon us. We are brought into living relationship with Him:

I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God {John 20:17}.

But besides that, what a comfort to know that while God Himself, as our Father, guides us by His Spirit, the secret providence of God controls circumstances and compels enemies where we could not be, and could do nothing if we were, yea where we ought to do nothing! But God fails not to work for us, and often works too by His worst adversaries. The devil himself is one of those who are obliged most of all to work out the fiats of God’s providence. He, when least intending or expecting it, brings about, in spite of himself, what God means in goodness. Is not this then a truth full of comfort? If Satan is obliged when he most exalts himself to be only God’s scavenger, it is very evident that we may trust our gracious Lord for everything; for the foot of pride after all cannot but do menial services for the purposes of God. It does not matter who it is or what it may be; the providence of God unseen invariably accomplishes His purposes.

Let it be repeated that this is not all. We have something infinitely nearer and more intimate; and I make this remark the more because those are not wanting who think that a Christian ought to be guided simply by God’s providence; it is not too much to affirm that such guidance would be always wrong. It is never set forth as guidance. Providence does not guide saints, but controls circumstances and foes. The Holy Spirit deigns to guide Christians. Still we have to do with external things; and there the providence of God works. But we have to do with God as our God and Father; and here we are not left to the unseen processes of circumstances and what might seem to be the casualties of the world, though really accomplishing divine purposes or ends. We have to do with the direct guidance of the Holy Ghost, who is pleased to lead us by the written word. This puts everything in its place, at least to faith.

It is an oversight to suppose that to bind up the guidance of the Holy Spirit with the word of God is to take it out of the affairs of daily life in any case. There are no doubt instincts of spiritual life; but the word of God is large enough to take in everything. And this increase of spiritual apprehension serves but to enlarge the sphere of obedience - - only we do not always perceive the exceeding breadth of the word, and sometimes we may be guided insensibly where we might fail to allege a definite text. How comforting to find our conviction sustained and strengthened and carried further intelligently by direct scripture! The simple believer is thus guided, more than at first sight appears, by the word of God. You see a Christian at once taking exactly the right line. If you asked him why he did so or so, perhaps he might not be able to say with clearness. Hence, when it is affirmed that the Holy Spirit guides by the word, it is not meant that there is always the positive and distinct application of the divine word on the part of him who is guided. Doubtless in any measure of our scriptural knowledge one can intelligently point to example and principle, if not formal precept, in scripture for what is done according to God’s will. One should always seek ability to gather from the range of His word the conduct to be pursued or to be pressed on others.

Thus, for instance, supposing a parent tells the Christian child to take care that the pot simmers properly, or any other duty of the simplest every-day sort, is it meant that one can bring a scripture for these? Certainly one can. The child who is set to watch that the milk should not boil over is called to act in obedience to her parents, and so please the Lord. If excluded from the province of scriptural principle, what mischief must result! On one ground the Christian child in such circumstances is amazingly strengthened by the feeling that it is not a question of the milk, or the pot, or the fire, or only of a parent’s charge,
but of doing the will of God. It is good to link all with Him. Therefore it seemed well to take the smallest matters that might be thought too low for the dignity of inspiration; but the truth is there is nothing more wonderful in scripture as in Christ than this very feature. They both -- He in deed, it in word -- show that there is nothing too great for man, and that there is nothing too little for God. Therefore

let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; . . . . and whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him {Col. 3:16, 17}.

Suppose now a more perplexing case. An evangelist has two or three stations before him at which to preach the gospel. Where is the scripture directing to one more than another? Am I to give up the word here? Certainly not. If I went to a place where another servant of Christ was preaching the gospel, I should not feel disposed to thrust myself in to do the work, knowing that self-assertion or slighting another would be alike contrary to the grace of the gospel. Where is the scripture directing to one more than another? If he were a wise and gracious man, he would wait till asked. We have to represent Christ as conscience before God, and not by the mere circumstances of providence; as the apostle says,

I commend you to God and to the word of his grace {Acts 20:32}.

Every case I am persuaded the wisdom of God has forestalled in scripture, if we have ears to hear, and pronounces upon each difficulty that can arise for the believer, though not apart from his state. Hence of course insensibility of conscience, or even want of intelligence, may hinder our perception, and therefore more or less expose us at least to uncertainty, and it may be to error and wrong; however truly in such cases the goodness of God interferes to hinder the full results for the simple who lack intelligence.

But it is our privilege, now that the Holy Ghost dwells in us, to bring everything within the scope of the written word. Thus, suppose you must go a shopping: there at once a question arises; and you will surely incline to one of two desires. In your purchase you will seek to please either yourself or Christ. Even in deciding where to go the same test is really applicable.

If among a multitude of shops you wish to know which is the right one to visit, it remains before you still to please Christ. Can one not ask one’s conscience, What is my motive for going here or there? He is faithful and knows how to decide by the Spirit’s use of the word in judging the secrets of the heart. In the great majority of cases such self-judgment would cut short many a visit to this or that shop, as well as make no small difference in what is bought. Take the very common habit of gratifying one’s taste. When one enters a shop, the temptation that occurs to the mind is to get what one likes as far as one can. Where is Christ in this?

We may then look for the distinct guidance of the Lord by His Spirit in the daily affairs of life, as well as the more spiritual occupations that engage our service; but the measure of our spirituality and knowledge of the word gauges our ability to use the word aright as our directory. And thus where we do not clearly see a duty to act, our duty is to wait rather than act. The waiting is a confession of ignorance, but at least of dependence. We desire to do His will and shall not wait in vain.

The meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way {Psa. 25:9}.

Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth {1 Sam. 3:9}, says the attitude of waiting, where restless self-will would prompt to this act or that. But God guides either by bringing clearly before one something that calls on love for action, or by keeping one waiting yet longer. Undoubtedly as there is reality in a believer’s intercourse with God, so he can look for special guidance. But never let us forget that when we have not a distinct duty before us, we should forbear to act at all. I do not speak exactly of an impression, but of a plain call to duty, or the positive energy of unselfish love. Undoubtedly there is the guidance of the Holy Spirit often without the letter of a command, but not therefore without scripture. Both the active outgoing of love and the calls of duty fall within scripture, which shows us their fulness in Christ. For instance, a Christian does not know what to do, we will suppose, next Monday. But his mind is made up to serve the Lord; and he is not anxious about it. An individual comes while he is waiting on the Lord, and brings before him a claim to serve Him in a way not outside his measure. Is not the duty then plain enough? May that one be doubted in the slightest degree? Is it not the will of the Lord that one who loves Him should respond to a call of love?

If two come and represent similar things before you, have you scripture to tell you which to select? Will not perplexity ensue? So it might appear and may really be. But in fact such perplexities do not often arise, if indeed they ever do, without some distinct means afforded of the Lord for judging between them.

It thus resolves itself largely into a question of communion with God. The child of God that goes on in communion with Him will not be perplexed or know what it means, because he habitually walks with One who is light. Our Father takes the greatest delight in guiding a child whose object is only to meet His mind. Of course it is another thing if we have ends and purposes of our own; in
such a case a Christian would not sincerely wait. But
the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him
{Psa. 25:14};
and though there might not be a positive precept, yet there
is the hearing of God’s mind in scripture in many real
though less direct ways. If there is a perplexity, it is time to
stop. One cannot act aright without the word; and this is
often missed through lack of communion, which itself
implies the guidance of the Holy Spirit; but we must not
sever this from the scripture.

From this long digression we return to our prophet, and
there find ourselves on ground not only of such moral
judgment as the word of God always contains, but of
solemn and public dealings. The day of Jehovah is not His
secret control by secondary causes or circumstances. It is
the display of His judgment of man on the earth.
Consequently the full sense of the day of Jehovah is that
grand dealing when God will
judge the world in righteousness by that man whom
he hath raised from the dead {Acts 17:31},
to quote a well-known scripture from the New Testament
that bears on it.

Judging the world in righteousness
is altogether a different truth from judging the dead. It is the
habitable world. It does not contemplate the resurrection of
individuals who once composed its population. The
habitable earth as such is the real meaning of Acts 17. So
the day of Jehovah falls here. The chief difference is that
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connection with the special place of Israel -- their
relationship to God, who had so revealed Himself to them.
It is the age when man will be no longer allowed to thwart and hinder the purposes of God, and when He Himself will
no more work merely in the ways of secret providence, nor
even by the mission of the Holy Ghost as now in
Christianity, forming and fashioning us by the word
according to Christ, but when God will take the world under
His direct government -- first, for putting down evil; next,
for the maintenance and spread of that which is good. Such
is the day of Jehovah. Consequently
that day
embraces the divine judgments which will be executed by
Christ as the Jehovah God of Israel, when He appears in
glory, as well as the whole millennial period. It is all called
the day of Jehovah.

But connected with this it is of all importance clearly to
understand the difference of that day from all before it; but
particularly to discriminate between that day and the
previous act of His coming to receive those who are waiting
for Him, whether saints who have died or those who shall
then be found alive on earth up to that moment. The
coming of the Lord
is a larger expression than the
day of the Lord (or Jehovah) {Joel 1:15}.

The day
is a particular part of His coming, when at His call the dead
saints rise, and the living saints are changed, and both are
caught up together out of the earth to meet Him in the air.
This great event -- the translation of those who are Christ’s
to heaven -- has nothing in itself to do with the display of
Jehovah’s government of the world; and therefore to
confound the coming or presence of the Lord with His day
is a gross error. After the saints have been taken to
heaven, the world will go on seemingly much the same, but
really very much worse. In no actual sense is it judged by
the Lord’s grace in taking His own to the Father’s house.
But the day of the Lord invariable supposes the judgment of
the world, though inchoatively including lesser judgments in
the Old Testament; not so His presence or coming, which
will manifest fulness of grace to those whom He loved to
the end. At the same time, when the day of Jehovah comes,
it will still be the coming of the Lord; for in this clearly the
two coalesce.

Thus in short the day of the Lord is the public and
governmental side of His coming; but the coming of the
Lord embraces events of another character distinct from and
previous to that day. This may serve as a plain and
compendious way of stating what could easily be proved by
many scriptures. Only we must bear in mind that the
coming of the Lord to receive the saints to Himself is
exclusively a New Testament truth. The Old Testament
proclaims the day of Jehovah, the New Testament endorses
this truth, maintaining and clearing it yet more. But the
New Testament adds another truth distinct from it; namely,
that Christ will come to receive us to Himself, and present
us in the Father’s house; after which He will bring in the
day of Jehovah, when the saints come with Him in glory.
Then will be the day of Jehovah, because this is the time
when He will destroy all His foes, the beast and the false
prophet, or Antichrist, with all their followers; and further,
the kingdom of the north, or Assyrian, the very power
foreshadowed by the mighty nation who troubled Israel of
old, and who comes before us much more fully in the
second chapter of our prophecy.

Before saying a little more as to the Assyrian, let me
point out the allusion to the trumpets here. It is a clear

92. The distinction between these two, the παροιμία and the ἡμέρα of the
Lord, is the key to 2 Thess. 2. The whole chapter, not to say the entire
province of prophecy, is embroiled in confusion where this is not seen.  For
where would be the force or even sense of beseeching his Christian brethren
by the presence or coming of the Lord not to be shaken by the rumor about
His day, if the day and His coming be the same? Whereas it is thoroughly
intelligible and pertinent to entreat them by a hope so full of good cheer as the
presence of the Lord which is bound up with the gathering of the saints to
meet Him above, not to be disquieted by the allegation, for which they falsely
cried authoritative communications from the Spirit and a supposititious letter
of the apostle himself, that His day -- that day of judgment of the quick on the
earth -- was already present. One corrective of the error is the recall of the
Christian to his proper hope of joining the Lord at His coming, so as to follow
Him out of heaven for the day of His appearing. The other is the making
known certain awful developments of evil, the apostasy and the man of sin
brought fully out, before that day can come.
reference to the use prescribed in the Book of Numbers. The trumpet was to be blown by the priests on two main occasions. One of them was for the journeying of the camps, and the other was for the calling of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle. If they went to war, an alarm was to be blown with the trumpets, and Jehovah remembered and saved them from their enemies. We may perhaps say then that this last was on the people’s part to bring in Jehovah; while the more ordinary sounding was on Jehovah’s part to gather the people in view of their solemn feasts and sacrifices before their God. These were the principal uses of the silver trumpets, and they are both employed by Joel.

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm (Joel 2:1).

It does not require much skill in interpretation to see the meaning of that trumpet, because the Spirit of God has so plainly defined its character and object.

Sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of Jehovah cometh, for it is nigh at hand (Joel 2:1).

This warned of what was tremendous to Israel. Jehovah’s day was at hand, -- a day when not enemies only would be there, but Jehovah would remember Israel, not yet to save His people, but to use the foe as a scourge for them. This might well be a note of alarm; Jehovah would not be absent. It was not merely the day of the Assyrian, but of Jehovah. Is it thought that as the judgment that the Jews were warned against was so remote, they would be liable to say, “It will not come in our day or upon our children”? I answer that it did come in their day. The same Assyrian power, which came then close upon the time of Joel, will reappear in the latter day. This is the true key to all the difficulties men conjure up in the Old Testament. We must remember that those foreign nations are no more done with than the Jews are. Many of them have lost or changed their names, but they abide still. And when the time comes for the restoration of Israel through judgments at the end of the age, they too will reappear and be known as the Assyrian once more. Nations no more die than individual men never rise finally. As surely as a resurrection awaits men, there will be a revival of those Gentile foes of the Jews. It is remarkable too that their final acts will bear the same moral character as their initiatory course. This intimates clearly a divine principle of dealing at the close for the sins at the beginning, because they will repeat their old sins at the end. The same jealousy of Israel, the same determination to exterminate the Jew, the same unbelieving opposition to God’s counsels which characterized them at their earliest epochs will also be found at their latest appearance. The circle of their historical unity is made apparent from a moral point of view -- the same character of guilt reproduced with God’s judgment upon them because of it.

It is not then that I have any doubt that the miraculous check of the Assyrian in the day of Sennacherib is the type of the final overthrow in the day of Jehovah; or that the past event was a day of Jehovah, not in the full sense, but a real though preparatory application of the day of Jehovah, and an unfailing pledge of the final catastrophe. This, which is nothing but the simple fact, seems to me to invest scripture with the greatest possible interest; and, more than this, it demonstrates its living character. Instead of merely looking back to things long since dead and gone, we read in what has been of what is going to be on a still grander scale, and with far more solemn, though also more cheering issues. Hence we can understand how that day had even then a practical purpose; but it had none the less the further bearing already pointed out.

It is here that the rationalistic party are so fatally astray, because they treat the Bible alike prophetic and historical as a mere mummy, if not a scanty corrupted compilation of the old records of the Hebrews, with glances at other tribes that once existed but are now passed away and for ever.

But that day surely comes,

a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains (Joel 2:2).

It is impossible to apply this to the Lord’s coming to receive His saints caught up to meet Him. Can one want a clearer instance of the folly of identifying the day of Jehovah, with its terrors for the earth, with Christ’s coming to translate His own on high? Will His presence which gathers us to Him above be in any wise

a day of gloominess and thick clouds?

The confusion is a palpable blunder. But more than this, His presence is never called His day.

I have no doubt that the reason is that which has been already indicated clearly -- the notion of His day always supposes manifestation.

That day may have been of old in a simply providential sense, as for instance when Sennacherib was destroyed; but it is very evident that this was the hand of God displayed terribly on man, and this is what is meant by manifestation to the world; though by and by it will go much farther than anything past.

Christians, indeed, are said to be children of the day before the day comes, as contrasted with men generally who are children of the night, as we may see in 1 Thess. 5:5. We are children of light and the day, because we have now the nature of Christ, and shall come along with Him when that day dawns. But it is a mistake to suppose that we must await the day before we are taken to our place in heaven; whereas it is certain from scripture that, when that day comes, we shall be previously in our own heavenly seats, and shall come with the Lord out
of heaven.

When Christ our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory {Col. 3:4}.

Next we have a most graphic description of the Assyrian army.

A great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations. A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them. The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run {Joel 2:2-4}.

No doubt that in this remarkably nervous sketch, where an unparalleled army is supposed to come up against the land, the prophecy goes beyond what then assailed the Jews. That is, we must take in the whole prospect, the binary star (what is past now prominent, the future still graver behind it), in order to meet the full strength of the divine expressions. The Assyrian then was a most formidable array, yet after all their vain-glorious insolence destroyed so completely in a single night, that Sennacherib returned in disgrace, evidently, consciously, confessedly beaten. But the future day will behold a far more appalling host.

Let me say here that according to scripture there cannot be the slightest doubt that Russia is reserved to play a most important part in this great future crisis. For the policy of that vast modern empire affects the same objects as the Assyrian of the last day. Russia from its position in the north-east is known to seek the lead as suzerain over the eastern powers, acquiring influence politically, so as to be able to mould and guide those vast hordes of central Asia down to the south. It is my conviction that western influence will before long be completely annihilated in the east, and that the dominion of our own country in India is destined to be short-lived. But this is merely by the way, which if true serves after all to show the importance of having a scriptural judgment on these matters, and how they prepare the mind for what, when it comes, will shake if not paralyze those who have not believed it; whereas, on the contrary, the development of facts, which prepare the way for the immense changes of the latter day, falls in with the faith of those who believe the word of God. They are not moved from their steadfastness by these things; they are prepared to expect them, instead of being surprised.

Again, in Joel 2:5,

Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array. Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness. They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks: neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path: and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded. They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall; they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: and Jehovah shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for [he is] strong that executeth his word: for the day of Jehovah is great and very terrible; and who can abide it? {Joel 2:5-11}.

In this remarkable way the prophet mingles the name and day of Jehovah with the Assyrians employed then to do His work. The same enemy is called in Isa. 10

the rod of his anger {Isa. 10:5},

the axe {Isa. 10:15}

that boasted itself over Him that hewed with it. Surely therefore the Lord Jehovah will turn against that axe and destroy it. He will employ it to accomplish His purposes upon a guilty people; but inasmuch as it destroyed them unmercifully and without the slightest fear of God, He, will turn upon that which exalted itself, taking advantage of His displeasure to destroy His poor people if it could be.

Consequently after this we find the practical appeal to repent.

Therefore also now, saith Jehovah, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Jehovah your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat-offering and a drink-offering unto Jehovah your God (Joel 2:12-14).

Then comes the second blowing of the trumpets; but this is distinct.

Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly {Joel 2:15}.

It is not now, “Sound an alarm,” but,

Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly.

It is the gathering of the people to God, not merely their loud call on God to appear for them in their great alarm before the enemy.

Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of Jehovah, weep between the porch and the altar {Joel 2:16, 17}.

Thus there is the complete prostration of the people as a whole, even to the very bridegroom and bride and sucking child; including the priests too as well as the people, but not
in their own place; for they have to come out, and are with the people in humiliation, not apart in official dignity. It is the most admirable picture of a nation humbling itself before God; so that all classes of society -- in political, religious, and family life -- give way to the sense of their sin before God. There is no such leveller as sin, or that which is the consequence of sin -- death; but it is a blessed thing when the gracious call of God works repentance, which really means the heart taking the place of owning our own evil and accepting what God thereon has to say to us. There is nothing more admirable for a soul, unless it be the grace of God which produces it. But, morally considered, repentance is always wholesome for His people, conscious of having unworthily answered to the grace He had shown them. It cannot but lead to restored communion through self-judgment and to a practical obedience according to it. So it will be with the Jew by and by.

And let them say, Spare thy people, O Jehovah, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where [is] their God? {Joel 2:17}

The marginal alteration for rule over is “use a by-word against.” But the text is confirmed by the ancient versions, as indeed the construction of the margin seems contrary to Hebrew idiom, the noun only (not the verb) admitting of the sense of derision.

But God hears.

Then will Jehovah be jealous for his land, and pity his people. Yea, Jehovah will answer {Joel 2:18, 19}

– not for alarm merely, but because of their genuine repentance before Himself. Instead of insensibility or efforts to improve themselves, they will draw near to Jehovah in the sense of their sins. It is when they shall turn in contrition to His word, when they welcome in their heart Him that comes in the name of Jehovah, that He will appear in answer to their cry. And now comes in the full assurance of comfort. The Assyrian enemy is disposed of.

But I will remove far off from you the northern [army], and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea, and his hinder part toward the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill-savor shall come up, because he hath done great things {Joel 2:20}.

The northern confessedly does not mean any locust irruption, for they come from the south. It is the great foe of the latter day, who will not perish in the sea as those insects usually do, but be driven to a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east or Dead Sea, and his hinder part toward the hinder or Mediterranean Sea. Just judgment of pride! because he magnified himself to do.

But it is God who will really do great things. Fear not, O land

(remark this as definitely the hope of the Jewish nation);

be glad and rejoice: for Jehovah will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field {Joel 2:21, 22}.

They are called to undergo renovation, instead of drooping for want even of common sustenance. The millennial day of joy for the earth and all creation is before us here. Hence the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig-tree and the vine do yield their strength {Joel 2:22}.

All is reversed. It is not Christianity with its spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and with scorn and suffering on earth for the faithful, but earthly blessing and reward, as well as divine and saving mercy, as we shall see.

Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in Jehovah your God: for be hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the canker-worm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you {Joel 2:23-25}.

Thus God will more than undo the mischief. He will restore what He took not away. He will efface by the fulness of His blessing all their past sorrows and shame.

And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of Jehovah your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed {Joel 2:26}.

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But could this satisfy? Could it suffice even for the renewed mind? Certainly it could not satisfy Him who must be God, not in righteous government only, whether of friends or of foes, but in His love for His people. Therefore we have an entirely distinct character of blessing introduced after this, where in the Hebrew begins the third chapter. It is matter of regret that, in this respect the Hebrew having a decided advantage over the Gentile arrangement, modern versions have not followed the former.

And it shall come to pass afterward {Joel 2:28}.

It is here we find the distinct break. Perhaps it is not too much to say that the putting of these two sections together has tended to mar the force of this scripture. Joel 2:28, 29 then are quite apart from what went before. It is blessing of a higher order, flowing from the love of God, but this evidently in a spiritual way.

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also
upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those
days will I pour out my Spirit {Joel 2:28, 29}.

It is the very scripture, as we know, which the apostle Peter
quotes on the day of Pentecost to show that the immense
blessing of that day was in accordance with the highest
favor promised for the kingdom, not that human excitement
or moral folly which mistaken or deluded men were quick
to impute to those who surpassed others in spiritual power.

But, observe, the apostle did not affirm that this scripture was fulfilled. He says,

It is that thing which was spoken by the prophet Joel
{Acts 2:16};

and so it is. What was promised was the outpouring of the
Holy Ghost. Without saying that the present fact was the
fulfilment of the prophecy (which men have assumed, to the
great misunderstanding of scripture and lowering of
Christianity), he showed that it was of that nature, and such
therefore as to be vindicated by the prophecy before their
conscience; but the apostle’s language is guarded, while
commentators are not. They go too far. We do well always
to hold fast to scripture.

As to the promise that the Spirit should be poured upon
all flesh,

we must bear in mind that

all flesh

is in contrast with restriction to the Jew. This is another
feature which made the Pentecostal gift so admirably
illustrate the scripture. For the patent fact that God caused
those who received the Holy Ghost to speak in the different
tongues distributed over the Gentile world, not causing all
the converts to speak the Jewish language (a poor thing if
true, which it is not, but a mere dream of superficial
paradox), but causing the Jews gathered from their
dispersion among all nations to speak the tongues of the
Gentiles was a magnificent witness of the grace that was
go ing out to the Gentiles to meet them where they were.
The judgment of God had inflicted these various tongues
upon them, and completely broken up the ambitious project
of joining together to establish an unity of their own through
the tower of Babel. But the grace of God went out exactly
where His judgment had placed them. If a crushing blow
laid their pride in ever so many separate ditches, the grace
of God went out to these ditches, and blessed them where
they lay, raising them out of their fallen estate.

Such then is the first interruption, and really the
beginning of a new strain, which is sufficiently plain from
the way in which it is introduced.

It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out
my Spirit {Joel 2:28}

– makes therefore a break with what goes before, and thus
again most admirably suits it to the use to which the apostle
Peter applies it. But then we must remember that when the
day comes for the Holy Spirit to be poured out afresh, not
for the gathering out of a people for heaven, but for the
earthly purposes of God’s grace (for that is the difference),
it will be manifest that the Holy Spirit will be given to men
altogether apart from their being Jews. So on the day of
Pentecost, when they were exclusively Jews, it was yet
shown by the miracle of Gentile tongues that God did not
mean to stop there, but to go out towards all the nations.

God will never give up that principle. He does not
mean to be limited to the children of Israel again. He will
bless the children of Israel once more, and will take up
Judah also as such, and will accomplish every word He has
promised to their united joy. There is no good that He has
annexed to them in His word which He will not bestow; but
He will never more restrict Himself to the Jew in the day
that is coming. And therefore, when the Holy Ghost is
poured out at that time, it will be strictly upon

all flesh,

not meaning that every individual in the millennium will
have the Holy Ghost; but that no race left after that great
day will be excluded from the gift of the Spirit. No class of
persons, no age, no sex will be forgotten in God’s grace.

But it may be desirable to remark here that there is no
thought of healing or improving the flesh, as the fathers and
the theologians say. The light of the New Testament shows
us the fallacy of such a view. The old nature is judged; our
old man is crucified, not renovated. To our Adam state we
have died, and enter a new position in Christ, and are called
to walk accordingly as dead and risen with Christ.

The external signs here named will precede the day
which is still unfulfilled. It is vain to apply Joel 2:30, 31 to
the first advent.

I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth
is evidently another character of things.

And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the
earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun
shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into
blood, before the great and the terrible day of
Jehovah come {Joel 2:30, 31}.

There will be a remarkable outward manifestation of divine
power before the judgment is executed. God always sends a
testimony before the thing itself. He does not strike before
He warns. It is so in His dealings with us every day. What
Christian has a chastening upon him before he is
admonished of the Spirit of God? There is always a sense of
wrong, and a lack of communion sensible to the spirit
before the Lord inflicts the blow which tells of His watchful
love over our careless ways. He gives the opportunity, if
one may say so, of setting ourselves morally right; and if
we do not heed the teaching, then comes the sorrow. And so
it is here. These wonders cannot but attract the mind and
attention of men, but they will not really be heeded.
Infatuated and under judicial hardness, they will turn a deaf
ear to all, and so the great and terrible day of Jehovah will
overtake them like a thief. But God at least will not fail. He
had foretold that so it should be, and His people will take
heed. There will be a remnant enabled to see, and pre-
eminently, as we know, from among the Jews, though by no means limited to them, as we learn from the second half of Rev. 7 and the end of Matt. 25. There will be still the witness of

all flesh [Joel 2:28]

prepared for the glory of Jehovah about to be revealed.

Whosoever will call upon the name of Jehovah shall be delivered

shows that the blessing is by faith, and hence by grace.

All flesh
does not necessarily mean every individual, but, as we know from other scriptures, blessing here goes forth largely toward all classes -- that is, toward all nations and even all divisions among nations. But all this is of great importance, because the Jewish system naturally tended to limit God as well as to make classes within the Jews. Only the family of Aaron could go into the sanctuary; only Levites could touch the holy vessels with impunity; whereas this greatest blessing of God will go out with the most indiscriminate character of grace.

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of Jehovah shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as Jehovah hath said, and in the remnant whom Jehovah shall call [Joel 2:32].

Hence it is plain that, although it is blessing for Israel, still our prophet Joel keeps true to his purpose. The city of Jerusalem abides the great and royal center; mount Zion reappears, the sign of grace for the kingdom which Jehovah will establish in that day.

In what follows [Joel 3] we have the final events only, which go right into the millennium.

For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem [Joel 3:1].

This prophecy does not even speak about all Israel, although of course their redemption is certain. The captivity of Judah and Jerusalem is no real difficulty; for the Jews have in a certain sense never yet been brought back to the land, as the prophets warrant them to expect it. They are suffering the consequence of having been led captive over and over again: and in that sense they may be regarded as captives, just as in Gen. 15 the affliction that Abraham’s seed was suffering in a strange land is counted from a long time before they actually arrived there. It would seem that in this way the moral truth of the captivity remains. God counts the time of the captivity from the time that they were carried away from Palestine and dispersed in all lands by Babylonians and then by Romans. They may better themselves in the lands of the Gentiles, and appear to become as great as Joseph did in the land of Egypt; but even he was the rejected Joseph as regards Israel, at the same time that he was the exalted Joseph in the land of Egypt. The reversal of their captivity awaits their restoration by divine power and mercy as yet unfulfilled.

I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land. And they have cast lots [Joel 3:2, 3].

But the nations, all nations, are to be judged as such in this world in that day. Hence the various indignities which they had done to Israel are described, and Jehovah declares that He will return their recompense. He holds to righteous retribution. What they caused Israel to suffer, they must suffer themselves. It is righteous in the eyes of God that the nations which wronged and insulted Israel, not only during the law, but up to the last, after Christianity should receive as they had given to the Jews.

And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they shall sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off [Joel 3:8].

Hence it is to be proclaimed among the Gentiles that they may muster all their forces and avert their fate if they can.

Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up [Joel 3:9].

Thus, instead of peace being brought about before the day of Jehovah comes, such a wide-spread gathering for war is to be as the world will have never yet seen. The desire to do great things, impatience of obligations, lust of conquest and military glory, will bring on men such a taste for war before long that no restraints will suffice to keep them within bounds, especially as jealousy of each other will have led to the accumulation of vast stores for military purposes. So the closing scenes of this age will be found to be described in scripture. I repeat, if one’s conclusion were drawn from the thoughts of men, much might be said for the contrary. Some might think the age had gained better sense, that they had too deep a conviction of their forefathers’ sin and folly in this respect, and that henceforth remonstrance and arbitration would gradually supersede the more savage diplomacy of “blood and iron.” But in vain it is hoped thus to control the passions and will of man. The time of peace is not yet. Men may think that they are going to succeed, but it will be with the Gentiles as of old with Israel. The Jews will try to get back into their land, and the political power of some nations will be used to establish them in peace. But when it is thought that all is going well, the work is arrested, and the Jews become once more an object of jealousy to the Gentiles. Before the harvest, as it is said in Isa. 18, the fair promise of fruit is nipped in the bud and comes to nothing. Instead of having Christ to reign over them in that state, they but prepare a throne for antichrist. Such will be the speedy result of it, with unspeakable dishonor to God and unexampled ruin to all concerned. The fact is, that God means to bring His people Himself into His land. We see all through the Old Testament the people’s blessing in the land He gave them. All attempts to anticipate the time, or change the methods of God for human means,
are not only vain, but will involve ruin as the direct consequence of such presumption.

The proper task of Christians now should be in no way to restore Jews, but to point solely to Christ in order that they may be saved. There never can be blessing for the world as a whole till God restores Israel. Christ accepted by and reigning over that nation is the essential condition of universal peace and blessing. The Christian is called out of the world and even now associated with heaven. We know Christ risen from the dead and glorified, and are therefore waiting to be taken to heaven when He comes for us. Even God Himself does not yet undertake the work of regeneration for the earth as such, nor will He till that day. He is gathering out the joint-heirs meanwhile who will then reign with Christ.

Hence, before that day comes, the utter failure of philanthropic and other schemes of improving the world will be clearly proved. It will be seen that all such efforts of men, or even of Christians, in ignorance of His mind and false hopes, must come to worse than nought. At best they are but nostrums that serve in no way the purpose intended, but keep up the delusion for a little while. They must soon answer the prophet’s ironical call:

Hallow war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up {Joel 3:9}.

Full time it is for the mighty men to awake, and for all the men of war to draw near and come up.

Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong. Assemble [or ‘haste’] yourselves, and come, all ye heathen [or ‘nations’], and gather yourselves together [from] round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Jehovah {Joel 3:10, 11}.

Doubtless those legions of angels are in the mind of the Spirit, which the Lord Jesus declined for Himself.

Thither cause thy mighty ones
to meet the world in its might. For in that day there will be, so to speak, a pitched battle between the powers of God and those of evil, the result of which cannot be doubted.

Let the heathen be wakened and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge {Joel 3:12}.

In this passage I do not think that the repeated call to awake
has any reference to actual resurrection, which is incompatible with a national or time condition for this world. Jehovah pursues the style of His challenge, and warns the nations that they will need all their watchfulness as well as every resource. He invites them to that valley of Jehoshaphat where the quick are destined to meet a never-to-be-forgotten judgment. The valley of Jehoshaphat {Joel 3:12} is a literal place in the land of Israel; and this again disproves the notion of a resurrection scene, which is set forth by the solemnities of the great white throne, not by figures taken from the sickle or wine-vat, which really belong exclusively to the Son of Man’s dealing with nations. In quite another way the harvest is used for the ingathering of the wheat into the heavenly granary and the subsequent burning of the tares. In this place shall the gathered Gentiles find their graves. There is not a single object on which man prides himself which will not come into the dust of death. The favor which the world now affects toward the Jew will turn into hatred before its day is over. False appearances and fair glosses will then fade and leave man in the naked deformity of sin for God to judge.

It is well known that some far-seeing philosophers of the day have come to very grave conclusions on other grounds than scripture can give to those who believe it. Every one acquainted with the men of this age knows that the author of Latter-day pamphlets is no believer, but a man of the world; nevertheless none, except the foolish, can doubt that he is a person of bold if not profound thought in his own peculiar way and style. But he too issues his latter-day pamphlets no less than such as believe the prophetic word. He has got a strong sense that things cannot go on as now; that there will shortly be a crisis and complete rupture of all existing institutions, and that influences powerfully at work now are destined to bring about that end. And what then? He knows nothing; nor can any save so far as he believes the word of God.

I was reading only a few days ago the words of a late philosophic poet and man of letters in general, whom I need not name, a daring personage who once troubled the German government so much that he was obliged to leave his country, and spend not a little of his life in Paris. This man wrote freely enough there of course, and gave his opinion that the French Revolution was only child’s play compared with what is coming. Frenchmen he thought incapable of deep feelings. They do little more than mock at things sacred or political, all their feelings being of a light order, which disposes them to fight by jokes and persiflage; but as for Germans, their love and hate are serious, their very thoughts having not only wings but hands. When the Germans have their revolution, it will be grave for all mankind, -- coldly calm in conception, passionate in execution. They struggle not for the human rights of nations, but for the divine rights of humanity! They think that men owe to matter great expiatory sacrifices, that the old offences against her may be pardoned. For Christianity, incapable of destroying her, has on every occasion outraged her; discountenanced the noblest enjoyments; reduced the senses to hypocrisy; and one heard everywhere of nothing but sins! Christianity therefore they are determined to destroy. The sentiment of his own divinity will excite man to erect himself, and it is from that moment that true greatness and true heroism will appear to glorify this earth.

Such are the audacious sentiments of modern Pantheism. Can any strides bring us closer to antichrist?
Thus the only God is man, who ought to live and must live according to the laws of his nature! Away with morality! “We desire to found a democracy of terrestrial gods, all equals in happiness and in holiness. You [French revolutionists!] ask simple raiment, austere manners, cheap pleasures; we on the contrary wish for nectar and ambrosia, mantles of purple, the voluptuousness of the best wines, the dancing of nymphs, music, and comedies.” Away with judgment! We destroy not priests only, but the religion that restrains and warns, the faith of Him who suffered on the cross! We shall enjoy to our heart’s content, when our day comes to call the world and religion to a reckoning for the chains they have put so long on the human race. Such is the general strain of his work on Germany.

It is awful to think how truly the yearnings of this Hegelian spirit coalesce with the picture prophecy furnishes of the apostasy and man of sin. I believe that amidst such revolutionary dreams sounds a witness deep from the heart of one who knows what is working in the infidel men of progress, and who was more than usually frank in uttering their hopes and desires, as being one of them. He was no doubt an outspoken person, a little before the time; and consequently he suffered the penalty; nevertheless he expresses and lets us hear what men wish. Lawlessness will be the predominant sign of the change which is coming -- the rejection of all restraint 93. Little did the German cited think that he was unconsciously anticipating the anti-Christian state of Christendom. Men will appear to succeed, but the effect of the success will be to bring the Lord forth to consume with the breath of His mouth, and to destroy the lawless one with the shining forth of His appearing. He knows well that the bulwarks of society will prove a mere house of cards, and that the will of man will not long bear the feeble resistance. Men are determined to have their way, and they will to their own perdition, to which consummation the wits and thinkers, the doctrinaires of this day, are pushing them on. The upper classes are listening largely, and will yet more, as the lower classes have been led away long ago. They will have their suited leader, who will at length make war with the Lamb; but the Lamb shall overcome; for He is Lord of lords and King of kings.

Doubtless, if the word of God did not warn us plainly of such a future, I should not attach the smallest importance to any man’s prognostications, but rather consider so awful an issue the ravings of a fanatic. But the believer who searches the word of God is enabled to say beforehand what God has said and written there, and he sees the principles at work in these so-called Christian lands. The word of God springing from the highest source (namely, His own perfect knowledge of what is coming) is equally worthy of trust, whether He speak to us of things present, past, or future.

In that day then it is a question not so much of the heavens as of the earth. Jehovah intends to take the earth under His care.

Multitudes, multitudes in the day of decision: for the day of Jehovah is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw- their shining. Jehovah shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem {Joel 3:14-16}.

Jehovah will appear, and demolish first the western powers, with their religious head in Jerusalem. For we know from Daniel and the Revelation of John that the Roman Empire will be established again. I do not understand the Pope by this, but the imperial power. The Italians are certainly rather tired of the papacy. But the old Roman Empire will be resuscitated once more. It will re-appear, repeat its old sins in new forms, and be judged for what it did from the beginning to the end. The empire of Rome was that which had the responsibility of the crucifixion of the Son of God, and God has not forgotten this, but means to judge them for it. Thus the Latin Empire revived will be the western political power, which utterly rejects Christianity as a fable. The religious power, or what is now Christendom, amalgamating with renegade Judaism, will be apostate too. Both will make the apostasy complete. It is very evident that the beast {Rev. 13:1-10} will have his seat at Rome; and the false prophet {i.e., the Antichrist, 93. (…continued)}
Rev. 13:11-18}} at Jerusalem. The religious or second beast will be where Christ was crucified; and there the beast or imperial civil power with its supporters will find themselves before the Lord appear. I have no doubt that for this things are preparing, and that the stripping of his temporal dominion from the Pope and giving Rome to Italy are steps on the way to the restored Roman Empire, as well as to a new form of religious chief in the Holy Land.

But the Assyrian survives that power, and this it is which is described here, not Babylon, nor Rome, but the king of the north, who also will appear in the last days, taking up his old pretensions and opposition to Israel. Such then is the Assyrian of Joel; it is the northern [army], the head of the northern and eastern powers of the world, who will by and by, as of old, come into collision with the Jew. He musters the great assemblage of the nations spoken of here. The western powers will comprise the flower of Europe, helping on and propelling up the false prophet who will then reign at Jerusalem. Men have seen a certain quarell which rose about the holy places, where the western powers came into a serious collision with the north-east. This will be carried on still more keenly and extensively when the beast and his ten horns sustain antichrist there. The man that will set up to have the highest spiritual power will reign in Jerusalem, and be the final personal antichrist, with the western powers for his supporters.

It is not to be doubted that many Jews will be gathered back to their land before that crisis comes; for the second beast rules over them. But they will of course return in unbelief. It will be the fruit of man’s doing then. The Gentiles will work to this end. This failing, God will afterwards gather the Israelites in from every side. The Assyrian will then show himself their adversary, and appear to succeed at first, so as to enhance his destruction in its time; especially as the western empire (the beast), with the religious ally and chief in Palestine, will have been judged previously by divine power. This the Assyrian will regard as wrought in their own favor. They will infer that they are going to have things all their own way then, and will simply come therefore to receive their judgment after the western powers have been blotted out by the Lord.

England, like the rest of western Europe, will be under the apostate influence of Rome and the antichrist; for there is no power faithfully protesting against this iniquity. For similar reasons, if I might venture to give an opinion (and I never think of giving one’s own thought as more than that), it is that the United States of America will be swamped into a political marsh; and as they have been hitherto a mere omnium gatherum or conglomerate from the rest of the world, especially from Europe, comprising no doubt a vast deal of skill, industry, and enterprise, but also not a little of the scum and refuse of all nations; so I believe they will break up into factions of noisy primitive elements; and, after going off in boastful vapouring, will at length burst as a bubble.

Population does not in itself make a nation strong. Some of the nations greatest in masses of men have been politically weak before a small energetic kingdom. Look at Darius’s power, as opposed to Alexander and his Macedonians. The last appeared contemptible. Did it not seem the greatest folly for these few adventurers to invade Asia, and face the enormous armaments of Persia? Yet the he-goat with his horn was too much for the myriads of the great king, and the second empire collapsed.

So as to America, I conceive that the young giant power which has grown so fast will sink still faster, probably through intestine quarrel, but assuredly somehow before that day comes. They will break up into different fragments. Their prime object is to maintain political unity. This is their great ambition, and though it may appear to stand and advance, as everything ambitious is apt to prosper for a time, it will be all blown down before long. For it is a remarkable fact that there is no place in prophecy for a vast influential power, such as the American United States would naturally be, if it so long retained its cohesion. Is it conceivable that there should be such a power existing at that day without any mention of it? Can the omission be accounted for save by its dissolution? However, I particularly wish every one to understand that this is merely drawn from the general principles of the word of God.

India I presume will be part of the north-eastern system spoken of here and elsewhere. The British will lose possession of India, as nationalities wake up to yearn after their own distinct position. And such is even now the tendency, which prophecy distinctly recognizes as characterising the end of this age. The Russian empire, as being itself north-eastern, is destined to be the suzerain power there. They may not be aware of the rôle divine prophecy attributes to them, of their immense success, and of their total destruction under the hand of Jehovah. But scripture is clear. (Compare Ezek. 38, 39.) Divine judgment will not slumber.

That it is the quick only, the wicked nations of the earth, who are here judged by an outpouring of divine judgment, when they think of no more than a campaign or politics, will be plain from what follows: a rising from the dead to be judged according to their works it is not.

Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in-the valley of decision: for the day of Jehovah is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining [Joel 3:13-15].

Nevertheless it is not “the end” of 1 Cor. 15:24, but the consummation of the age, of this present evil age, which will be followed by the glorious world-kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. 11), and the fulfilment of the great mass of the prophecies in the earth’s blessedness under His reign. Joel 3:16, 17 make this equally plain and sure.

Jehovah also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth
shall shake: but Jehovah will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So shall ye know that I am Jehovah your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more.

At the judgment of the dead Jehovah will not roar as here out of Zion, neither will He dwell there, making Jerusalem holiness. For earth and heaven will have fled away (Rev. 20:11). The absolutely new creation follows for eternity in Rev. 21:1-5.

But here the picture is so different as necessarily to suppose a time wholly distinct. It is the earthly Jerusalem, not the heavenly; it is not the Lord’s shout calling His own to meet Him in the air, but His lion-like roar against His enemies on earth. It is His dwelling in Zion, His holy mountain, so as to make the holiness of Jerusalem no longer a mockery but a blessed reality. It is not yet the hour when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth and the works that are therein being burned up. For it shall come to pass in the time here spoken of,

that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of Jehovah, and shall water the valley of Shittim. Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for Jehovah dwelleth in Zion (Joel 3:18-21).

It is the time of the restitution of all things according to the full stream of the prophetic testimony, yet in no wise the last hour of that day when all must be destroyed in order to the eternal judgment and the new heavens and new earth, not in an inchoative but in the complete and absolute sense of the words.

The confusion of pious, able, and learned men on this subject is incredible to those who have not examined them carefully with a competent knowledge of scriptural truth to judge them by. It is not correct to say, for instance, that the imagery describes the fulness of spiritual blessings which God at all times diffuses in and through the church; nor is it well founded to assume that on earth (and the text speaks of the earth) the church has a lease of such blessings for ever, unless one speaks only of such individuals as have eternal life; nor again can we lightly speak of the church’s enemies being cut off for ever, unless we limit our thoughts to the powers of darkness (Eph. 6:12), which are surely not what is intended here by the desolations of Egypt and Edom.

The objections to taking the prophecy in its strict and natural import are of no such weight as to call for a mystical sense. Thus it is said that “the promise cannot relate to exuberance of temporal blessings, even as tokens of God’s favor. For he says

a fountain shall come forth of the house of Jehovah, and shall water the valley of Shittim (Joel 3:18).

But the valley of Shittim is on the other side Jordan, beyond the Dead Sea, so that by nature the waters could not flow thither.” But here lies the mistake; for the reign of the Lord over the earth (which St. John declares shall last for a thousand years) differs essentially from all previous ages, as well as from the eternal state which succeeds. And the fuller light of the New Testament makes it plain that its distinctive feature is the heading up of all things in heaven and of all things on earth in Christ, the glorious Head of the universe now enjoying the promised blessing for which the groaning lower creation still yearns. Hence there will be a perfect condition for those on high (including the church then glorified), a blessed but not absolutely perfect state for those below, among whom Israel, converted and planted in their own land under Messiah and the new covenant, will have the highest place.

Thus it is easy to see that it will be the time for removing the effects of curse and shedding both spiritual and natural blessing. In witness of this shall go forth the vivifying fountain from the house of Jehovah, the waters of which take their course even to the valley of Shittim beyond the Dead Sea. The very point is a blessing power beyond nature going directly through a sea so dismal. Ezek. 47 gives full particulars, and states an exception to the healing, which is important as negativing the idea of heaven or eternity. Zech. 14:8 lets us know that, of the living waters issuing from Jerusalem in that day, half should go west to the Mediterranean, and half east to the Salt Sea, unaffected by the vicissitudes of the year. Undoubtedly along with this will be vouchsafed spiritual good abundantly; but there is no solid ground to question the real physical fact and its consequences in that day so glorious to Jehovah-Messiah. We must leave room in the future for the divine vindication of Himself in the lower creation, remembering the reconciliation to God of all things as well as of believers (Col. 1:20, 21), and that Christ is head over all things to the church which is His body. It is admitted that the vision of Ezekiel belongs to this life; as also Rev. 21:24-26, 22:1, 2. But in none is the connection with the present evil age, but with the good age to come.

It will be seen that I contend for no pseudo-literalism, and acknowledge freely the strong figures employed; as for example the mountains dropping new wine, and the hills flowing with milk; but surely the force is the supernatural spontaneousness with which God will then cause the earth to yield its choicest stores of the animate as well as inanimate creation. The day of toil and sorrow is past; and this through the Second man’s grace, not the first man’s skill any more than his deserts. Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day. But it is not a description of our spiritual blessings in heavenly places. Undoubtedly it is earthly Judah and Jerusalem; but mercy and truth have wrought in the people,
and divine power in the land and city of the great King. Their blessing shall abide for ever, as long as the earth endures; yea, Judah’s surely in a new form throughout all eternity.

And I will avenge [or pronounce free from guilt] their blood [that] I had not avenged; and Jehovah dwelleth in Zion {Joel 3:21}.

It is not the church either militant or triumphant, but the permanent vindication and blessing of His earthly people, when He makes good His pledge of the hill He chose of old as His rest for ever.
The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake {Amos 1:1}.

If the prophet Amos was thus a contemporary of Hosea during some part of his ministry, there is, as we might naturally expect, considerable difference in the character and aim of the two prophets; for God does not write merely to corroborate. For Him to speak once must be sufficient. In grace He may be pleased to give confirmatory testimony, but it is never necessary. Hence, even though there may be ever such strong resemblance in accounts of the same transactions and during the same epoch, substantially at least God has always a special object before Him in the work that He assigns to each. So it will be found that Amos, inasmuch too as he was of Judah, has his own peculiarities and a distinct line from God.

The general tone of the prophecy differs from Hosea’s in that the latter speaks with far more emotion, with stronger expressions of passionate grief over the condition of Israel. From the beginning of Amos 3 both families are taken up, the children of Israel, the whole family, as it is said, which He brought up out of the land of Egypt. From this point onwards each chapter composes a section of the prophecy; so clearly that even those who object to Hosea for the broken and disjointed character of his prophecies admit the orderly series of Amos. It has been already shown how unfounded is the objection to Hosea; but it is the more remarkable in the case of Amos that the connection should be so sustained and evident, inasmuch as the portions of his prophecy were clearly separate in themselves.

The truth is, man has an indifferent judgment of the word of God; and it is a great mistake that he assumes to himself or allows others to judge it at all. It is exactly right to use it for judging others, were it even an apostle that preached. The sure and only way to profit fully by it is first of all to receive it implicitly. When we thus bow our will to God and His word we learn; it cannot be otherwise safely, however grace may save us finally. Hence moral condition is always essential to understanding the word of God. If the will be not subject, spiritual intelligence is impossible.

If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light {Matt 6:22}.

Surely this is worthy of God, and, more than that, it is wholesome for man. There cannot be a more dangerous thing than the appearance of high intelligence where the heart is far from God. Therefore it is the greatest mercy that spiritual intelligence is, as the rule, inseparable from a right condition of the soul with the Lord. It is very possible that the man may have bright thoughts, as indeed commonly is the case with the enemy, who contrives with positive heresy to mix up not a little which sounds plausible and like truth. There may even be attention drawn to neglected truth; but then it is not a truth that sanctifies, but the truth. A truth misused may be the means of the greatest injury and danger to the soul. The truth is found in Christ only, and therefore it is the possession of Christ before us which alone secures both the glory of God and the blessing of man.

In our prophecy then the prophet introduces himself according to his lowly origin and condition. There is no vaunt nor puff. There was love in the Spirit, and love does not behave itself unseemly. There was boldness, as we shall find; there was a courageous uncompromising readiness to oppose wrong-doers, were it the king of Israel, but no hiding that he himself was among the herdmen of Tekoa. Further, he speaks of the king of Israel, not merely of Judah. There was no narrowness of feeling; nor was there unworthy yielding to the condition in which Israel was. There was no excuse drawn from the circumstance of the rent between the ten tribes and the two; as if one by the providence of God cast among the two was therefore to be absolved from all painful duty as to the ten. None the less the mission of Amos as a whole was to Israel. He notices Judah; but the charge given him was Jeroboam’s kingdom far more than Judah. In short, his heart being with God, he loved His people as such; he loved the whole of them therefore, and could not yield to the enemy that, if sin had compelled a schism, and this had been the occasion of...
deeper mischief which dishonored God, a prophet must abandon his testimony for His name, and forget that all were sons of Israel, and the objects of promise, destined yet to taste of saving mercy, as surely as they were now on the ground of law and reaping the bitter consequences of their unfaithfulness. He could wait for the day when God would cast out all stumbling-blocks and renew the bond that had been broken, renewing it to never to be severed again, under its only rightful head, the true Son of David, the Lord Christ. This we shall find in his prophecy before this notice is concluded.

Further, as Amos does not hide that he was of lowly degree, nor his connection with the south of Judah, neither does he abstain from pressing the solemnity of Jehovah's utterance by him. His words were what he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake

warnings first in word, then in deed.

Observe this preface:

And he said, Jehovah will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem [Amos 1:2].

Such is the opening of our prophet, who begins where Joel ends (Joel 3:16). These references to, or citations from, other prophets are designed of God, and serve to bind the various witnesses in one testimony, as another has profitably called to our notice. But how solemn it is that Jehovah utters His voice from the central spot of His worship and government, not to comfort and direct but to denounce; and to denounce not strangers and enemies but His own people! He will roar {Amos 1:2};
and the effect is that the shepherds mourn in the south, and the beautiful blooming Carmel withers in the north.

Then we come to particulars.

Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron. But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael which shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad [Amos 1:6].

The Spirit begins with the greatest but most external of the enemies here to be enumerated, the Syrians. Their ruthless and persevering efforts cruelly to exterminate the Jews east of the Jordan would not be forgiven. This filled the cup of Syria.

I will break also the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the plain of Aven, and him that holdeth the sceptre from the house of Eden: and the people of Syria shall go into captivity unto Kir, saith Jehovah [Amos 1:5].

The Syrians were to go back captives to Kir (probably Kurgistan, Georgia), whence they had emerged as conquerors and settlers.

So also as to Gaza, and in similar style as representing the Philistines, their old, unremitting, and active antagonists, if not an internal, at least a borderer, foe. They had been guilty of transgression upon transgression, and therefore Jehovah would not here too turn back. He would deal summarily with their iniquity, not carrying them off merely, but annihilating them as a people.

The remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord Jehovah [Amos 1:8].

Then comes before us Tyre, purse-proud as a city of merchant princes usually is, and by commerce connected with every part of the earth; its palaces should be devoured by fire, as in fact came to pass.

Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant: but I will send a fire on the wall of Tyrus, which shall devour the palaces thereof [Amos 1:9, 10].

They were false to their brotherly covenant, and delivered up a complete captivity of the Jews to Edom, the haughty hater of the people of God. Little did they think that He saw and resented their covetous traffic in Israel.

Edom is next threatened with a judgment of no less extreme character. Here the sin was closer, as the tie was of blood, not covenant only -- pitiless pursuit of his brother, and the keeping up of undying wrath.

Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever: but I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah [Amos 1:11, 12].

Ammon yet political and calculating in their desire to destroy Israel for their own interests are doomed of God to go into captivity.

Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border: but I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour the palaces thereof, with shouting in the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind [Amos 1:13, 14].

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94. This formula is not to be taken as equivalent to three + four transgressions, but as the climax after several antecedent evils of lesser degree. (Compare Prov. 30:15-31.)
Thus saith Jehovah; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime: but I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kirioth: and Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet {Amos 2:1, 2}.

It would seem that 2 Kings 3:26, 27, contains the fact alluded to, which most like Josephus have misinterpreted.

His eldest son {2 Kings 3:27} means the eldest son of the king of Edom, the heir-apparent and probably joint king, whom the king of Moab threatened to burn, and did burn his bones, when Israel refused to raise the siege.

After this we come in Amos 2:4 to the solemn announcement that God must deal with Judah as with their Gentile neighbors. With God sin admits of no respect of persons any more than righteousness.

For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn back.

Here Jehovah’s law was broken, and lies or idolatries were trusted.

Lastly we come (Amos 2:6-8) to Israel’s transgressions. Here there are apparently four classes of wickedness: hard selfishness (summum jus summa injuria, we may perhaps say); covetous grinding of the poor; licentious profanity; and idolatrous revelry. The prophet sets before them the gracious and faithful care of God both in the land and before it in Egypt, to shame them (Amos 2:9, 10), and His choice of their sons to be prophets and Nazarites; and what had they done? (Amos 2:11, 12). Patience was over; no resources should keep or deliver.

Behold I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves. Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself: neither shall he stand that handleth the bow; and he that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself. And he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith Jehovah {Amos 2:13-16}.

Israel had failed as a nation before God; and certainly the righteousness that punished the heathen would not spare a more privileged people who bore His name. Yet we find that in these two chapters there is only a general dealing laid down, preparatory to all the details which follow. And this is the more remarkably shown by the fact that from Amos 3 what is special is said of the two houses or the whole family of Israel.

There is more henceforth than dealing generally with Judah and Israel. It was no small dishonor that they should come into the list of guilty nations in and around Palestine scourged for repeated transgressions always ending with the worst. But if Judah and Israel had sunk to the level of the Gentiles, this does not hinder His preferring a peculiar indictment against them, both as a whole and separately. Thus, though there was in Amos 2, 3 the general inclusion of Judah and Israel with the heathen round about them, in Amos 3 we come to what is far closer, more serious and characteristic, for they are here viewed as distinguished from their neighbors.

Hear this word {Amos 3:1}.

It is thus that we enter on a new division of the book. There is a similar commencement of Amos 4 and 5, though each may be regarded as distinct discourses. Then comes the obviously different woe (Amos 6:1),

which is followed by other modes of introduction in the rest of the prophecy. But in the third chapter,

Hear this word that Jehovah hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt {Amos 3:1}.

What is the ground here taken by God?

You only have I known of all the families of the earth.

It is evident that now they are singled out, not mixed up with the Gentiles. But the conclusion is extremely solemn. Because they were thus separated to the knowledge of Jehovah, they only being known as His people, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities {Amos 3:2}.

The measure of relationship is always the measure of responsibility. The nearer one is brought, the stronger are the grounds, and the higher the character, on which one must be conformed to divine claims in obedience.

This is an invariable moral truth. It is no otherwise in human relationships. A man would resent in his wife what he could not be expected even to notice in another; he might justly and deeply claim a kind of subjection in his child, a different identification with family thoughts and interests in his son, from that which would be suitable in any other. The failure of a confidential servant, even in the eye of men of the world, is incomparably graver than that of a casual laborer. And so it is in all the details of daily as well as spiritual life. Hence under the law wickedness in a ruler was far more censurable than in one of the common people; wickedness in the anointed high priest had an import and consequences more solemn than in any other individual in Israel. We find this distinction where God measures the different offerings for sin (Lev. 4). It is a moral necessity. There cannot be a more misleading thought than that all individuals are exactly on the same level; and that consequently all sins have just the same criminality, no matter in whom they may have been. It is contrary to what every well-regulated mind is able to discern when set before him, and certainly in direct collision with the plain word of God. The fact is that we find ourselves in various
relationships; and the higher the relationship, or the greater the privileges, so much the more deplorable is unfaithfulness in that relationship and to such privileges.

This is the reason why the sin of Israel is now dealt with on quite a different ground from what was seen in Amos 2. There the question was, if the evils of the Gentiles came under the divine notice and chastening, whether Israel could be exempted from the punishment of their faults; and God shows they could not. If the Gentiles were so dealt with, Judah and Israel could not escape. But then this does not hinder there being a second count in which they are tried and found wanting. In Joel 3 they are judged not merely as faulty -- others were guilty and so were they; but Israel were under Jehovah as none other was, and therefore they were chargeable with treason in a sense that none other could be.

You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities {Amos 3:2}.

Has this no voice for us? Have we no special relationships with God? Whatever might be the nearness of an Israelite, whatever the blessings heaped on that favored nation, how can either be compared with the place of a Christian, or of the church, the body of Christ?

Hence it is that in the instructions of Luke 12 our Lord Jesus lays it down that in the day of His return, while the servant that did not his Master’s will shall be beaten, the servant that knew his Master’s will and did it not shall be beaten with more stripes. It is impossible to conceive a principle more heinously false than that favored lands in Christendom are to be passed over more lightly in that day than the dark wastes of heathendom. One meets too often with an impression, for instance, that this country in which the Bible has been circulated more than in any other, and whence it has been sent out beyond any other center, will be exempted from those condign judgments of God which are predicted to fall upon Christendom. It appears plain that the revealed principles of the divine word point to a conclusion directly opposed. The truth is that the wide diffusion of the Bible creates an aggravated responsibility for those who treat it lightly, and who will assuredly under pressure yield to temptation and give up the truth. It is the evident tendency of the present day, in consequence of the difficulties of adjusting matters, to give up the public recognition of God in the country, to solve the difficulties of various sects and denominations by abandoning all distinct and positive assertion of His truth. Disgust at the selfish squabbles of religionists will lead to the setting up of secular education for instance, and to the division of the funds intended for religious purposes as spoil which will be diverted to the present interests of man. I am convinced that God will take such a notice of it as men do not expect, and that those who have despised even the defective and feeble testimony of His truth in Protestantism will pay dearly for their contempt of Himself and of His word.

No doubt a similar process of disintegration is going on in various ways throughout every other part of Christendom. Rationalistic indifferentism is at least as rife among Romanists. Hence it is that, as one part has more particularly exalted itself by its pretension to be above the others -- mother and mistress of all, this very arrogance betrays its alienation from the mind of God; for the gospel is perverted into a means of the most egregious worldly ambition, and the holy name of the Crucified becomes the stepping-stone to rank and wealth, and the avowed successor of him who had not silver or gold vies with the kings and queens in the splendour of earthly show, in names of honor, and in every form of the pride and luxury of life. Greater abomination will surely yet appear; when the end of that which sincere men must acknowledge to be contrary to the word of Christ and the teaching of the apostles will be visited as no sin ever was since the world began. Such is the doom that impends over Babylon.

As to the local habitation of Babylon now, or its center at any rate here below, no man who simply believes the Revelation can question that the seven hills are not spoken of in vain. It is plainly enough intimated where was the city which took the place not merely of being the great but the governing city, ruling the kings of the earth, and reducing them to tribute and vassalage. Rome possessed it first with a pagan profession, afterwards with at least equal ambition and cruelty but far more guilt as the metropolis of Christendom. Other systems may no doubt be bad enough, where all is arranged according to the will of man; but so-called Christian Rome has usurped the dominion of God over conscience, has compelled idolatry as a duty to Christ, has claimed through the cross dominion over the powers that be to the utter confusion of authority as well as holiness and truth, and consequently awaits a more dreadful fate than paganism or Judaism ever knew. Such is the Babylon of the Revelation.

On the other hand we must remember that it is a sorry employment merely to occupy ourselves with that which touches others. Let us seek always to bow to what God has revealed for us, and not only to what He threatens on the iniquity of others. Let us use His word for Christ’s glory in our own souls, and this too with earnest desire to help others, especially such as are of the household of faith. If God has been pleased, in the greatness of His grace, to bring any of us into a better knowledge of His truth and into a larger sense of the favor He has bestowed on His church, let us remember that we are responsible exactly according to that measure.

The word Babylon, I am aware, presents a great difficulty to many minds in applying the idea to Rome. But this arises from a misapprehension of the Apocalypse, which does not merely repeat Old Testament facts, but employs them for deeper purposes in view of the ruin of Christendom. The origin of the application of Babylon seems to be this; the essence of the name consisting in confusion, the meaning is a system of
confusion; it is that which seeks and takes the place of exceeding loftiness in the earth, a grand center, we may say, of races and peoples and tongues. But even before this the great idea was the strength and dignity which result from combination. Later still it was the beginning of the Image power -- a dominion world-wide in principle (Dan. 2). All these combine in the apostasy of Christendom.

Doubtless the church is not a mere aggregate of churches, still less an evangelical alliance. The Christian assembly as a whole was the house of God; there were many members and but one body. Babylon may seize the idea of unity to make a carnal commandment, seeking not the faithful but all the christened world for its own purposes of pride, power, and covetousness; but it has no real conception of the truth. There cannot be the unity of the Spirit in what is merely a fleshly compact, founded on a system of earthly priests and human ordinances, with decrees, canons, and ceremonies innumerable, which may distinguish, but can never unite souls. The sole power of unity in the church of God is the baptism of in the power of the Holy Ghost {1 Cor. 12:13}. Inasmuch as Christians have one Spirit dwelling in them all, those who have the Holy Spirit thus are by this great fact members of one and the same body. They are united after the very closest sort. For while there is a base union of flesh, as the apostle so solemnly tells us in 1 Cor. 6, and there may be another legitimate and of God, what is either in comparison with the one body formed by the Holy Ghost? Flesh at best is a mere creature, and now being deprived and evil it finds its exercise in will and passion. But union in the Spirit is holy in its nature, and has for its purpose the exalting of Christ. Such is the object of the church of God here below, and anything that does not answer to this will before long sink into a machinery for selfish purposes. It does not matter whether it be individuals or nations -- anything that loses sight of God’s object and is not carrying out God’s plans forfeits its place really except for judgment. If we accept a name, is it not true that God deals with us according to the place we take?

This has been the case with Rome more particularly. No other can put in such a claim to be the Apocalyptic Babylon. But it is well to bear in mind that Rome will put forth her powers in ways for which now are unprepared. It is my persuasion that those who are not founded on Christ and loving His word by the Spirit of God will merge in Babylon before long. Thus Rome will think to have its own way immediately before its final judgment and ruin.

There are two spirits, be it never forgotten, struggling for mastery in the world now: one is that of infidelity, the other that of superstition. Of course the spirit of superstition is what triumphs in Romanism. But we must also remember that, although these powers be so opposed in appearance, there is between them a real link of connection and of kindred source under the surface. For in sober truth superstition is as really infidel in the sight of God as scepticism. The only difference is that scepticism is the infidelity of the mind, while superstition is that of the imagination. They are both vails which shut out and deny the truth of God, as they both have their spring in a real ignorance of the true God, substituting what is of the first man for the Second, one of them in a reverent tone and with appearances of devotion which outdo the truth which is according to godliness, bowing down even to lick the dust of the earth or anything else that will abase man before his earthly priest as the visible emblem of God; for this is the essence of the system. It is man abased not before God but before man. The aim of the enemy is evident. Every mind taught of the Holy Spirit in this can see without hesitation that God has not His place; and that consequently infidelity is the real root of Popery no less than of open profane scepticism.

Hence they both work so as to help each other on; because the grossness of superstition provokes and produces infidelity as a reaction, while the barren misery and desolation of infidelity exposes souls to the high claims of superstition to meet the cravings of the natural heart, where God is not known and self is unjudged. Thus scepticism leads persons indirectly to superstition. The cold blank of infidelity, the hopeless absence of truth, its negative character in short causes the heart to yearn for something positive, something to lean on; and if they have not God and His word to believe, by an abuse of His name they have man at any rate to confess to. Thus to regard man is superstition; but it is evident that the deliverance from it is not giving up scripture, but bowing to God instead of man.

This subjection of heart to God and His word is the sole attitude which becomes one before God; to this we are called by the word of His testimony; and when we rest on Christ’s redemption, His Spirit is given to be in us as thus brought to God. Such are those who have received the name of the Lord Jesus; for there can be no real faith in God now without accepting Christ, the Son of God and the Son of man. Impossible to please God without accepting that glorious person, who is as truly God as man, and who has wrought our reconciliation, which supposes indeed the reality of His Godhead and the perfection of His manhood, by a sacrifice in which sin has been completely and for ever judged before God. Consequently he that believes in the name of the Lord Jesus steps into all the blessing that is founded on the work of Christ and commensurate with the infinite dignity of His person.

Such is the position of a Christian. Hence all questions as to acceptance with God are absolutely settled for him, by His grace in Christ; and no matter who or what he may be, whether here or there, black or white, high or low (I do not speak of heterodoxy or sin), every Christian is to be accepted equally as a member of Christ’s body. We must rejoice to accept them all as belonging to that one Head, not only for heaven by and by, but for church fellowship now. For what can be more self-condemnatory than to acknowledge a relationship for Christ which you are ashamed to own for yourself and others on the earth? Is it not of the essence of Christianity to act now on what is
those who are of heaven. The trial is now, and faith and doubt of it in heaven; there should be none on earth among all that are Christ's, always supposing that there be no our joy then as it is our duty to remember in practice that what calls itself “the church”? Such a system as this must be along with it a system of indulgences for sin and a tariff of there has been the theory of counsels of perfection, but over conscience which can be conceived. In the same way there is at the same time really the most enthralling tyranny where the most shameless confusion the fairest names gloss over the foulest ways and ends, where under the profession of being the servant of servants there is at the same time really the most enthralling tyranny over conscience which can be conceived. In the same way there has been the theory of counsels of perfection, but along with it a system of indulgences for sin and a tariff of enormities for money. What wickedness cannot be bought? What evil cannot he atoned for by some corban given to covering under fair forms and high-sounding names the most hideous corruption of truth and sheer rebellion against God. Such, in my judgment, is the system of the Babylon of the Revelation, where with the most shameless confusion the most hideous corruption of truth and sheer rebellion against God. That is to say, there have been persons who manifest among them. This is humbling and most profitable for one’s soul, because it shows to what a pitfall the allowance of unbelief may expose a Christian. It is evident that any one might be ensnared into it, especially such as occupy themselves with a truth -- not the truth. From one thing indeed I should expect a person born of God to be kept, at any rate not to abide in, namely, what directly destroys the glory of the person of Christ. Now although Popery has brought in the most horrible enormities, both of doctrine and practice, yet thank God they have never given up those fundamental truths which the soul needs for salvation before God. Popery is distinct enough as to all this. I was lately reading a Latin book on theology which I had the curiosity to examine, a modern work of ability, partly because printed in America by a Roman Catholic Archbishop. And not a little was I pleased, in the midst of feeling what a sorrowful system it is, to find greater tenacity about the foundation truth of God in that book than in many Protestant ones of our day. For instance, one of the works strongly condemned for their looseness of doctrine and heterodoxy is Barnes’s Notes on the New Testament, a very popular book. I believe it has been published in Great Britain by various editors who are thought orthodox. But this Popish bishop is quite right, because Barnes denies the eternal Sonship of Christ; and although I should be sorry to express any opinion doubting the author’s personal salvation (we have nothing to do with that which belongs to God), I have no hesitation in pronouncing the Protestant commentator unsound and Archbishop F. P. Kenrick justified in his strictures as far as that charge goes.

And again, who does not know that many have allowed themselves in unholy thoughts about Christ’s humanity, where Popery has been quite consistently opposed? Anything like Irvingism would have been denounced by the

unseen and eternal? To allow circumstances to outweigh this does not seem to evidence real faith or genuine love. Be it our joy then as it is our duty to remember in practice that we are called now to be witnesses of what God has done for all that are Christ’s, always supposing that there be no question of plain scriptural discipline. There will be no doubt of it in heaven; there should be none on earth among those who are of heaven. The trial is now, and faith and love should surely show their colors in the day of trial. It was all well to love David when as a king he sat on the throne; but the test of affection as well as of intelligence in the mind of God was when David was chased upon the mountains like a partridge.

Here it is exactly, though very far indeed from exclusively, where we are put to the proof now. Against those built together for God’s habitation in the Spirit, -- which now, alas! has been disfigured and broken as far as outward manifestation is concerned, -- against God’s church, Satan has formed and fashioned that awful mystery of lawlessness, the greatest the world has ever seen, most hideous corruption of truth and sheer rebellion against God. Such, in my judgment, is the system of the Babylon of the Revelation, where with the most shameless confusion the fairest names gloss over the foulest ways and ends, where under the profession of being the servant of servants there is at the same time really the most enthralling tyranny over conscience which can be conceived. In the same way there has been the theory of counsels of perfection, but along with it a system of indulgences for sin and a tariff of enormities for money. What wickedness cannot be bought? What evil cannot he atoned for by some corban given to what calls itself “the church”? Such a system as this must be judged to be a practical denial of God in the church, and a setting up of man in His place, under pretexts which make God a party to His own dishonor; as if the Holy Spirit had signed and sealed over the rights of Christ to men who claim to be the successors of the chief of the twelve apostles in powers which not all the twelve ever possessed, and which not one ever hints at as possible. It is needless of course to enter into more particulars. My point is not now to lecture on Romanism, but to show sufficient cause why its confusion of holy confession with the greatest practical unholliness, which characterizes Rome, is called “Babylon.”

It may be a question how far a Christian who has really faith in the Lord Jesus, and stands in the integrity of the results of the work of Christ, in whom therefore the Spirit of God dwells, may possibly participate in Babylon, or even manifest its spirit, its essential spiritual element.

That there have been children of God ensnared in Babylon cannot be doubted by those acquainted with early mediaeval, or even later facts. There have been children of God in the position of priests, nuns, monks, cardinals, and popes. That is to say, there have been persons who manifest by their ways and their writings that they were born of God. To me this, instead of being any reason for license, is rather a most solemn warning; because it furnishes evidence how far a converted soul may be beguiled. Nothing can be more false than to argue that Romanism cannot be so bad a system because there have been Christians in it. Rather say the contrary: see the pit into which a Christian may fall! See the appalling quagmire into which a Christian may slip by yielding to human tradition and refusing to use the word of God to judge everything by! Thus to my mind there cannot be the smallest doubt that, as Romanism is the greatest religious imposture under the sun, so there have been children of God drawn into its toils, not merely as lowly and obscure members, but perhaps in its highest seats. I do not doubt that Popes Leo and Gregory, both styled the great, were Christians; nor do I mean to insinuate that these were the only two of whom we may think as saints and brethren in the Lord. My acquaintance with their personal history is not at all minute; but I know enough of them fully yet charitably to believe that there may have been Christians among them. This is humbling and most profitable for one’s soul, because it shows to what a pitfall the allowance of unbelief may expose a Christian. It is evident that any one might be ensnared into it, especially such as occupy themselves with a truth -- not the truth. From one thing indeed I should expect a person born of God to be kept, at any rate not to abide in, namely, what directly destroys the glory of the person of Christ. Now although Popery has brought in the most horrible enormities, both of doctrine and practice, yet thank God they have never given up those fundamental truths which the soul needs for salvation before God. Popery is distinct enough as to all this. I was lately reading a Latin book on theology which I had the curiosity to examine, a modern work of ability, partly because printed in America by a Roman Catholic Archbishop. 95 And not a little was I pleased, in the midst of feeling what a sorrowful system it is, to find greater tenacity about the foundation truth of God in that book than in many Protestant ones of our day. For instance, one of the works strongly condemned for their looseness of doctrine and heterodoxy is Barnes’s Notes on the New Testament, a very popular book. I believe it has been published in Great Britain by various editors who are thought orthodox. But this Popish bishop is quite right, because Barnes denies the eternal Sonship of Christ; and although I should be sorry to express any opinion doubting the author’s personal salvation (we have nothing to do with that which belongs to God), I have no hesitation in pronouncing the Protestant commentator unsound and Archbishop F. P. Kenrick justified in his strictures as far as that charge goes.

And again, who does not know that many have allowed themselves in unholy thoughts about Christ’s humanity, where Popery has been quite consistently opposed? Anything like Irvingism would have been denounced by the

standards of Popery, no less strenuously than Arianism and of course Unitarianism -- which is only another word for infidelity. Thus whatever error directly touched the person or natures of Christ has found decided opposition from the theologians of Rome. For this one may thank God as keeping firm the basis of grace for the myriads of souls all over the world who have been entangled in that system. For surely so far as such errors go they are fatal. He who denies the supreme deity of Jesus, or His perfect humanity, is guilty of the deepest affront to God who gave His Son in infinite love, and has sent the Spirit to uphold and testify His glory. There is nothing in the Athanasian creed objectionable on this score. I believe it to be a singularly sound production, though not meaning by this that I should think it right to subscribe to it. I have long done with endorsing the dogmas of men, however excellent in themselves. At the same time, while not willing to bind myself to human definitions of faith, I am of opinion that, put forward merely as an exposition of truth on the human and divine natures in the person of Christ, it is admirable though perhaps too scholastic in form. As for the outcry about dammatory clauses, it is all a mistake. For our Lord Himself says,

He that believeth not shall be damned {Mark 16:16}.

Does the Athanasian creed go farther than this? No doubt some who want to do away with that creed believe it: I should be sorry to think that they do not; but if so, it seems to me that they stumble over small things.

From this digression, which may not be unseasonable or without practical use suggested by the then objects of judgment, we will pursue the course of the prophecy.

We have seen the great principle as true of an individual as of a people, and of Christendom as of Israel, that the Lord exercises righteous government with a closeness proportioned to nearness and privilege. It is in vain for unbelief to complain; for this is exactly what righteousness is and should be. The more favored you may be, so much the more responsibility increases. This was the reason why God made so much of David’s sin. How many others, even among the people of God, have been no less guilty than David, but have never been so exposed as he! For he was chastened not only himself as few ever were, but in his family also beyond most; yet spite of his grievous sins, he was one of the rarest men for faith and devotedness that ever lived in Old Testament times. It is plain that God was acting on the same principle with him individually that we find here with the nation. Impossible if one had been so favored as he and nevertheless had made practical shipwreck -- not indeed of his faith -- but of a good conscience, that the Lord could righteously withhold the dreadful chastening inflicted both on him and on his family after him.

This is a peculiarly solemn consideration for us, because the Christian of all men has the greatest privileges, and hence is exposed, if unfaithful, to the severest correction. Never was there such an unfolding of grace and truth as that which came by Jesus Christ our Lord; never such a position of peace and liberty as that to which we are entitled now by the gospel -- peace and sonship and nearness to God within the rent vail, not to speak of life and incorruption brought to light. As to the last the Old Testament saints too were quickened and will have incorruption, as I need scarcely say. They had a new nature as we have; they will have incorruption at Christ’s coming no less truly than we. But now these blessings are brought to light {2 Tim. 1:10};

now there is no vail; for us darkness thoroughly passes away and uncertainty. For faith everything now is brought to an issue. Man stands convicted at the cross. Again God has made plain what He is in love and light. Consequently in such a day as this no doubt nor question becomes the soul which believes the word of God. And what is the result for man within the range of the Christian profession? That there are heavier judgments at the conclusion of Christendom than at the crisis of Israel.

There is one practical point on which I must again insist. The hope of special exemption, true of all saints, is an illusion for Great Britain, which on the contrary, as it will play its part in the dreadful tragedy of the falling away, so also cannot go unpunished.

But there is another thing of closer interest to note. The God who will judge in righteousness deals graciously. He does not soften, much less neutralize, judgment by grace, but brings in grace before the judgment in order to deliver from it those who bow to Him. We must never mingle the two together. If grace and judgment be thus jumbled, never will anything be seen aright; you may even forfeit the certainty that you are a Christian, and cannot hope to have peace in your soul. Judgment or mercy must each have its full character as well as measure -- must be given a free and undisturbed course. Mercy interposes to deliver those that believe; judgment will fall on those that through unbelief are disobedient.

So here Jehovah warns His people through the prophet. He had explained to them the moral principle; now He lets them know His ways in certain brief parables or comparisons.

Can two walk together, except they be agreed? Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing? Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all? {Amos 3:3-5}.

First, what communion could there be between God and His people in their then state? Next follow intimations of the sorrow in store for them: the lion’s roar for his prey, the snare for the bird, the loud blast of warning for the careless people, all indicate it.

Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people
not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and Jehovah hath not done it? {Amos 3:6}.

Not moral evil: Jehovah never does anything of the sort. It is impossible that God should be tempted with evils in that sense, neither tempteth He any man. But evil here and in other places means execution of judgment -- a tremendous thing in itself, of course, as it is God who acts.

So much has been made of this phrase that it may be well to seek that it be cleared yet more. The very expression,

Shall there be evil in a city?

indicates that it is not in view of a man's heart or life.

Evil in a city means plague, capture, or any other severe chastening falling on it. This is all that is referred to here.

The passage speaks of Jehovah's punishment as an evil to be borne, and so it is, a fearful scourge inflicted on a city. It is Jehovah then that has done it. Others may look at the secondary instruments; but there is nothing without Him. According to the highest authority, the Lord Jesus Himself, not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father; how much less can any judgment that envelopes a city take place without Him? Surely therefore, as He does all things, He knows all; and as He knows He communicates what He sees fitting of each judgment to those who hear His mouth and make known His mind.

The Lord Jehovah will do nothing, but he revealeth his secrets unto his servants the prophets {Amos 3:7}.

The Christian stands on this wonderful ground now, inasmuch as he has a place not only priestly but prophetic. By this last I do not mean the power to utter predictions, but the power to know beforehand with a lowly but sure confidence in God for himself. This is what I mean by the possession of a prophetic place. It is any thing rather than a pretension to new revelations; it is really the place of one who is a believer in God's revelation, who receives His written word as that which he is bound to hold, loving to confess it as the one source of divine truth and the only standard of it. Assuredly this is very important, because in our priestly place we draw near to God, and in our prophetic place we are intended to be witnesses of the truth before the time comes when the world too must know it. The world will shortly be forced to learn in bitter sorrow how true was the word of God it despised; they will feel its force by the judgment which He will execute, by the evil which He does not only in a city then, but all over the world in various but righteous measures. The Christian ought to be familiar with it all beforehand.

Seeing ye know these things before {2 Pet. 3:17}, says the apostle,

what manner of persons ought ye to be? {2 Pet. 3:11}

It is a wholly false maxim that the Christian has to wait till the predicted things are accomplished before believing them. The very essence of his faith, as far as this is concerned, is believing them beforehand. When the world itself cannot but bow to their truth, when it will no longer be a question of men's believing them but of being broken and punished for their previous unbelief, when the judgments of God are in the earth and the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness, it will be too late for those who have trifled with the name of Christ and the privileges of Christendom. It will be too late when the long-suspended sentence falls on the guilty. The power, the peace, the comfort, is in receiving the truth before the things appear to man; there is a great blessing for the soul in it, as glory brought to God by it.

This is the moral reason for heeding prophecy in general, which the prophet Amos sets out particularly here.

The lion hath roared, who will not fear? Jehovah hath spoken, who can but prophesy? Publish on the palaces at Ashdod, and on the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria {Amos 3:8, 9}.

God would expose them to their neighbors near or farther off; nay, invites these from the heights to behold the disturbances and oppressions of Samaria. They were become reprobate of mind, whose only store consisted of violence and oppression in their palaces. Then we have a description of their evil and what must follow it.

Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, An adversary shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled {Amos 3:11}.

So that out of that strong people which enjoyed the pride of life in the corner of a bed (or divan) and a couch, the merest refuse of a remnant should be rescued.

As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the

{96} Some have conceived that the rescued morsels have a specific meaning: the one indicating that by which one walks, the other whereby we hear the (continued...)
children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus [in] a couch {Amos 3:12}.

Possibly Damascus itself is meant as the couch by a strong figure. The Lord will not permit utter destruction to His people. He will allow an extreme judgment because of their sin; but He will preserve a remnant, out of which His grace will make a strong nation. Such is the destiny yet for Israel.

In Amos 4 this is pursued in a still more precise manner.

Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria {Amos 4:1}.

The reference is to those that dwelt at ease and are self-indulgent in Israel, the figure being taken from the herds which grazed on the rich pasture lands coveted by the two and a half tribes on the eastern bank of the Jordan. This soon leads to unfeeling indifference and oppression of others; and so the prophet proceeds to charge them:

Which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink {Amos 4:1}.

Intense selfishness is here laid at the door of Israel. It was the time of their most flourishing state politically, not of their real honor and glory, which was under David and Solomon. But after the rent from Judah, it might outwardly seem to man that Israel was a highly favored people. Alas! their independence was coeval with their apostasy. They had abandoned the true God, they had set up the calves at Dan and Bethel. They were under the self-asserting government of Jeroboam, whom God had allowed to succeed as a scourge to the guilty house of David. But His eye was in no wise unobservant of their ways. Yet the very fact that He noticed oppression of the poor and other effects of their intense selfishness shows the low condition of Israel.

This I cannot but think an important principle. Suppose the church of God were occupied with rectifying the squabbles of such as did not know how to behave themselves, with frauds in business, or such like faults, moral or social, would it not indicate an exceeding low state? For, properly speaking, these are the mere evil ways of fallen men. What normally belongs to the church or the Christian, while passing no evil by, is to judge spiritual defilement according to God, offences against the holiness and the truth of God, indifference as to such evil, or connivance with it in others. Of all this natural conscience takes no cognizance, and of course they are outside the province of human law. Not that these evils of a spiritual nature are not very real and profoundly bad before God, and even more destructive to the soul than moral ones (for these are at once discerned and would trouble all save for the time the guilty actors); but doctrinal evil is subtler and taints the spirit and conduct of man insensibly. Hence it is worse than practical evil, although they are both of them inconsistent with Christ. Still it is clear that where Christians go astray the evil is naturally apt to be more of a spiritual kind, as that of the world is of a coarse and open sort.

The very fact, therefore, that God here charges upon Israel habits and practices which might be found among the heathen is a flagrant proof of the degraded state into which His people had fallen. He must judge:

The Lord Jehovah hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks. And ye shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her; and ye shall cast them into the palace, saith Jehovah {Amos 4:2, 3}.

It is borrowed from helter-skelter confusion among cattle. The last phrase is rather

Ye shall cast yourselves to the mountains of Monah {Amos 4:3, see New Trans., JND},

meaning perhaps Armenia. He does in His government notice, as He always must, the evil of His people that affronts and grieves Him; and He shows further that, as there were such fruits, there was a stock and root also. Their practical evil sprang from idolatrous rivalry of Himself.

Come to Bethel and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression {Amos 4:4}.

These names, of such striking association with God, the places where God had manifested His grace and character of old, were now converted each into a focus of corruption. It was at Bethel where their father Jacob had first seen the vision of God; at Gilgal the reproach of Egypt was rolled away for ever from the sons of Israel on their passage of the Jordan after they had left the wilderness behind. But now, alas! God was degraded as far as the will of man could in Bethel, as the people degraded themselves in Gilgal. The true glory of Israel had departed for a season.

The prophet then mockingly bids them come to their haunts of idolatry, but in such terms as to intimate the contrariety to God.

And bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith Jehovah {Amos 4:4, 5}.

It was dismal, the mingling of heathenish will-worship with the relics and reminiscences of Jehovah. It is bad enough to be careless and unfaithful in the true worship of the true God; it is the gravest insult to mingle nature worship or false gods with the true, keeping up a measure of imitation, but with marked departure from the revealed ritual.

Such was the state of ruin in which Israel now lay, and
the Lord shows how He had smitten them with one affliction after another to rouse them from their self-will to feel His dishonor.

And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah. And also I have withheld the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered into one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah. I have smitten you with blasting mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig-trees and your olive-trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah. I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah

{Amos 4:6-10}.

Thus far they had been incorrigible; even though, as they are reminded, He had overthrown some of them as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

And ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah (Amos 4:11).

Now He takes a new method and more ominous than any blow. They must meet Himself.

Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, Jehovah, The God of hosts, is his name (Amos 4:12-13).

It is the strange habit of some to apply this text to a soul which is under the hand of the Lord when brought to believe the gospel; but it is evidently a threat of final judgment. Fully as we may desire to own the exceeding breadth of the divine word, we should not blunt the keenness of its edge in this way. It is excellent to guard one’s spirit from the least approach to a captious or critical tone in one’s thoughts of the use of scripture made by any simple mind; but we should not confound grace and judgment, or the day of Jehovah with the gospel call to the sinner. There is no lack of suited appeals. There are abundant examples in point. How much more blessed to take those which are intended as a call to mercy, than to turn such a summons of God as this to meet His judgment into an invitation to hear His message in the gospel now! However this by the way.

In Amos 5 is the third call to hear with a lamentation over the ruin of the virgin of Israel. The prophet only speaks of the present government of God: in no way does he deny an after raising up of Israel, but that their unbelief precluded any means now of staying the evil that had set in. The city that went out (that is, to war) [by] a thousand shall retain a hundred, and that which went out [by] a hundred shall retain ten for the house of Israel. Then Jehovah appeals solemnly to Israel to seek Him and live, not to seek Beth-el, nor to enter into Gilgal, nor to pass to Beer-sheba;

for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Beth-el shall come to nought (Amos 5:5).

When idolatrous superstition turns names and places invested with religious associations against the truth, faith must look simply and solely to God Himself: Here again it is said,

Seek Jehovah, and live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Beth-el. Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth (Amos 5:6, 7).

It was but vanity or worse to cry up the sacred character of spots where God had once spoken, now alas! openly turned to the purposes of idolatry, not consecrated to God, but by the will-worship of His people.

Seek him that maketh the seven stars [the Pleiades, which consist of seven greater stars, but of many more lesser] and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: Jehovah is his name: that strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress. They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly. Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time (Amos 5:8-13).

In Amos 5:14-17 the appeal is more moral, but in conformity with the call to seek Jehovah.

Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so Jehovah, the God of hosts, shall be with you as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that Jehovah the God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. Therefore Jehovah, the God of hosts, the Lord, saith thus: Waiting shall be in all streets: and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! and they shall call the husbandman to
mournings, and such as are skilful of lamentation to wailing. And in all the vineyards shall be wailing: for I will pass through thee, saith Jehovah.

One evil was then prevalent which the prophet particularly notices, the boldness with which the people said that they desired the day of Jehovah.

Woe unto you that desire the day of Jehovah! to what end is it for you? the day of Jehovah is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; and went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of Jehovah be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it? {Amos 5:18-20}

This is indeed presumptuous sin, not to believe the gospel, but so to brace the day of the Lord. It is not so uncommon. We may often meet with it in Christendom. Have you not heard men say, in the midst of the present confusion, while helping it on, “It is true that the condition of Christendom is awful; but there is one comfort, that the Lord is soon coming to put it all right.” Is not this desiring the day of Jehovah in a sense not remote from what is denounced here?

To what end is it for you?

If there were separation practically from what His word condemns, and devotedness to the objects He enjoins on us, it would be another matter. For the day of Jehovah can be an object of desire if our souls are free as far as our conscience knows. We may, as we ought, and must then love His appearing. Far from this being consistent with His will and word, it becomes us. If walking in obedience and holiness, we should surely desire it; but it is an empty and bold illusion to settle down deliberately in what is contrary to scripture, and then to talk of longing for the day of the Lord. This seems to be precisely the sin of Israel here denounced. It was an evident sham; not only a powerless force without force in the conscience, but the witness of heart-indifference to the will of Jehovah.

In general indeed there is nothing more dangerous or dreadful than to dislocate scripture from its appeal to the conscience. If I make the hopes of scripture to be simply an imaginative vision before my eyes, instead of hearing it as that which judges what I am doing, what I am saying, what I am feeling now, it is evident that I am not in communion with God about it. I do not speak only of those who, not being real Christians, have necessarily no portion in the blessing, but even of those who appearing to be Christians do nevertheless exhibit the counterpart of Israel’s bold unbelief. Assuredly their state is bad, and the thought is displeasing to God. The truth is that one object the Spirit has in setting His return before us is for leading us to clear ourselves from everything inconsistent with His will. As the apostle John says,

He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself as he is pure {1 John 3:3}.

It is not merely that the Lord will purify when He comes. He will; but this will be in the way of judgment. Let no man venture to await this process of purification: what we have to do is to seek it from God by His word and Spirit now. We know Christ’s love; we delight in His glory; we have Him as our life; and therefore we cannot endure that anything should be tolerated in our ways contrary to His word. Such is the only right course, if waiting for Christ.

But the sons of Israel were in a very different spirit. They were superstitious and withal, as usual in such a case, distrustful of God. They talked piety, but there was no substance, no reality, in them; and therefore the prophet can but warn what that day must be to such.

Shall not the day of Jehovah be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it? {Amos 5:20}.

That day ends all fond conceits, and will admit of no lightness of heart; that day will not deal gently with sins or displeasing to God. The truth is that one object the Spirit has in setting His return before us is for leading us to clear ourselves from everything inconsistent with His will. As the apostle John says,

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This is much to be noticed. It is not otherwise when grace works in our souls. Suppose a Christian, for instance, to have been walking practically at a distance from God. To begin merely with what he was doing today or yesterday is not enough: we must go back to the beginning. The Lord will have him to look well and judge, and see what was the root of fruits so evidently bad. Thus even a fall is used by grace as the means of rousing the conscience by the Spirit of God. One is thus made to feel the low point to which one may have come. But the object of God in permitting it is to lead to a retracing of the steps to the first point of departure from Himself.

Here we have this principle applied to the judgment of Israel. It is not merely the calves that Jeroboam set for politico-religious purposes at Dan and Beth-el. They are reminded when and where their idolatry began, that is, in the wilderness. False gods were objects of worship there, the Moloch and the Chiun, that they took up all the time that the Levites were carrying the ark of the tabernacle, with the sons of Israel so demurely following. They had not got rid of the gods of Egypt then. They brought these vanities along with them into the wilderness; and now this is charged upon them.

But ye have borne the shrines of your king, and the basis of your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves {Amos 5:26}.

Mark the circumstances.

Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity (the deportation to the cities of the Medes) beyond Damascus {Amos 5:27}.

Stephen says beyond Babylon (and so indeed was the fact) perhaps to distinguish from the Babylonian captivity. Such was the result of the old sin in the wilderness. No doubt that sin was more glaring at the end; the dark stream was always gathering further contributions to its volume. The mass of waters flowed more mightily down at its mouth than at the beginning of its course. Nevertheless God always goes back to the source, and at last declares that because of the first departure did the final blow come. The captivity of Israel was the consequence of their forefathers’ sin in the wilderness, and not merely of the sins they had added to it in the land God allotted them. Of course there were many and bitter aggravations in the land; but the evils which abounded in the land were the consequence of a failure to judge the wickedness in the wilderness. It is the same thing practically with every Christian.

No doubt grace can and does act in the case of a Christian now, even where he might have slipped seriously aside, but where there followed deep and thorough repentance, and the sense of forgiveness which the Spirit grants. This would become the last starting point, so to speak, and grace if it went back beyond it would use it for good. Not only is He faithful and just to forgive and cleanse, but He loves to bring him who has failed when restored into a better condition than he had ever known before. Witness Simon Peter at the end of the Gospels and the beginning of the Acts. And so it will be with Israel in a future day. But self-judgment, wherever it is thorough, wherever there is a vindication of God against one’s own sin, always brings one in the measure of the repentance into a corresponding measure of depth in God’s grace never possessed before. There are few things more common than to see a person converted in what may be called a superficial manner. Where this is the case, there is commonly a falling into open failure of one kind or another, sometimes a shameful break-down, by which the man really becomes nothing less than a bag of broken bones, thoroughly brought to nought in his own eyes. After this, when grace has lifted him up, he will be incomparably humbler and will have a more grateful as well as chastened sense of what God is than he had when first converted. Hence, although it be a shame to him that he required such a humiliating process, it is the triumph of divine grace to use his folly for putting him that is restored into a better condition than before he went astray.

But if Peter knew and needed this, Saul of Tarsus did not require it; and I have no doubt that in the early work in the latter’s soul the iron entered incomparably more deeply than into any one of the twelve. It is always indeed a matter for thankfulness, when a soul goes through a sound and grave work at the starting point; that is, when it is not all joy and comfort, but the conscience is enabled fully to be before God as to our sins, when we realize gravely all that we have been, and are thoroughly sifted out in His presence. Surely this inward work should not hinder confidence in God. This ought never to be; for grace is preached in the fullest and most absolute way when man is called and enabled to search out and confess what he is in God’s sight. On the other hand, there is no need that one should have gone to great lengths of outward evil in act, in order to a profound feeling of depravity and ruin. Paul had been, we may be sure, a more scrupulously moral man all his days than any of the apostles: yet none fathomed the iniquity of his heart as he did. It is therefore very possible by grace to combine the two things, which indeed go together according to God and are dangerous if separated: a rich and unwavering sense of the grace of God in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and a deep (the deeper the better) moral process in the soul when it judges itself, and not its acts only, before God. It ought to be evident that this is the kind of conversion which morally most glorifies God. It is that which we see exemplified in the case of Saul of Tarsus. Hence there never was a man who had less of self-righteousness, as far as I know, -- never one who equally recognized the grace of God. Consequently wherever was a man made so great a blessing to the whole church of God? But where one at first has been drawn more by affection than by conscience, there always follows the work in conscience where the conversion is real; even so,

98. Such is probably the meaning of the difficult word Chiun, יפנ.
where the inward work has been comparatively superficial, there may be the need of many a moral dealing, sometimes in pain and shame, as we see in the case of Peter. I do not think that Peter would have been allowed to deny his Lord, and to repent and swear to it too, in a very public manner, unless there had been a good deal of self-righteousness along with ardour which carried him easily into danger but was unable to bring him safely out. Still the Lord is always good, and His grace is tender and considerate, as well as wholesome and holy. Differences there are in men; but never anything but what is good in God.

**Amos 6** is a fresh appeal of Jehovah to those wrapped up in self-security, warning them of sure sorrow.

Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came! {Amos 6:1}

Here they are shown that the resources of nature are impotent to hide from the judgment of God; impotent too their place of honor in being raised above the nations, with the house of Israel looking up to them.

Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border? {Amos 6:2}

Calneh was far east, a very ancient city and of long continuance. (Compare Gen. 10:10 and Isa. 10:9.) Hamath was a Canaanitish kingdom north of the land. Gath lay in the west. Where were they now? What cause Israel had to fear, worse and more guilty than they!

Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph {Amos 6:3-6}.

Thus whether some pretend to court the day of Jehovah, or others dare not to look

the evil day

in the face that they might oppress and enjoy without remorse, it comes to the same end of judgment from God, who is not mocked in either case. Hence in Amos 6:7 they are told that they shall be with the first that go captive, and the noisy banquet (or revel shout) of the outstretched shall depart. It will be turned into mourning and the cry of despair.

The prophet then solemnly pronounces the hatred God feels against the ways of Israel, so dishonoring to Him and so corrupting to man.

Jehovah hath sworn by himself, saith Jehovah the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein. And it shall come to pass, if there remain ten men in one house, that they shall die. And a man’s uncle shall take him up, and he that burneth him, to bring out the bones out of the house, and shall say unto him that is by the side of the house, Is there yet any with thee? and he shall say, No. Then shall he say, Hold thy tongue; for we may not make mention of the name of Jehovah. For, behold, Jehovah commandeth, and he will smite the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts {Amos 6:8-11}.

It is a picture of utter desolation and despair.

Lastly, the absurdity of expecting any other result than destruction from their ways is set strikingly before them.

Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow there with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock: ye which rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength? But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith Jehovah the God of Hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hemath unto the river of the wilderness {Amos 6:12-14}.

The Assyrian must teach Israel with thorns.

In **Amos 7** a gradation of three judgments on Israel is set forth: first (Amos 7:1-3) by the grasshoppers or creeping locusts, next (Amos 7:4-6) by fire, and lastly (Amos 7:7-9) by a plumbline, which intimated the strict measure applied to mark their iniquities; when patience had exhausted itself, further delay would have been connivance in evil. These troubles were accomplished historically, it would seem, in Pul, Tiglathpileser, and Shalmaneser, who finally swept away the kingdom.

The priest Amaziah strives to arouse the fears and jealousy of the king against Amos (Amos 7:10, 11), while he also pretends to counsel Amos for his good, his aim being to get rid of the divine testimony, which he dreaded.

Then Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land. Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Beth-el: for it is the king’s chapel, and it is the king’s court {Amos 7:10-13}.

It is remarkable how his language bewrays him. Religion in Israel was political arrangements, spite of their effort to imitate the ritual of God. So here even Amaziah speaks of the king’s sanctuary as naturally as of the king’s court. Just so men call their religious associations by the name of their

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country, an invented polity or a favorite dogma. A divine source and authority is unthought of, save to adorn the structure, not for subjection of heart and obedience.

The course of this world is traversed by a godly unsparing testimony, which does not fail to be regarded as troublesome to the government. Amos sought no arm of flesh, but openly confessed who and what he was, when God summoned and commissioned him to prophesy.

I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was an herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit {Amos 7:14}

He had not been brought up in the school of the prophets, nor had he hitherto enjoyed any other natural advantages. He could boast of no learning acquired among men. Birth or property had done nothing for him. His claim to speak was the fruit of divine grace. Any power that Amos possessed was as a true prophet of Jehovah, and solemn is the message he delivers:

Now therefore hear thou the word of Jehovah: Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus saith Jehovah: Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land {Amos 7:16, 17}.

In the reiteration of Israel’s doom the presumptuous opposition of Amaziah meets with a special, relative, and personal humiliation.

Amos 8 opens with a fourth symbol -- a basket of summer fruit, betokening how near as well as sure the end was for Israel.

I will not again pass by them any more. And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord Jehovah; there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence {Amos 8:2, 3}.

The command of the king, the intervention of the priest, would in no way stay, but rather accelerate and increase, the punishment of their iniquity. Thus a still more solemn and complete chastening is proclaimed on Israel. Their oppressive conduct is exposed with vigor, and Jehovah’s sworn judgment is repeated. Nothing yet executed meets the term of Amos 8:9. Their worst famine should be one of the word (Amos 8:11, 12): they shall feel the want of what they despised. The most fresh and vigorous should not escape the suffering (Amos 8:13, 14).

Then in Amos 9 all is crowned by the vision of the Lord standing on the altar to execute without further delay the judgment Himself.

And he said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake: and cut them in the head, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword: he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered {Amos 9:1}.

It is no longer a question of sprinkling the lintels of the door with the blood of the paschal lamb. Now, on the contrary, it is His own people who are the object of inevitable destruction. Jehovah is not viewed here as staying His hand and passing over His people, neither does He judge others in His displeasure; He is punishing not the Egyptians or the Gentiles, but Israel. A solemn sight and sound! The theme is pursued throughout the chapter, where the Lord declares that, as His eyes were on the sinful kingdom to destroy it from the face of the earth, so on the other hand He would not destroy the house of Jacob, but He will command, and, spite of their scattered estate all over the face of the earth, He will not permit one grain to escape.

The kingdom which began in sin went on in sin and must perish. There is no prospect of restoration held out to the kingdom founded by Jeroboam. But Jehovah promises the intervention of mercy (not to Judah merely but) to the house of Jacob {Amos 9:8}.

When in the latter day restoration is taken in hand, God will assemble the outcasts of Israel no less than the dispersed of Judah. The chaff, of course, must perish in the fire. The true grain of the Lord’s sowing should not fall to the ground.

All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us {Amos 9:10}.

It is not the eternal judgment of the dead raised, but a divinely inflicted judgment of the quick in this world, not while the gospel goes forth, but afterwards in view of the kingdom of the Lord over the world in power and glory. The exclusion of the power of Satan over man and the earth, and the public display of the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, are painfully ignored by the current theology, Catholic or Protestant, Arminian or Calvinist. It is a serious gap both for Christ’s glory and the right interpretation of scripture. It is a wrong both to the word of Him who never lied and to His saints who deeply need it, among those especially who are plunged in the usual uncertainty generated by this system of teaching. For if the divine word can fail as to Israel’s restoration and prominent glory in their land and the universal joy of the nations as such, how can we trust it for the eternal life of the believer, and for the heavenly privileges of the Christian and the church at this present time? The symmetry of the dispensations of God is also destroyed by the error to any mind capable of a comprehensive grasp of their course as a whole.

Nay, more, it is declared not only that God should preserve what was of Himself in the solemn day which is still future, but

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David .

He would not permit merely a flourishing state of Judah and of Israel as separate powers. He will re-unite them and establish the rights of the united kingdom.
In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof {Amos 9:11}.

Weak as that rude booth or hut looked in itself, a fallen thing too, God would raise it up in the day when the strong and high and haughty must fall. Their breaches will He wall up; for many were the breaches sustained from internal weakness and external violence. Nay, He would raise up the ruins of David, and build it as in the days of old;

that they may inherit the remnant of Edom, and of all the Gentiles which are called by my name, saith Jehovah that doeth this {Amos 9:12}.

Here is the well-known principle which was applied by James at the council of Jerusalem to the divine right of recognising under the gospel the Gentiles without being circumcised. His argument is that they do not require to become virtual Jews in order to get the blessing of God and to bear His name. For to be circumcised is practically to be no longer a Gentile, but to become a Jew. Whereas now God is really making not Jews but Christians. Therefore to force circumcision on such Gentiles as believed was a total mistake.

On the other hand Jehovah has not yet raised up the tabernacle of David; nor is this at all intimated by James’s quotation of the passage. Neither he nor any other apostle ever says that the church of God is the same thing as the booth of David. The whole system which identifies them is foreign and opposed to scripture. It is only the allegorical habit of the fathers which invented the fiction that Zion or Jerusalem, that Judah or Israel, mean the church. But this error lowers our own dignity, and deprives the ancient people of that hope for which God’s providence reserves them spite of their actual unbelief. Assuredly God will bless the Jews by and by, and His name will be called upon the Gentiles. Even the most obstinate of Pharisees could not gainsay James’s proof of this. If then God were pleased to call His name on Gentiles now by the gospel, who can deny the principle if he believe the prophets? Their own scriptures agree to this, and oppose the narrow-mindedness which would convert them practically into Jews in order to be called by His name. No Israelite could have conceived that God had then raised the fallen hut of David; but he could not gainsay that God spoke of all the nations on which His name should be called when that day comes. It was not inconsistent but in keeping with this, if as Gentiles they were called by His name now. James does not speak of this or any other prophetic citation being fulfilled at present {Acts 15}. He simply quotes the broad fact from the Septuagint version, as agreeing with the principle generally laid down by the prophets that all the nations should be called by Jehovah’s name. This is indeed the characteristic of the millennial day, when all Israel shall be saved {Rom. 11:26}, and shall inherit the remnant even of their bitterest foe as well as of all the Gentiles. Undoubtedly, when it is fulfilled, the subjection of the nations will be for ever, and the kingdom of Jehovah over all the earth, though it be of course the kingdom of the heavens. The apostle cites this then only for present use in sanctioning the reception of Gentiles without circumcision, which it did unanswerably.

The rest of the prophecy speaks of the blessed restoration of the people to their land in the mercy and to the praise of Jehovah.

Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith Jehovah thy God {Amos 9:13-15}.

Undoubtedly it will be a day of blessing for the souls of all that are born of God; but the prophet’s description, though of what is surely beyond nature, is not therefore of heavenly things but of the earth, then indeed the sphere of boundless blessing from God without hurt or danger to man. It is in no way an emblem of the pathway of faith which makes its way by the power of the Spirit against the adverse course of the world; for Satan will then be bound {Rev. 20:1-3} and the Lord reigning not in secret but manifestly, righteousness at ease and in honor, and iniquity, if it display itself for a moment, as speedily suppressed and judged. Hence the natural emblems are here used to set out the abundance to be bestowed here below, when the Redeemer vindicates and manifests the Creator’s bounty. It only misleads when the Christian reads such a passage with a view to his own circumstances. It may be lawful to apply the principle in illustration of the rich grace of our God; but we must beware of allowing such a use to deny its just and full meaning, and the evident scope and purpose of the Holy Spirit in it.

It has been well remarked how Amos, a prophet of Judah but for Israel, joins on his own prophecy to that of Joel, whose office was peculiarly toward Judah and Jerusalem; thus purposely identifying their work of testimony (Amos 1:2). Here is a fresh instance, though Amos, evidently taking up the rich promise given at the close of Joel, goes beyond it in strength when he says that all the hills shall (not merely flow with milk, but) melt (Amos 9:13).

But it is not wise to slight the earthly things of that kingdom which, though now exclusively spiritual and heavenly, will really embrace both the heavens and the earth in the day of the Lord’s displayed glory. If the tiniest insect

99. Even Dr. Henderson confesses that “all attempts to apply what is said respecting the booth of David to the Christian church are unwarranted and futile.” — Minor Prophets, p. 181, second edition.
or the least of herbs were left outside His reconciliation, the enemy would have gained a victory over God and His Christ, which can never be. Hence the bringing again of the captivity of Israel is to be understood in its obvious import, though surely in that day the spiritual will in their case coalesce with the earthly. To interpret it, exclusively at least, of churches of Christ is infatuation, and gives sanction to a "delusive alchemy," which is already turned by less scrupulous hands to efface the incarnation and atonement of Christ and all other foundations. Nor have any of the allegorists any sure means of defending the truth on such principles as these. The partial return from Babylon is the pledge of a complete restoration in the day of Jehovah, as well as a condition of His coming and work whose rejection has made the promises sure in His death and resurrection. The complete fulfilment is the very reverse of ended by His coming; for He will come again, and Israel shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah, and the sure mercies of David will be enjoyed to the full. This takes nothing from the church, gives much to Israel, and glorifies Christ in all. But the error is not only unjust to God’s word and His ancient people, but it is dangerously false as tending directly to blind Christendom to her impending judgment for her sins and the apostasy close at hand by holding out the false expectation of universal and perpetual triumph.

100 So R. Hooker called the habit of allegorizing without warrant or measure.
The history of Edom throughout scripture is one of much interest, as exhibiting the ways of God with a people akin to Israel, but with fortunes more and more diverging from the chosen people of God. We find first fraternal consideration, even in Obadiah -- tenderness and yearning over brother Edom. The inevitable crisis comes, the judgment of the early sin, which becomes more and more pronounced, until at last patience would be a sanction of wickedness. At the same time in the history of Edom we see thoroughly maintained the principle of moral responsibility which God never abandons, but holds inviolably true and sacred, as it is equally applicable to the enemies of God and to His friends. Nevertheless we find also what is necessary to bear in mind along with this -- the sovereign wisdom of God, who from the first needed neither to learn anything of man on the one hand, or grounds to decide His will on the other. He exercised His own mind and purpose, even before the birth of the children of Isaac. It was so ordered that the character of the flesh should be manifest, not merely where there was wickedness in the family, but where there was faith. Isaac stands out remarkable for piety, doubtless of a domestic and equable character in the retired calm of a godly household, as decidedly as Abraham does for a stronger and more self-renouncing communion with God. Abraham's faith was exercised in a field more varied and conspicuous. There was more of a public testimony in the man whom God deigned to call His friend. As Isaac was more retiring, so also apt to yield overmuch when tried. Himself the chosen heir to the setting aside of the bondmaid's son Ishmael, it was in his family, among the twin sons not merely of Isaac but of Rebekah, of the same father and the same mother, that God afresh exercised His sovereignty. Impossible to find greater closeness in point of circumstance. This therefore made it all the more striking when we find God even before their birth pronouncing on the ultimate and distinct destiny of the two sons. As noticed in another place, if God had not been pleased to choose, it is evident that the two could not have exactly the same place. Was God then to abrogate His title? or to leave it to man with only Satan to influence? It was most fitting then that He should choose which was to have the superior place. Equality never abides; and they could not both be invested with first-born rights. One must be chosen for the better place. The order either of flesh or of God's choice must prevail. Which is most right? Assuredly God, whatever may be His grace, maintains always His own sovereignty. He chose therefore Jacob the younger, and not Esau, for this could only have given importance to man in the flesh -- man as he is in his fallen condition without God. Impossible that He should make light of the fall or of its consequences: He therefore chooses and acts.

At the same time it is remarkable that, while the first book of the Bible points out the choice of God from the beginning, He does not pronounce morally on Esau in a full, complete, and absolute way until the last book of the Old Testament. It is only in Malachi that he says,

Esau have I hated {see Mal. 1:3}.

I could conceive nothing more dreadful than to say so in Genesis. Never does scripture represent God as saying before the child was born and had manifested his iniquity and proud malice,

Esau have I hated.

There is where the mind of man is so false. It is not meant, however, that God's choice was determined by the character of the individuals. This were to make man the ruler rather than God. Not so: God's choice flows out of His own wisdom and nature. It suits and is worthy of Himself; but the reprobation of any man and of every unbeliever is never a question of the sovereignty of God. It is the choice of God to do good where and how He pleases; it is never the purpose of His will to hate any man. There is no such doctrine in the Bible. I hold therefore that, while election is a most clear and scriptural truth, the consequence that men draw from election, namely, the reprobation of the non-elect, is a mere reproduction of fatalism, common to some heathen and all Mahommedans, the unfounded deduction of man's reasoning in divine things. But man's reasoning in the things of God, not being based on the divine revelations of His mind in His word, is good for nothing, but essentially and invariably false. It is impossible for man to reason justly in the abstract as to the will of God. The only safe or becoming ground is to adhere to the simple exposition of His own declarations; and this for the very simple reason that a man must reason from his own mind, and his own mind is far indeed from being God's mind. Reasoning means deduction according to the necessary laws of the human mind. Here, however, the groundwork being the will of God, faith to reason aught must reason from what God is according to what He Himself says. The danger is of inferring from what man is and from what man feels. Such is the essential difference between what is trustworthy and what is worthless in questions of the kind. Man must submit to be judged by God and His word, not to judge for Him. No man is competent to think or speak in His stead. But we may and ought to learn what He has told us of Himself and His ways in His word.
Nor is there any serious difficulty, still less opposition to what is here said, in the scriptural fact which is often brought up in discussing points like this -- the hardening of Pharaoh. It can be readily shown that such a judicial dealing on God’s part is unquestionably righteous. Scripture lets us see the proud, cruel, and blaspheming character of Pharaoh before the hardening; nor does it speak of the Lord hardening his heart till he had fully committed himself to self-will and contempt of God. But as to the thing thus expressed, I believe that it is a real infliction from God because of a rebellious opposition to His demands and authority. There may be such a dealing now with a man, but He never hardens him in the first instance that he should not believe; but after he has heard and refused to believe, God seals him up in an obdurate state. In no instance, however, is this the first act of God, but rather the last, judicial and retributive, when he has slanted an adequate and faithfully rendered testimony. Every one’s heart when simple bows instinctively to the truth of God. If unsophisticated (I do not say converted), we feel how righteous, wholesome, and good it all is. Anything that distorts or even ignores the revealed character and mind of God is false, and will always be found to issue in wrong deductions. But in general the fault does not so much consist in mistaken deductions from scripture, as in human preconceptions and mere theorizing. There are Calvinistic speculations just as much as Arminian. It seems to me that both schemes are beyond question partial and do violence to the truth. The practical lesson is to cherish confidence only in God’s word. We may safely rest, as we are bound to rest, in His revelation. The best of men, those who help most in ministry, are liable to err; and we must beware lest merely changing names we fall into the old snare of tradition or confidence in man. Our own day presents no better security than another. May we trust to God and the word of His grace, which is able to build us up! Nothing else in the long run can preserve souls from illusion or falsehood. On the contrary, when men begin to presume, they go and lead wrong, no matter what their position may be. Need I say to you who are here that, if this should be a just feeling in itself, it should be felt quite as strongly respecting ourselves as about others? Our only safety is in simple and implicit subjection to the word of God. For this we need the guidance of the Spirit. But we are never sure of having the directing power of the Spirit with us, except the eye be single to Christ. Thus these three safeguards are always together where we are right; and unless they are all verified in us, there is no real deliverance from self nor assurance of the mind and will of God. The attempt to use the word of God without the teaching of the Spirit lands one in rationalism. The presumption to have the Spirit of God without the word leads into fanaticism. But we need, in addition to both the word and the Spirit, a bond (if I may so say) between them, in order to keep us firm and steady yet dependent and humble; and this bond of attractive power which binds together both the word and the Spirit of God is having our eye fixed upon Christ. Thus, instead of self (the real root of all mistake), Christ becomes our object -- the Second man and not the first.

Such then, omitting the notice of the hardening of Pharaoh, is the early revelation as to Esau, himself the progenitor of the Edomites; but we have also the history pursued through scripture. They early emerged into considerable strength and importance. Gen. 36 gives us the rise and progress of their national greatness, the line first of their dukes, as they are called, which would answer probably in modern language to the sheiks of their tribes; and then later of the kings that reigned in the land of Edom before there reigned any king over the sons of Israel. These kings we should, I presume, call emeers, that is, not in the absolute sense of a king perhaps, but rather of a chief for common purposes; for among these sons of Edom there was a great deal of independence, considering that they were Orientals. Indeed it is so still in the kindred children of the desert. Although the emeer may have considerable rights and privileges, the under-chiefs reserve not a little independence for themselves. These various stages of polity were both developed in the early history of Edom. They had dukes and even kings flourishing in their midst when the children of Israel as a whole were obscure and unsettled. They had even their regular line of kings -- as we know with certainty from a verse of great interest which furnishes rationalism a fresh occasion for exposing its ignorant and self-sufficient unbelief -- long before the children of Israel called Saul to the throne; nay, I should judge, before they emerged from the wilderness. I suspect, without being positive respecting the matter, that it was the sojourning of Israel in the wilderness, which was about the epoch of change from their having simply dukes, as they are called in scripture, to their having kings. My reason is this, that while in Ex. 15 we hear of the dukes of Edom being amazed, in Num. 21 we read of the king of Edom who would not permit the children of Israel to pass through his land. Although they promised not to drink of their waters, or touch their fruit without paying for it, he refused absolutely and churlishly this favor, of no cost to himself, but of moment to the people of God. It would appear, therefore, that at the entrance of Israel upon the wilderness there was still the old condition of a number of independent chiefs, but before they left the wilderness kings in rapid succession reigned, as might well be at such a time and state of things.

But however this may be judged, the approach of the sons of Israel brought the feelings of the Edomites to a head. It is always so. Nobody knows himself till he comes into contact with what is of God. It is the true and crucial test for the soul. Hence Christ is the perfect criterion as well as standard, because He only is the perfect manifestation of God. He is God, but then He is God in man; and therefore, coming down to us, living, speaking, acting, suffering in our midst, He becomes the most complete, and indeed absolute, test of human nature. As the true light He made manifest every soul He came across. And so it is to this day, although He be not here below. Assuredly He is in heaven; but the proclamation of His name and truth has the same substantial effect as His presence when here below, if
not even greater, because now there is proclaimed in the gospel the weightiest conceivable addition to the power of His person in the efficacy of His work. Alas! human nature is stumbled by both. It is an offence to man to find somebody who a man, and the lowliest of men, yet infinitely greater than Adam and all his other sons -- some one that man never can match or even approach, who, at the same time, condescends in grace to the vilest and the worst to pity and save them by faith. Now there is nothing more trying to man's mind than such condescension, especially from one he has wronged, because it just tells him how worthless, guilty, and ruined he himself is. Consequently the saving grace of God is incomparably more offensive in Christ than if He had been a lawgiver like Moses, because this at any rate would have left some scope for man's ability, for his reason, and for his merits; but to be treated as nothing save a sinner is the greatest possible offence; which consequently the cross of Christ does not fail to entail without disguise before man, because it is the fullest manifestation of human worthlessness on one side, and of God's grace on the other.

So it was in measure, though certainly ill-represented, in Israel as the object of God's choice before Edom and his children. These might have been ever so decent individually -- probably, as a rule, far from being as dark and depraved as their Canaanitish neighbors; but when the destiny of Israel began to dawn, the enmity of their hearts came out fully. Although nothing could be more respectful and upright than the overtures of Moses and the children of Israel, the hatred of the Edomites became quite unmistakable. They would listen to nothing but the malignant and proud suggestions of their own hearts. God shows His character in the most admirable manner. According to His will the people turn back, called though they were by His decree to be the first of nations in this world. They take the unprovoked insult of their brother Edom with quietness, and this at the express command of God who would teach His people patience. It is always good for those who may before long wield power to learn the exercise of patience. But did not God in this tell out, as far as it went, what He is in so directing and training His people? They turn back, meekly accepting the insolence of their relatives, and quietly abide by the guidance of Jehovah who was slighted in their slight. But even more than that, they are admonished to cherish the most friendly feelings towards these Edomites, a command incorporated into the substance of the law. Whatever might be the exclusion of others, from the book of Deuteronomy we find it expressly laid down that an Edomite was to enter the congregation of Jehovah after the third generation. An unusual license this, if one may so call it, and a peculiar privilege in itself; but how striking that it should be extended of all others to those who had taken such decided ground in contempt of their kinsmanship with Israel as these sons of Edom. 101 All this seems the more instructive, because in the case of an Ammonite or Moabitic entrance was refused until the tenth generation. Such is the true God: none but He would have thought of such a course; only Himself would have enjoined it on His people; for it, was what became such as love His name to feel and act on.

But there is another principle. The greater the patience of God, the worse man behaves in presence of His goodness and patience, so much the more tremendous must be the judgment when it comes. This we may read in the ultimate history of Edom. Doubtless there are many in these days of unbelief who fancy that Edom is done with; and assuredly it would be difficult for any ethnologist to trace out satisfactorily where and who the Edomites are just now, and for many centuries before our day. But when we talk of difficulties, we must remember whose they really are. Beyond controversy, if it be a question of man, enormous obstacles are in the way; but it is outside our measure, and belongs simply to God and His word. I therefore stand to it in the most deliberate and distinct way that the Edomite is not extinct -- that he remains under other names impossible for man to trace now. But there is another and connected fact, equally wonderful but more commonly acknowledged. The ancient people of God, the twelve tribes of Israel, are yet to emerge as a whole.

Thus therefore it is according to the analogy of the divine dealings with His people that He should also summon their enemies to come forth. Hence at the same critical moment when God causes the chosen nation to emerge from the dust of ages, wherein they had lain buried and for the greater part unknown, He will also remove the vail which as yet conceals among others that kindred Edomite race with their undying hatred against the sons of Israel. The great and final conflict of the age will then ensue without farther delay. Such, beyond a doubt, is the representation of the prophets; and them I believe, not present appearances or the hopes and fears of men.

Let me here refer to a familiar chapter in Isaiah in proof of what has been just now remarked -- Isa. 11. The time spoken of is when Messiah shall establish His kingdom here below, of which indeed the chapter undeniably treats, when that blessed picture of peace and joy shall be realized, when Messiah shall judge with righteousness the poor and reprove with equity, after He shall have smitten the earth with the rod of His mouth and with the breath of His lips slain the wicked. This we know is the very passage which the apostle Paul applies to the appearing of the Lord Jesus in glory, when He destroys the man of sin [2 Thess. 2:8]. No intelligent believer but knows that this judgment has not yet been accomplished; that it awaits Christ's coming again. Further, the very features of the earth and its inhabitants, rational and irrational, render any proof needless in order to

101. There was similarly a command not to abhor an Egyptian, which natural
(continued...)

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certainty that the change is future; for at what time since sin entered the world did the wolf dwell with the lamb, or the leopard lie down with the kid? There is a day, but it has never yet shone, when there shall be seen the calf and the young lion and the fatting together; and a little child shall lead them. Then, not before,

the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea {Isa. 11:9}.

Is it too strong to call it as absurd as a fairy tale for any to say that there is or ever has been the smallest approach to such enjoyment in the world? I own deeper joys of the Holy Ghost in the midst of hearts separate to Christ from the world; but here the earth, the race, the creatures of God in general are in the scene. It is the beautiful future of God when His Anointed shall reign in Zion, when it will not be as now heavenly glory opened to us by grace to faith, but when the earth and all creation shall know the blessedness of Him who shall come to be the King, who, being its Maker, none the less died in order that He might reconcile not only the believer but all things unto Himself. The Lord will do it in His own time.

In the midst then of Isaiah’s fascinating description we read,

It shall come to pass in that day, that Jehovah shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea {Isa. 11:11}.

And lest there should be the slightest doubt, he says,

He shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah {Isa. 11:12}.

What can be conceived plainer than this?

The envy also of Ephraim shall depart.

It will not be merely the restoration of the ancient people, but their spiritual renovation. Hence it is that the envy of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off. Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim {Isa. 11:13}.

Now for the revival of the manifest existence of their old enemies.

But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west {Isa. 11:14}.

The Philistines will be burden-bearers. As they treated the Israelites with the greatest indignity in early days, they will be obliged to be their servants now. A very good thing then that they are even allowed to be servants. God in strict righteousness might have cut them off; but He is good, and so it is said,

They shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them out of the east together; they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab {Isa. 11:14}.

Does not this intimate what I want to prove -- that Edom is one of those districts and races which will be the object of the dealings of God in the future restoration of Israel? We must remember that the millennial work of God will not be all wrought in a day -- undoubtedly in the day, but not in a day. The day of Jehovah is a considerable time. In my opinion it embraces the whole millennium, and a little more. It embraces a space before the millennium begins, and a space after, when the millennium properly so-called is over. It embraces the preparatory dealings of Jehovah, in which He will lay the ground for His reign of peace and glory over the earth; and it will also contain a margin after the millennium is over, when Satan, let loose from the abyss {Rev. 20}, will make his last effort by Gog and Magog to his own destruction as well as that of his followers. All these events, and indeed the great white throne -- that is, the eternal judgment of the wicked dead from the beginning -- are part of the day of Jehovah. 102 It is evident, therefore, that the day of Jehovah is an expression which embraces, as we have seen, for its central part the thousand years’ reign of Christ, but includes also events of an important kind which both precede and follow that reign. It is all the day of Jehovah. So scripture speaks, and scripture cannot be broken.

This then may serve to show that Edom is not done with, as is commonly assumed, to no inconsiderable straining of the prophetic word. The Edomite is not extinct, though for the present unseen as such as he has long been -- certainly unknown by us westerners. But that race surely exists for God, just as the ten tribes do; and when the day comes for His retributive dealings with the nations of the world, all these different parties must reappear for good or ill. Such is the voice of scripture. All this, it is obvious, attests the living value of the word of God, even in what might seem external and remote. Instead of merely speaking of nations dead and gone, whose dead bones are with painful uncertainty drawn by historians out of their tombs to be looked at as objects of curiosity, we find set out distinctly in the scriptures the unquestionable characteristics not only of God and His people, but also of the nations who opposed them; for with these God will yet surely deal.

Accordingly it will be found, as it struck my mind many years ago, that as men have certain moral traits which constitute a character, so nations may be said to have. Thus

102. [“The day of the Lord” ends “man’s day” (1 Cor. 4:3), when Christ as the smiting stone smashes the Gentile power, as depicted in the smiting of the image in Dan. 2. That is when He appears in glory to begin the “war of the great day of God the Almighty” (Rev. 16:14), a short period of time when Christ deals with enemies in a sequential manner, according to the respective characters of those enemies. Subsequently, the millennial reign will begin, and after the 1000 years Satan is loosed (Rev. 20:7-10), and the wicked are slain. Then follows the great white throne judgment. 2 Pet. 3:10 shows that the dissolution of the present heavens and earth takes place in the day of the Lord (see JND trans.). The new heavens and the new earth follow (2 Pet. 3:12, 13) and with this begins “the day of God,” i.e., eternity.]
the prominent trait of Edom was envious dislike of the people of God. We do not find it so pronounced in any other nation. Take another people associated with Edom as we shall find in this very prophecy of Obadiah. Could it be said that enmity against Israel was the specific and unfailling line of Babylon? Undoubtedly Babylon was the greatest scourge but one that Israel ever had: “but one,” I say, because the Romans laid a more terrific chastisement on the Jew than even Babylon, as the prophet Isaiah expressly intimated. For all that, neither in the case of Babylon nor even of Rome, was there such personal persevering spite as seemed to be concentrated in Edom. There can be no question that the character of Edom answers to what the Lord lets us know through Isaac.

Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; and by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck {Gen. 27:39, 40}.

It would be hard to conceive a prediction of this nature where every word was more truly verified in the whole history of man than in the life and changes of Edom and Israel respectively. Nevertheless there is no intimation in this of their spite and vengeful hate. Living by the sword does not necessarily mean enmity; because ambitious activity often leads to a career of conquest and determination to have their own way where there is no particular enmity at work.

Many a race, again, would far rather not take up the sword; but still if others do not bend who stand in their way, they do not scruple to use force. This is more perhaps what we see in Edom’s conduct to others. Hence, as we know, they coveted the possessions of the Horims at mount Seir in early days (Deut. 2:22), a peculiar race that lived in caves and dens of the earth. But the Sons of Edom destroyed them and succeeded in their stead. Again, they have one of the most remarkable cities in the world, consisting of what is called troglodyte habitations where the old race had dwelt, as afterwards themselves. They were dwellings, and not uncomfortable dwellings, cut out of the yielding sandstone of Petra and other places of Idumea. The climate being remarkably dry, and the stone exceedingly suited for such works, great or small -- private dwellings as well as public reception rooms -- they used these caves to live in. The remains are remarkable even to our own day. The Edomites coveted such a natural fortress as suiting well their destiny; for, being of a remarkably warlike character, they saw with clear instinct that, exposed as they must be in the edge of the desert to the predatory attacks of robbers, their Ishmaelite connections or others, the rocky abodes of mount Seir would prove an admirable means of easy defense against surprise. Never were the outward circumstances of a land more adapted to national characteristics and a purpose defined by prophecy, though I do not say that they were conscious of being so governed in their choice.

Whoever may live there now, the Edomites will be found there at the close. This appears to me intimated by the word of God, which is the sole conclusive authority always and in everything; and scripture leaves little ground for hesitation to the believer about the matter. It is not the case of a nation simply transplanted into another place, striking root there, coalescing with others, and forming in some sort a new stock. A solemn doom awaits that land and race by and by. They may have others to supplant them for the moment (of this I am not giving any opinion); but it is clearly known from the word of God that the Edomites will be in Idumea, and that there the judgment of God will not fail to overtake them at the last, when the Messiah stands at the head of His ancient people.

It would seem then that their special character, gradually if not from the first, is a relentless hatred of the children of Israel. Of old the good hand of God in Israel’s favor, and the glorious purposes that He has in store for them, will have had but one effect on Edom. Instead of reaping any comfort from the thought, that if they were themselves not the most honored, at any rate those who were near to them had that highest place by the gift of God, Israel’s gain, on the contrary, will draw out as before nothing but deadly jealousy; and this increasingly and above all in the distresses of the Jew, which should have drawn out their pity.

This gives the occasion for Obadiah’s prophecy. Nor is the theme confined to him. The pencil of Isaiah has drawn a most awful picture of the judgment that awaits the Edomites. Hence, our prophet being very brief, I purposely connect a few other scriptures with it.

In Isa. 34 we read that

the indignation of Jehovah is upon all nations { Isa. 34:2}.

It is evident enough that in its full import this is a future scene. There may have been and was no doubt the indignation of Jehovah on particular nations in times past; but it would be hard to say it was on all nations in the marked manner which is described here, when all the hosts of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig-tree. For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea { Isa. 34:4, 5}.

How can sensible men, not to say believing and reverent men of God, apply it all to what people call the day of judgment? For when the wicked dead stand before the great white throne to receive their doom, it will be no question of Idumea or any other land. It is undeniable that, when the elements of the universe are dissolved with fervent heat, there will be no question of one country or race more than another, but of a wholly new and final state of things. Here it is the judgment of the earth while it still subsists, not that
eternal judgment where the old creation disappears in order to the

new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness {2 Pet. 3:13}.

In fact the judgment of Idumea, though beyond anything in the past, is very far short of this radical and final change for eternity.

As a whole then the prophecy, whatever partial accomplishment it may have received, awaits its complete and punctual fulfilment before the time and the scene of the great white throne in Rev. 20 at the end of the millennial reign of peace and blessedness, which therefore in the nature of things it must precede. Compare also the connection with the following chapter Isa. 35. The millennium certainly is to follow the most tremendous blows of divine judgment; and this on Idumea is one of the worst.

For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment. The sword of Jehovah is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams; for Jehovah hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea {Isa. 34:5, 6}.

Bozrah was one of their chief cities. Not only therefore have we the land in general, but even the city retains its existence or reappears before that day.

And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls {Isa. 34:7}.

Of course the language is highly figurative; on all sides this is admitted. The question is, Figurative of what? Of heavenly things or of earthly? of eternity or of time? Unquestionably the latter.

And their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness. For it is the day of Jehovah’s vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion {Isa. 34:7, 8}.

It is not the new heavens and new earth, but the earthly people are coming forward -- Zion, the city of the great King, the Messianic royalty, the universal kingdom of the Son of man. Therefore it is that the judgments of the nations can be no longer deferred. It is emphatically the earth which is in hand, and solemn questions as to the nations which must be solved before the Lord reigns as the true Solomon. This makes the real nature of these judgments abundantly plain.

Hence it is that nothing can exceed the strength of the language of the prophetic Spirit. As he says here:

The streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever; from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever {Isa. 34:9, 10}.

We are all aware of the haste with which some readers (prophetic students they can scarcely be called) have tried to show that this has been accomplished already. An impression existed widely ever since the beginning of the present century, that if a man attempted to go through the land of Idumea he must surely die; and if not on the spot, at least very soon after. All this was in principle a mistake. Without speaking of natives here and there, not a few travelers have passed through Idumea, and have lived to write and publish their accounts, so that, ignorant as we may still be, we know considerably more about the country than had been known for centuries. Therefore even if we take the lowest ground of matter of fact, it became evident, not that the prophecy had failed, but that the time for its accomplishment is yet future. Such is the only just inference. It is to be a land where people no longer dwell, and where no strangers pass through for ever. It will be made an outstanding example of utter consumption through the unsparing wrath of God before the whole world.

What brings all out more strikingly is that the awful description of Edom’s absolute desolation, and this under the mighty hand of God, is at or just before the time when the wilderness and the solitary places shall be glad on account of the overthrow of their former desolators, when that which is now a wilderness shall exult and blossom as the saffron. Who can avoid seeing in this the predicted, long-expected, millennial day? Not that that day is to be either a mere difference in degree from the present day, nor on the other, as some suppose, the perfect extinction of all evil.

The new heavens wherein dwelleth righteousness {2 Pet. 3:13} will be a scene of absolute good, when all evil shall have been judged and consigned for ever to the lake of fire. Thenceforward the separation is eternal. The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, their God. Good is then alone, evil is punished and put away for ever. But the millennial state only will be a pledge of this; there will be a real and public testimony to it, but not the thing itself in its fulness, leaving nothing more to desire.

In the millennium, for instance, there will be death, not as the rule, but as the exception. Still death, though only a judicial infliction, will not be quite extinguished as yet. There will also be the need of healing, as we gather from Rev. 22:2, as well as Ezek. 47. There will even be judgments from God where needed, as is plain in Isa. 65:20, 66:24; Zech. 14:17-19; though it is granted few and under exceptional circumstances, without reckoning the last outbreak of the distant Gentiles at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:7-9).

Plainly then the gracious power of God will both
restrain mercy and vouchsafe unprecedented bounty and goodness among men, not the elect merely as now. That day will be a period of government which in itself always supposes evil that requires to be controlled; whereas in the new heavens and new earth there will be none left. Then righteousness will not merely govern, as often noticed, but will dwell where all things are made new, and there is no need of governing more, but rest and joy, love and praise, abide for ever. Thus therefore Christ’s kingdom over the earth for its allotted term, when partial application occurs of the new heavens and earth, will be characterized by righteousness reigning, the eternal state of the new heavens and new earth by righteousness dwelling. Such is the scriptural distinction between the two. In the millennium righteousness shall control any evil which, still subsisting, may show itself; which will be rare because the great leader of evil is bound, and the glory of the Lord will shine and His goodness supply freely and to the full. But in the new heavens and new earth there will be no evil save in its own place, and Satan never more prowl about to lure men to rebellion and destruction, making God appear a mere Judge, instead of leaving room for the flow and fulness of His love. All judgment will have passed before the appearance of the new heavens and the new earth. All who have taken their side with Satan definitively will have been definitively judged; and so there will be a lasting separation between that which is of God and with God for ever, and what is finally rejected to suffer the consequences with Satan, whom they preferred to God and His Anointed.

Such is the statement of scripture, and a more solemn reality cannot be. The same revelation which lets us see beforehand the everlasting state shows us the lake of fire no less than heaven and earth. Thus with equal plainness we learn the everlasting wretchedness of those that are lost as certainly as the eternal blessedness of those that are saved. If I have ground from God to believe the one, I have the same authority to believe the other. A believer? He who believes only what he thinks reasonable is allowed himself to choose out of scripture be considered a believer? He who believes only what he thinks reasonable is a believer in his own mind, not in God’s word. A believer is one who accepts what God says, and all question for him is at an end.

It is needless to go through the other scriptures that speak of Edom, but I may direct attention to Isa. 63 as the prophecy of Jehovah’s return after the judgment has been executed, which was first threatened in Isa. 32. Compare also Jer. 49:7-22, where, it will be observed, contrary to the hope held out to some enemies, Jehovah does not say that He will bring again their captivity in the latter days, any more than from Philistia, Damascus, and Hazor; their fate is sealed, though for different reasons. Edom especially must have this marked and definite character of judgment. The joy of the age to come will not reverse its sad sentence. As long as the earth endures, Idumea will be given up to desolation; the unrelenting implacable hate of Edom’s sons for the Jews will bring on them justly merited destruction.

Just so in the New Testament we may see that the Babylonish system of Rome, the great center of idolatry and of corruption, will be similarly the object of judgment without mercy from God. This appears to include Rome physically or geographically, according to the aspect defined in Rev. 14:8; 16:19, 18, more particularly in Rev. 18. The smoke is described as rising up for ever and ever; a solemn and public exhibition that the age of universal blessing to the honor of the Son of man will be no less the time of judgment on some pre-eminent guilt. What a warning to all nations!

When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness {Isa. 26:9}.

Nor will divine vengeance fall on certain Gentiles only: those in the last verses of Isaiah, I conceive, are or at least comprehend apostate Jews. Though the form of the word may not be the strictest term for transgressing the law of Jehovah’s covenant, it is applied to Jewish as well as Gentile impiety, as may be seen clearly in Amos 1, 2. The mass or the many spoken of in Daniel {Dan. 9:27} will suffer supremely, as well as the Gentiles who will either join the antichrist or fight against the Christ. But the description first of this sin in Isa. 65, then the standing witness of the punishment in Isa. 66, inclines me to infer that some at least must have been under the law. Gentiles are never called transgressors in the sense of violating the law or covenant, but rather sinners of the Gentiles, though we have seen that it may be said in the general sense of an impious rebellion or ungodly opposition to God. We never hear of such a thing as transgressors (παραβαλταὶ) of the Gentiles. The Jews, being under the formal or positive conditions of the law, are consequently brought to a point; and if they violate that law, they are not merely sinners like the Gentiles but also transgressors; that is, they are guilty of the distinct violation of the known law of God. Consequently their guilt is greater, and hence a special example will be made of them, though not of them only, as we may see in Matt. 25:41-46. They will have renounced the true God of Israel, Jehovah; they will have accepted him who comes in his own name, the antichrist; they will have become again worshipers of idols. Thus, having refused the true Christ and received the false, rejected the testimony and the Spirit of God, they will be given up to the last great lie of Satan and their lawless chief, and be met by divine judgment in that condition. They are accordingly described as made a perpetual shame and warning in their suffering before the eyes of their fellow Jews, as indeed before all flesh, exposed to view, as God will know how to effect it, in the valley of Hinnom, outside the city of the great King. There will be this spectacle, the more awful from its proximity to the earthly center of glory and blessing in that day.

No doubt it is founded on such illustrations as this that so many have formed their notions of hell. But a great
mistake lies under it, though not at all in the direction of aggravating the horrors of perdition. If we believe the scriptures, it is impossible to exaggerate the awfulness of eternal judgment; but in my opinion the Jesuit conceptions of hell are low and vulgar and earthly. They bring in elements almost ludicrous to natural minds and expose the truth of God to derision. At the same time they are founded upon a perverted truth. There is no reason to think that the everlasting judgment of those that reject the gospel of Christ will be an earthly spectacle such as this is. Those who have sinned in an earthly way will be punished after an earthly sort; but he who disbelieves the gospel now will be punished in a way suitable to that which he rejects. There is always a righteous measure in the dealings of God, a perfect graduation of punishment to sin, though man may not be an adequate judge of it. To reject the gospel is yet worse than violating the law; because it goes far more deeply against the divine glory than the mere failure of man in his duty to God and his fellows. This is the law. But to reject the gospel is to reject the grace of God in His Son; it is to reject God and his fellows. This is the law. But to reject the gospel is incomparably more profound and tremendous. It is plain that God is willing to save sinners at His own sole cost through the redemption that is in Christ, throwing back, as it were, the infinite gift in His face.

Some indeed have a dogmatic system which tells us that all men are judged simply according to the law, on the assumption that such is the one ground of responsibility for all men, Gentiles and Jews being viewed as alike under it. But the assumption is not erroneous only; it evinces the most painful insubjection to or ignorance of scripture. It has every fault which a vicious hypothesis can possess. The facts are neglected, and the true principle untouched; theirs never did apply as they suppose it always does; and at the present time no part of it applies, because a deeper responsibility is come in. It makes too much of the old state of the Gentiles; it makes too little of the judgment now impending over every soul that neglects the great salvation. The scriptural way of presenting judgment therefore makes it incomparably more profound and tremendous. It is plain that the Jesuits are as feeble in appreciating either the privileges of the gospel or the judgment of God, as their main point is a human use of terror in order to act upon the dark heart and guilty conscience. They have been thus accounted great as preachers; but their way is a dramatic representation as of the sufferings of the damned, so also of the external circumstances of the cross of Christ. Undoubtedly all this has its real place; but God’s part is habitually left out.

There will then be at least three distinct applications of judgment for those on earth immediately before the millennial reign. To the north and east of the land will be those that play their part in the earthly history as the antagonists of Israel: to the west those that will come forward as friends after the gospel to the Gentiles. To these the scriptural warnings is that the presence of Jehovah is to be manifested in it; next, that it will be at the time when all nations and all the earth are to come under the hand of God: and thirdly, that the epoch of the judgment is to be just when blessing comes beyond example and unchangeably to Israel and to the earth in general. Compare Isa. 11, 34; Lam. 4:21, 22; Ezek. 25, 35. Isa. 63:3 in no way excludes (what is elsewhere affirmed) that Jehovah will execute His judgment through Israel; for “of the people” should be understood of the peoples or nations, without including Israel amongst them: יהוה שופט את אמרונך ויביא ביהויה מים אבסם. No extraneous instrument will be employed in this work. Jehovah with Israel as His means will do it effectually.

In the prophecy before us Obadiah unveils the future to the same purport.

Thus saith Jehovah concerning Edom: We have heard a rumour from Jehovah, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle {Obad. 1:1}, because of their resistance to God’s manifest will who made Edom a little people, with the fastness of mount Seir as a natural hiding-place and security. But they sought great things and detested the dignity of Israel.

Behold, I have made them small among the heathen; thou art greatly despised {Obad. 1:2}.

This is not so where a man or a people is content with the lot assigned and becoming; it is especially the doom of such as aspire beyond their measure. Then to be despised is of course particularly painful; and such was the history of Edom. For as we see pride in Esau from the first, so we see it in the Edomites to the last. They seem to have been after all as mercenaries usually are -- despised by those who served themselves and employed them. It is the doom of one false to his kin to sell himself to aliens for an odious task, and then to be thrown completely off when their purpose is served and he seems of no more use. Somewhat like this would appear to have been the experience of Edom:

The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock {Obad. 1:3}.

Their naturally impregnable position would prove no protection when God invited the instruments to pull them down from their proud heights. Be it that their habitation is high; be it that Esau, if not with his lips, saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? {Obad. 1:3}
the word is gone out from God,

    Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though
thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring
thee down, saith Jehovah {Obad. 1:4}.

Their fall should be so much the more complete and
hopeless.

But even worse than this remains. Not only should their
security turn out vain in the day of trial when Jehovah took
them in hand; but further the retribution of their rapacity
would be unsparing. They had lived by the sword and by
the rapine which generally follows the sword; and so should
be their punishment.

    If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art
thou cut off?) would they not have stolen till they
had enough? {Obad. 1:5}.

Even such as live by plunder ordinarily would be satisfied
when they had stolen what they could carry off in their
hasty visit and flight: and those who honestly toil among the
vines do not so thoroughly gather as to leave no remnants
here and there; for

    if the grape-gatherers came to thee, would they not
leave some grapes? {Obad. 1:5}

and Jehovah will expressly make it good of Israel by and
by, when their pruning will come in order to the
establishment of His earthly kingdom in their midst. This,
as all know, is usual. But not such should be their doom.

How are the things of Esau searched out!

There is nothing left behind whatever -- nothing to pick up
when the spoilers are gone.

How are his hidden things sought up! {Obad. 1:6}.

What made it so bitter was too the fact that those they
counted friends and partisans helped it on.

    All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee
even to the border.

Those words plainly show that those they had fully trusted
turn out their enemies at last, able to injure them the more
because more familiar with their persons, their habits, their
dwellings, and their possessions.

    The men of this place have deceived thee, and
prevailed against thee {Obad. 1:7}.

    Thy bread
(meaning those who eat the bread of Esau)
    have laid a wound [or “snare”] under thee.

Plainly, therefore,

    there is no understanding in him {Obad. 1:7}.

    Shall I not in that day, saith Jehovah, even destroy
the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of
the mount of Esau? {Obad. 1:8}.

    They had plummed themselves on their special wisdom
and prudence; but it failed them in the hour of their need.
When the tide turned against Judah, they tried to turn to
their own account the enemies of Judah, as well as to gratify
their undying hatred of the fallen. They made friends with
the Babylonians, with Nebuchadnezzar and his captains who
came up against Judea. But this is the retribution which God
will award them.

    And thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed,
to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may
be cut off by slaughter {Obad. 1:9}.

Yet what happened then was not the end. This, it is trusted,
has been already proved. It has been shown from scripture
that, when the final scene comes at the end of the age,
Edom is one of the objects of divine judgment on earth.
Consequently there must be a reappearing of that race in
their land in the latter day; but what took place under
Nebuchadnezzar is a remarkable pre-figuration of what will
be re-enacted in the beginning of the millennium, or rather
during the brief crisis which precedes it as has been
repeatedly explained.

    For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame
shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever.
In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the
day that the strangers carried away captive his
forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and
cast lots upon Jerusalem.

    This refers clearly to their conduct in Nebuchadnezzar’s
day. Then

    even thou wast one of them {Obad. 1:10, 11},
taking part with the Chaldean spoilers.

    But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy
brother in the day that he became a stranger
{Obad. 1:12}.

    It is not yet the stern irreversible sentence of judgment
against Edom. There is still a kind of transition in the tone
of Obadiah. Jehovah is slow to wrath and full of
compassion. Hence we find a tone of aggrieved affection in
the prophecy as yet. When Malachi opens his mouth, all
that is gone: –

    Esau have I hated {Mal. 1:3};

This could be said then, and only then, in its depth of
feeling. There is a preparation for it, as we saw, in
Jeremiah, who probably was after Obadiah, and
incorporates in his prophecy not a little of the very burden
of judgment we are now considering. There can be no
reasonable doubt that Obadiah was rather the more ancient
of the two; but then, as each warning was given and Edom
did not take either, but persisted in enmity and anger against
the Jews, the words of God became still more unqualified in
the denunciation of the wrath of Jehovah against them.

    But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy
brother in the day that he became a stranger, neither
shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of
Judah in the day of their destruction; neither
shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of
distress {Obad. 1:12}. 
There is nothing that exhibits more malice and wickedness than to take advantage of another when he is ruined or sorrow wastes the spirit and divine chastening. It is a heart altogether depraved that could take advantage of another’s fall to trample yet more on him when he is in the dust. This course is exactly what Edom did then, and will I presume repeat in the day that is coming. For we do well to remember that there will be further dealings of God in cutting down the transgressors of His people, and Edom will take part once more in the displeasure of God with the children of Israel before God establishes them in their place of supremacy. History will repeat itself. Even in human things it is in a measure verified; but in divine history it is exactly and invariably true, because all scripture has more or less a typical character or prophetical character. Hence, therefore, what has been is that which shall be, and what has been in part will be once more in full. In such a world as this we cannot wonder that it applies to the evil quite as much as the good. Thus it will be conspicuously seen in the future of Rome, there will be special traits peculiar to the day when it reappears as the beast ascending from the abyss. But as a rule it is true of all. Even in our blessed Lord we may see the lovely connection between what He was in all His character of grace in humiliation with the glory in which He shall be revealed at His appearing and kingdom.

He repeats as a kind of refrain the words in the day of their calamity.

Neither shouldst thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldst thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress. For the day of Jehovah is near upon all the heathen {Obad. 1:13}.

This, we easily see, is the emphatic link, and proof too, of connection between the future and the past. The day of Jehovah in its full and proper sense has never yet arrived. In a partial sense it has come on Egypt; it has come on Babylon; it has come on other great powers which have successively fallen under the divine dealings; but in the full sense the day of Jehovah on all the heathen has never yet shone. The proof is that in that day this earth is to be one united whole, all tribes and tongues, not at the end or gradually in its course by secondary means, but by the gracious and almighty intervention of Jehovah, blending in His praise when all idols shall be completely and for ever gone. This has never been since idols were forged by Satan’s craft for this world, and never will it be till the day of Jehovah dawn: then it will characterize its course from first to last. Even the rebellion when the reign for the thousand years is over will be no restoration of Satan’s wiles in idolatry.

For the day of Jehovah is near on all the heathen. As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee {Obad. 1:15}.

For Edom we find condign retribution.

Thy reward shall return upon thine own head. For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been {Obad. 1:15, 16}.

But we may distinguish between the past troubles of Edom, which the heathen or Gentiles inflicted, and a still more appalling one in the future, which seems distinguished in this brief prophecy, when by Israel as a whole mount Seir shall be given to desolation more than ever, because of the indignity they did to the sons of Zion, who shall then be saved and blessed. So it is written here,

Upon mount Zion shall be deliverance {Obad. 1:17}.

It is not the beginning that decides a war, but the end. And this is a grave thought for us to keep in view habitually in all our ways. One often sees a good deal of ardour for a while; but they are wise who look on for another day, yea, who labor for eternity; they are wise who look not to what things appear now, but what they will be in the estimate of the Lord at His coming. There is no real test except that best of moral ones -- the will and judgment of the Lord of all. To help us in this, the power of the Holy Spirit deals with our souls by the word of God. This certainly we ought to know intelligently; for there is no such means of keeping us sober yet humble, happy yet grave, feeling too that the Lord is the only ultimate and adequate judge of everything, and exercising ourselves to have a conscience void of offence: and this in no small measure by letting in the light of the day, that is the future, to deal with the present. Can there, in fact, be a proper outlook of faith without that day before our eyes? To judge without it will be largely according to appearances, and so far not divinely righteous.

In this prediction then we find how completely the tables are turned in that day, and that mount Zion is to be the place of deliverance, not the sign of Israel’s desolation, and that the scum of the Gentiles tread the capital of Immanuel’s land.

And there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall inherit their inheritance {Obad. 1:17}.

That this is in no way the gospel, but the kingdom when the two things shall be distinguished, instead of coalescing as now in Christianity, will be still plainer from the words that follow, which it is really absurd to apply to the church, and alike ignorance and error to explain away. The divines labor in vain to explain how a remnant of Judah can be called the house of Jacob,

and the house of Joseph {Obad. 1:18}.

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But this difficulty is only created by the false system which exaggerates the past, and indicates the future, and deprives the ancient people of God of their hope: a Gentile conceit (see Rom. 11) and not the truth.

These verses, like others in the prophets, contemplate the bright future for the earth, and the earthly people once more restored and united in their land.

And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for Jehovah hath spoken it. And they of the south shall possess the mount of Esau: and they of the plain the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead {Obad. 1:18, 19}.

As the places are particularly specified by name, it shows that we should not fritter it away by what people call spiritualising. In fact spiritualising is an incorrect term; it should rather be viewed as allegorizing. To deny the hopes of Israel has not an element of spirituality about it. In these matters true spirituality consists in understanding the word of God in the sense in which He intended it. We may apply the principle of scripture, and this may be quite legitimate. We can take up what God says of Israel and enjoy it fully; for if God loved His people then, we may be assured that the church is well beloved now, and every member of that holy body. If we see how truly Jehovah loved the Jew as such, we should not doubt but believe that the Christian is loved yet more. All this is quite true, and therefore we can take the dealings of God with Isaac or Jacob, David or Solomon, with Isaiah or Hezekiah. We can listen to them all as full of instruction for the Christian.

At the same time we must remember that there were also points peculiar and special; and so, in this very scene, the mention of Samaria and Gilead and the like shows that it is no question of heaven or eternity, nor of the church or the gospel. The Jews have been just as guilty as the Gentiles of the same allegorical style of misapplying God’s word. For instance, they interpret the Edomite as meaning the Christian, crowning their wickedness with the blasphemous lie, that the Lord Jesus, their true Messiah, was an Edomite. Yet Gentile doctors, being scarcely less censurable for their perversions, though of course desirous of honoring the Lord, have little reason to take high ground in condemning the rabbis.

Luther, for instance (blessed man as he was), through not holding fast to the general scope and connection, as well as the propriety of each phrase in detail, so far lost the true force of the prophecy as to suppose this chapter means the gospel. Can any further proof be asked of his lamentable deficiency in the knowledge of the Bible? He must have a most surprising imagination who brings the gospel into anything that has been read here as yet. The golden rule is never to force scripture: otherwise we never fail to enfeeble the truth by confounding things that differ. I do not say this out of the smallest want of homage for the great Reformer; for he was assuredly to be respected by all who love the truth. But the truth has higher claims; and his name must never be used to weaken its authority, as when he through ignorance (for instance, of the hopes of Israel and the future judgment of the quick) nullifies its meaning. But he was both rash and feeble in his thoughts of the inspired word. Thus we all, I suppose, are aware that he treated the Epistle of James as not scripture at all, and that he doubted about other parts of the word of God. In point of fact this is what has given the rationalists of Germany a certain ground of advantage, which they have not failed to press on their more orthodox adversaries. For after all the party which cry up rationalism are much influenced by tradition, just like those who seem most opposed, their reasoning, in my opinion, being of the most superficial kind. However this may be, even Luther did give his sanction to the school of interpretation which turns away the testimony of the prophets from the people who are directly in view; namely, the Jews.

The truth is Israel are as much the center of the Old Testament as Christians are of the New; and unless those two facts be held fast and in view, one is always in danger of mistaking and misinterpreting the mind of God.

Obadiah then speaks of an earthly deliverance, in Obad. 1:17, by God but on earth. It is the restoration not of the church but of Israel; and the Spirit speaks of mount Zion literally, as afterwards of the mount of Esau, the plain of the Philistines, and the fields of Ephraim and of Samaria. The figures of fire and flame devouring others as stubble in no way represent grace, but judgment when the world-kingdom of our Lord is come. Man, and even believers, may doubt; but

Jehovah hath spoken {Obad. 1:18}.

And the south shall possess the mountains of Esau; and the plain the Philistines; and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim and the fields of Samaria; and Benjamin, Gilead. And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel, between Sidon and Tyre, which is [with] the Canaanites, unto Zarephath [Sarepta]; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad [Sardis, the metropolis of the Lydian kingdom], shall possess the cities of the south. And the Saviors shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau: and the kingdom shall be Jehovah’s {Obad. 1:19-21}.

These deliverers spoken of are, no doubt, instruments that Jehovah will employ in the day that is coming, for He means to put great honor on His ancient people when brought to Himself; He promises to make the feeblest among the inhabitants of Jerusalem like David, and the house of David as God, like an angel of Jehovah before them, as said Zechariah. These seem to be the persons here referred to. The connection excludes any reference to the Maccabean times; still less can Obadiah be considered justly
to refer to the Christian state of things. It is plain that he
speaks of the days which preceede the millennium when the
kingdom shall be Jehovah's. It is impossible to connect the
statement with the eternal state when God shall be all in all;
for then, as we are explicitly taught, the kingdom will have
been given up to the Father, that God (Father, Son, and
Holy Ghost) may be all in all. Here it is the previous era of
the kingdom.

I believe there is no exposition of the scripture which
satisfies all the conditions of the context and of the rest of
the Bible but this. Who would deny that scripture must have
as its ultimate force some fixed determinate meaning? There
must be a true and full object for the word of God, and this
is in no way adverse to the principle of applying particular
passages meanwhile. This is all right, and would not be
objected to for a moment; but we must distinguish between
the application of scripture and its just interpretation. The
latter means the full mind of God, the intention and scope
whether of prophecy or of anything else. Application is
justifiable according to apostolic precedent as a practical use
of it before

that day.

It is well known that the Edomites pushed their
successes as Israel and Judah decayed; so that they even
took some of the southern districts and towns of Palestine.
They became much mixed up with the Jews. Then came the
people called Nabatheans, descended from Nebaioth the
eldest son of Ishmael, who took possession of the land of
Idumea, and turned the sons of Esau out to a great extent.
In consequence of those men pushing up into Edom, the
previous inhabitants thronged into the Holy Land, where
some of them acquired considerable possessions, part of
which they were obliged to give up before the time of our
Lord, as is notorious. Yet it was an Idumean family which
got the upper hand in the land. Antipater was the forefather
of Herod the Great, who was reigning in Jerusalem when
our Lord was born, and sought to kill Him. But this state of
things is rather the converse of the prophecy than its
accomplishment. In fact the close of our prophecy awaits
the great future day of Jehovah for its fulfilment. It is a
miserable idea that Obadiah predicted under such bright
terms anything like the successes of the Maccabees for
somewhat more than a century, followed by the Idumean
family which reigned over the Holy Land. The days of
Herod the king were far from the time when the kingdom
should be Jehovah's.

Christianity on the other hand knows but one Savior.
The bright promises of Obadiah are as yet unfulfilled. They,
like all others which concern the nations and the earth,
await the appearing of the Lord Jesus and His kingdom. It is
not the eternal state, when God shall be all in all; for then
the kingdom will have been delivered up to God, even the
Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all
authority and power. For He must reign till He shall have
put all His enemies under His feet.

The kingdom

will be that long period when divine power, administered by
the Son of man, shall cause the earth to manifest blessed
results according to God's will and word for His glory. But
it will be a time of just rule on the part of the great King;
that is, a time when power, combined with righteousness,
shall openly reward on earth the good given abundantly and
sustained in mercy, and withal shall put down whatever evil
dares to show itself. Not so the eternal state which succeeds
the kingdom; for then will have taken place, consequent on
the judgment of the dead, the everlasting separation; the
new heaven and earth in the absolute sense, where God
dwells with men without death, or sorrow, or crying, or
pain, more; and the wicked are consigned to the lake of fire,
which is the second death.
The most cursory reader can hardly avoid seeing that Jonah has a peculiar place among the prophets. There is none more intensely Jewish; yet his prophecy was addressed to the Gentiles, to the men of Nineveh in his day. Indeed here we learn nothing at all of his service in Israel. He is severed by God’s call to this then most extraordinary mission and testimony. Thus, as it has been well observed, Jonah seems outwardly as singular in the Old Testament among, the prophets as James is apt to sound strange to many ears among the New Testament apostles. Perhaps every one has felt the difficulty: certainly we know that in some eminent servants of the Lord the difficulties have been allowed to interfere with the reverential confidence due to an inspired writing, as I am assured most mistakenly. Nevertheless such remains the notorious fact. Even a man known for the writing, as I am assured most mistakenly. Nevertheless such.

The Lutheran party in Germany have always shown the strongest tendency towards what has been called “a free handling,” of the word of God, but it is to be feared in anything but a becoming spirit. Who can wonder that this has at length developed into the various forms of decided rationalism in the present day, though indeed more or less ever since the Reformation? They may ever so little reflect or sympathize with what was of faith and of divine excellence; but they are none the less disposed to cite Luther as giving an anticipative sanction to their own skeptical spirit towards the word of God.

The truth is that the value of the books of both James and Jonah is chiefly owing to, and seen in, their peculiarity. God is not narrow, though man is; and our wisdom lies in being lifted out of our own pettiness into the vast mind of God. Hence it will be found that, so far from James being one who slighted grace, his epistle is unintelligible unless a man really understands and holds fast the grace of God. He is the only apostle who uses the remarkable term the perfect law of liberty {James 1:25}.

This supposes not law but grace. Therefore it was really the feebleness with which grace was apprehended which made people fancy and shrink back from the bugbear of legalism in the Epistle of James. Had they read it in the liberty of grace, they would have seen the real power of the Spirit of God in giving the Christian to realize his liberty.

Just so it appears to me that Jonah in the same way, although personally he might be eminently Jewish in his feeling, nevertheless was used of God for a final Old Testament testimony to the Gentiles. Nineveh, the capital of the then Assyrian kingdom, was at that time the great power of the world. It was before the days when Babylon aspired to supreme empire, and was permitted to acquire it; for Babylon was of itself a most ancient city probably before Nineveh; but it was not allowed to rise up into supremacy until the complete trial of Israel, and the proved failure even of Judah and David’s house. Jonah was an early prophet. He lived in or before the days of Jeroboam II. I believe that modern speculation has put him a hundred years perhaps too late. However, this is a small matter. The grand point is the bearing of his prophecy. There is another difference too that is worthy of note in Jonah, and that is, that the book differs from others of the minor prophets by being for the most part prophecy in fact and not so much in word. The whole history of Jonah is a sign. It is not simply what he said but what he did, and the ways of God with him; and this it will be my business to endeavor to expound.

The New Testament points out some of the most prominent parts of this prophecy, and will be found, I think, to give us the key to the bearing of it in a distinct and material way. Our Lord Himself refers to it, particularly also, it may be added, to that which has drawn out the incredulity of many divines. Now it is well known to those who are acquainted with the working of mind in the religious world, that they have found enormous difficulties in the facts of the book of Jonah. The truth is that, as elsewhere, they stumble over the claims of prophecy; it is the difficulty of a miracle. But to my mind a miracle, although no doubt it is the exertion of divine power, and entirely outside the ordinary experience of man, is the worthy intervention of God in a fallen world. It is a seal given to the truth in the pitiful mercy of God, who does not leave a fallen race and lost world to its own remediless ruin. So far, therefore, from miracles being the slightest real difficulty, any one who knows what God is might well expect Him to work them in such a world as this. I do not mean arbitrarily, or at such a time as ours; for although there be answer to prayer now and the most distinct working of God according to it, it is all to my mind a simple, thing. We must never confound an answer to prayer, precious as it may be, with a miracle. For an
answer to prayer is no more unintelligible than that your own earnest request to man should bring out a special intervention to your mind. What greater difficulty is there for God to hear the cry of His children? Have baptized men and women sunk into degrading epicureanism? It is then truly monstrous to shut out such a gracious interference of God every day, and there cannot be a stronger proof of where and what man has come to in Christendom than the notion that special answers to prayer are irreconcilable with the general laws God has established to govern the world as well as mankind. Now there is no doubt that there are general principles, if you will, as to everything, -- as to the universe, as to the moral ways of God with men, and also as to His dealing with His own children. But then we must never shut out that He is a really personal God, who, even when a miracle may not be, knows how to make His care a living and a known reality for the souls of all that confide in Him.

In the present case then we have one authority weighing infinitely more than all the difficulties which have been mustered by unbelief. For it is plain that our Lord Jesus singles out the particular point of greatest difficulty and affixes to it His own almighty stamp of truth. Can you not receive the words of the Lord Jesus against all men that ever were? What believer would hesitate between the Second man and the first? The Lord Jesus has referred to the fact that Jonah was swallowed up by the great fish, call it what you will: I am not going to enter into a contest with naturalists whether it was a shark, a spermaceti whale or another. This is a matter of very small account. We will leave these men of science to settle the kind; but the fact itself, the only one of importance for us to affirm, is that it was a great fish which swallowed and afterwards yielded up the prophet alive. This is all one need stand to -- the literal truth of the fact alleged. There is no need to imagine that a fish was created for the purpose. There are many fishes quite capable of swallowing a man whole: at any rate such have been. If there was one then, it is enough. But the fact is not only affirmed in the Old Testament, but re-affirmed and applied in the New by our Lord Himself. Any man who disputes this must give an account of his conduct before the judgment seat of Christ before long.

Turning then to our prophecy, we read,

Now the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah {Jonah 1:3},

-- that is, to the neighboring port of Palestine on the great sea, the Mediterranean, in order to go west.

And he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah. But Jehovah sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty, tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep {Jonah 1:3-5}.

Now it cannot be doubted that there must have been some strong (however unjustifiable) impulse which gave a contrary bias to this godly man, as undoubtedly the prophet was. What was the motive? To our minds singular enough, but none the less influential over him for all that. Jonah was afraid that God would be too good! If Nineveh repented, he suspected that He would show it mercy. He feared therefore that his own character as a prophet would suffer. He did not choose them to hear the threat that God was giving to destroy the Ninevites for their wickedness, lest they might humble themselves under his preaching, and the threatened judgment might not be put into execution, and Jonah would thus lose his honor. What a miserably selfish thing is the heart even of a prophet, unless just so far as he walks by faith! Jonah did not so walk, but allowed self to gain a transient mastery. I do not speak of what Jonah felt as a man, but of his jealousy as he thought for his office. He could not bear that his ministry should be jeopardized for a moment. How much better to trust the Master!

Now I need not say at any length that we have the exact and blessed contrast to this in a greater than Jonah, who deigns to compare in a certain respect His own ministry with that of His servant. A greater proof of divine humility there could scarcely be. But in all things Jesus was perfect, and in nothing more than this -- that He, knowing all things, the end from the beginning, came down into a scene where He tasted rejection at every step -- rejection not merely as a babe when He was carried away into Egypt, but rejection all through a life of the most blameless yet divinely ordered obscurity; then through a ministry which excited growing
hatred on man’s part. There is nothing a man more dreads than to be nothing at all. Even to be spoken against is not so dreadful to the poor proud spirit of man as to be absolutely unnoticed; and yet the very much greater part of the life of Jesus was spent in this entire obscurity. We have but a single incident recorded of Jesus from His earliest years until He emerges for the ministry of the word of God and the gospel of the kingdom. But then He lived in Nazareth, proverbially the lowest of poor despised Galilee -- so much so that even a godly Galilean slighted and wondered if any good thing could come out of Nazareth. Such was Jesus; but more than this; when He did enter on the publicity of divine testimony, there too He meets opposition, though at first there was a welcome which would have gratified most men, yea servants of God. But He the Son, the divine person who was pleased to serve in this world, saw through that which would have been sweet to others when they, astonished and attracted, hung on the gracious words that fell from His lips. And how soon a dark cloud passed over it! For even that selfsame day in which men heard such words as had never fallen on the ears of man, miserable and infatuated they could not endure the grace of God, and, had they been left to themselves, would have cast Him down headlong from the precipice outside their city. Such man was and is. How truly all that was fair was but as the morning cloud and early dew. But Jesus, we see, accepts a ministry of which He knew from the first the character, course, and results, perfectly aware that the more divine grace and truth were brought out by Him, the stern rejection He should meet with among men.

God deals very tenderly with us in this respect. He does not fail to send somewhat to cheer and lift up the heart of the workman in praise to Himself; and only just so far as there is faith to bear it does He put on him a heavier burden. But as to the Lord Jesus there was no burden that He was spared; and if none in His life, what shall we say of His death? There indeed a deeper question was raised, on which we need not enter now, only referring to the first great principle as the contrast to the conduct of Jonah in going directly in the teeth of the Lord's distinct commission.

Another trait we find masked in Jonah -- his Jewish feeling. He was intensely national. He could not bear that there should be the slightest apparent failure of his word as a prophet in the midst of the Gentiles. He would rather that every Gentile had been swallowed up in destruction than that one word of Jonah should fall to the ground. It was precisely here where He had to learn himself short of the mind and heart of God. The wonders that were wrought were not too great for teaching the needed lesson. We have already referred to Jesus, but we need not even go so high as to the Lord of glory. In some respects the working of the Spirit of God in the apostle Paul may aptly serve for us, because he was a man not only of flesh and blood, but of like passions as we. Who ever suffered like him the afflictions of the gospel? Who with burning love to Israel so spent himself in untiring labors among the Gentiles -- labors too so unrequited then, that among the Gentiles themselves who believed he so often knew what it is to be less loved the more abundantly he loved?

On the other hand Jesus had no sin. Although perfectly man, every thought, feeling, and inward motion was holy in Jesus: not only not a flaw in His ways was ever seen, but not a stain in His nature. Whatever men reason or dream, He was as pure humanly as divinely; and this may serve to show us the all-importance of holding fast what men call orthodoxy as to His person. I shall yield to none in jealousy for it, and loyally maintain that it is of the substance and essence of the faith of God's elect that we should confess the immaculate purity of His humanity, just as much as the reality of His assumption of our nature. Assuredly He did take the proper manhood of His mother, but He never took manhood in the state of His mother, but as the body prepared for Him by the Holy Ghost, who expelled every taint of otherwise transmitted evil. In His mother that nature was under the taint of sin: she was fallen, as were all others naturally begotten and born in Adam’s line. In Him it was not so; and, in order that it should not be so, we learn in God’s word that He was not begotten in a merely natural generation {Luke 1:35}, which would have perpetuated the corruption of the nature and have linked Jesus with the fall; but by the power of the Holy Ghost He and He alone was born of woman without a human father. Consequently, as the Son was necessarily pure, as pure as the Father, in His own proper divine nature, so also in the human nature which He thus received from His mother: both the divine and the human were found for ever afterwards joined in that one and the same person -- the Word made flesh.

Thus, we may here take occasion to observe, Jesus is the true pattern of the union of man with God, God and man in one person. It is a common mistake to speak of union with God in the case of us His children. Scripture never uses language of the kind; it is the error of theology. The Christian never has union with God, which would really be, and only is, the Incarnation. We are said to be one with Christ,

one spirit with the Lord {see 1 Cor. 6:17}
one body,

one again as the Father and the Son; but these are evidently and totally different truths. Oneness would suppose identification of relationship, which is true of us as the members and body of our exalted Head. But we could not be said to be one with God as such without confounding the Creator and the creature and insinuating a kind of Buddhistic absorption into deity, which is contrary to all truth or even sense. The phrase therefore is a great blunder, which not only has got nothing whatever to warrant it from the Spirit, but there is the most careful exclusion of the thought in every part of the divine word.

And here it may be of interest to say a few words of explanation as to our partaking of the divine nature, of which Peter speaks at the beginning of his second Epistle (2 Pet. 1:4). It does not seem to be the same as oneness with
Christ, which in scripture is always founded on the Spirit of God making us one spirit with the Lord after He rose from the dead. Christ when He was here below compared God making us one spirit with the Lord after He rose from Christ, which in scripture is always founded on the Spirit of 

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would bring forth much fruit {John 12:24}. Though the Son of God was always the life of believers from the beginning, He promises more, and thus indicates that union is a different thing. They must never be confounded. They are both true of the Christian; but union in the full sense of the word was that which could not be till Christ had died to put away before God our sins, yea to give us our very nature judged, so that we might stand in an entirely new position and relationship, made one by the Spirit with Christ glorified on high. This I believe to be the doctrine of scripture. Along with this observe that the only one who brings out the body of Christ asserted dogmatically in the New Testament is the apostle Paul. Our spiritual oneness is referred to frequently in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of John: but this is not exactly the same thing as being one with Christ according to the figure of the head and the body, which is the proper type of oneness in scripture. Now it is by the apostle Paul alone that the Spirit sets before us the body with its head; and this it is which figures the true notion according to God of our oneness with Christ.

To be one with or have life in Him is not the same thing. This may be clearly illustrated by the well-known instance of Abel and Cain. They had the same life as Adam; but they were not one with Adam as Eve was. She only was one with Adam. They had his life no less than their mother. Thus the two things are never the same and need not be in the same persons. Oneness is the nearest possible relationship, which may or may not be conjoined with the possession of life. Both are in the Christian. The pattern of oneness or its proper scriptural model is found under that of the head and the body, which is the more admirably expressive as the head clearly and of right directs all the movements of the body. In a man of sound mind and body there is not a single thing done by the extremity of the foot which is not directed by the head. Such exactly is the pattern Spiritually. The Spirit of God animates the assembly, the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the true bond of oneness between the members on earth and Christ in heaven. By and by, when we go on high, it will be represented by another figure equally apt, though also anticipatively applied while we are on earth. We never hear of the head and the body in the day of glory, but of the Bridegroom and the bride. So we read in Rev. 19 that the marriage of the Lamb is then come. This takes place in heaven after the translation of the saints and before the day of Christ’s appearing. Scripture avoids speaking of the marriage until the whole work of God is complete in His assembly, so that those who are baptized of the Spirit into that one body may be caught up to Christ together. These between the two advents of the Lord are all in one common position. But those before Christ came were surely quickened of Him; sons of God, they were partakers of the divine nature. So are Christians now; so will be the saints when the millennial kingdom is set up under the reign of Christ manifest to every eye. But to be one with Christ, members of His body, is only true now that He is in heaven as the glorified man, and that the Spirit is sent down to baptize us into this new body on the earth. That one body is now being formed and perpetuated as long as the church remains on earth. The marriage of the Lamb (of course a figure of consummated union and joy) will only take place when the whole church is complete, not before, whatever may be the language inspired by hope before then.

As to the difficulty of some minds, whether Christ partook of our nature as it is here, or we partake of Him as He is in heaven, the answer seems to me that both are true; but they are not the same truth. Christ partook of human nature, but not in the condition in which we have it. This has been already explained, as it is essential not only to the gospel but to the Christ of God. The man who denies this denies Christ’s person; he wholly overlooks the meaning of the supernatural operation of the Holy Ghost. Such was the fatal blot of Irvingism -- a far deeper mischief than the folly about tongues, or the pretensions to prophesying, or the presumption of restoring the church and its ministries, or even its gross Judaizing. It made null and void the Holy Ghost’s operation, which is acknowledged in the commonest creeds of both Catholics and Protestants. These all so far confess the truth; for I hold that as to this Catholics and Protestants are sound but the Irvingites are not, although in other matters they may say a great deal that is true enough. Certainly the late Mr. Irving saw and taught not a little neglected truth. Notwithstanding they were, and I believe still are, fundamentally unsound in holding the human nature of Christ to be fallen and peccable through the taint of the fall, thus setting aside the object and fruit of the miraculous conception by the power of the Highest.

Hence then our being partakers of the divine nature is one thing, the gift of the Holy Ghost quite another. Both we have now. The first is the new nature that pertains to us as believers, and this in a substantial sense has been true of all believers from the beginning. But besides this there is the peculiar privilege of oneness with Christ through the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Clearly this could not be until the Holy Ghost was given to baptize the disciples of Christ into one body; as again the Holy Ghost could not be given to produce this oneness till Jesus by His blood had put away our sins and been glorified at God’s right hand (Heb. 1; John 1, 7). Those who should be saved had been in every kind of impurity, and they must be washed from their sins before they could be righteousness set in that position of nearness and relationship as one new man {Eph. 2:15}.

Esther was chosen and called to a high position; still, according to the habits due to the great king, there must needs be a great preparation before the actual consummation. I grant you this was but a natural place; still it is the type of a spiritual relationship; so that we may use
it to illustrate God’s mind. It is not consistent with His ways or His holiness that any should be taken out of the old things and put into the wonderful position of oneness with Christ until the work of redemption completely abolished our old state before God and brought us into a new one in Christ. Such is the order of scripture.

But there is more to come. For although we have already the Holy Ghost as well as the new nature, there is a third requisite which the glory of Christ demands for us: we shall be changed. That is, we Christians, who have now not only humanity but this fallen, are destined at Christ’s coming again for us to be changed. Christ had human nature but not fallen. In His case alone was humanity holy, free from every blemish and taint, and pure according to God. It was not only not fallen, but fit without blood to be the temple of God. This is far more than could be said about Adam in his pristine innocency. When Adam came from the hand of God, good as he was, it could not be said that he was holy. There was absolute absence of all evil. God made the man upright before he sought inventions. There was untainted innocence. But holiness and righteousness are more than creation goodness and innocency. Holiness implies the intrinsic power that rejects evil in separation to God: and righteousness means consistency with the relationship in which one is set. Both these qualities we see not in Adam but in Jesus even as to His humanity.

That holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God {Luke 1:35}.

He was the Holy One of God,

Jesus Christ the righteous {1 John 2:1}.

Indeed He was the only one of whom it was or could be said of His human nature that it was holy; as it clearly is of humanity in His person that the expression that holy thing is used. The divine nature was not born of the virgin; and it was little needed to call that holy. There was the highest interest and moment in knowing the character of His humanity. Scripture as to this is most explicit. His humanity was holy from the very first, spite of being born of a fallen race.

And this agrees with all other truth. Thus had the human nature of Christ been tainted by the fall, how could He have been the most holy

sin-offering for sinners? There was no instance about which there was so much scrupulosity of care as the meat-offering and the sin-offering. These two are remarkable and remarkably opposed types of Christ: the one of His life, the other of His death.

But we shall have much more in the way of power and glory by and by. When Christ comes, human nature in us will participate in the victory of the Second Man, the last Adam, as it now shares in the weakness and ruin of the first man. Then indeed is the time when human nature will be promoted to a good degree; that is to say, it will be raised out of all the consequences of the fall of the first man, and will be placed in all the power and incorruption and glory of the Second Man as He is now in the presence of God. Never shall we be made God: this could not be, and ought not to be. It is impossible that the creature can overpass the bounds that separate the Creator from it. And more than that, the renewed creature is the very one which would most abhor the thought. No matter what the church’s blessedness and glory may be, it never forgets its creature obligations to God and the reverence due to Him. For this very reason he that knows God would never desire that He should be less God than He is, and could not indulge or tolerate the self-exalting folly which the miserable illusion of Buddhism cherishes, along with many kinds of philosophy which are afloat now as of old in the west as well as the east -- the dream of a final absorption into deity. This is altogether false and irreverent. All approach to such thoughts we see excluded in the word of God. In heaven the lowness of those whom the sovereign grace of God made partakers of the divine nature will be even more perfect than now while we are on the earth. Human nature under sin is as selfish as proud. Fallen humanity always seeks its own things and glory; but the new nature, the perfection of which is seen in Christ, (that is to say, the life given to the believer, what we receive in Christ even now, and by and by when everything is conformed to it) will only make perfect without a single flaw or hindrance that which we now are in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Returning from our long digression, I would now direct attention to the plain fact that Jonah too faithfully represents the Jews in his unwillingness that God should show mercy to the Gentiles. The effect of this uncomely narrowness and indeed failure in bearing a real witness to the true God is, that far from being the channel of blessings to the Gentiles, he brings a curse upon them. So with the Jew now, and it will be yet more verified at the end of the age. The ringleaders of the actual rationalism in the world have derived a vast deal of their cavils from Jewish sources. The miserable Spinoza of Amsterdam, the theological pantheist of the seventeenth century, is really the patriarch of a great deal of the philosophy that is overrunning the world now and ever since. And this will grow far worse. It is granted that this did not begin with him, but with heathen unbelievers, yet made more and more daring by Jewish and then Christian apostasy. I have no doubt that there is yet to be, from the dragons’ teeth which they are sowing over Christendom, an abundant crop of men given up to lawlessness.

Here however it is a very different state: we see a godly man spite of all faults. Nevertheless the result of his unfaithfulness is that he brings a tempest from Jehovah on the ship; and his error brought no small danger on unconscious Gentile mariners, who little thought of the question between God and His servant, or of the deep reason that lay underneath so singular a controversy. But Jonah knew what the matter was, though he had never dared.
to look it fairly to the bottom: as men never do whose conscience is bad. And this he showed when the ship master came and waked him up from his sleep with the cry,

What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not {Jonah 1:6}.

Even then he does not reveal the secret.

And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us.

When men are ashamed and will is still active and unjudged, it takes no small discipline to set them right again. So Jonah held his tongue as long as he could, though he knew right well who was the culprit.

They did cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah {Jonah 1:7}.

As it was not possible to hide his secret any longer,

Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us? What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou? And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear Jehovah, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceeding afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of Jehovah, because he had told them. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous {Jonah 1:9-11}.

The prophet then directs them like a genuine soul, as he was at bottom: all of which we have spoken freely and plainly, as the word of God warrants us to do, seems quite consistent with it. For all his shortcomings, his narrowness, and his official self-importance, he did not fear to trust himself in God’s hands, as we shall see. For he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea {Jonah 1:12}.

Is it not evident and sad the mixture one sees even in a real believer? It is plain that he has not the slightest doubt of his own relationship to God; he entertains no question that all will be well somehow with Jonah. Yet had he really been, as he was often in danger of being, impatient, self-willed, and presumptuous. Jonah knew God well enough to dread that He would be better than his own message and warning to the Gentiles. He did not mind that God should be ever so good to the Jews, but he could not bear that his threat should seem vain through divine mercy to repentant Gentiles.

Jonah, I say, tells them to take him up and cast him forth into the sea.

So shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you {Jonah 1:12}.

The shipmen, not having the heart to do it, rowed hard to bring the ship to land; but they could not: for the sea wrought and was tempestuous against them {Jonah 1:13}.

And they too cried unto Jehovah. A remarkable change, as we may here discern, takes place in them; for up to this time they simply owned God, but only after a natural sort because they called on their gods withal. This was inconsistent enough. They did not see the grievous incongruity of worshipping false gods and at the same time owning the true God. Such however was exactly their state; but now they cried to the true God. They had heard His name was Jehovah, and they were struck by the reality of His government in the case of Jonah before their eyes.

And they cried unto Jehovah, and said, We beseech thee, O Jehovah, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O Jehovah, hast done as it pleased thee {Jonah 1:14}.

A remark may be made by the way in proof of the excess of the folly rationalism displays in judging of these names of God. In these days most people who read are aware that freethinkers have tried to build up the theory that each of the early books at least of the Bible must have been written by different authors at different times, because among other phenomena there occur two or more accounts sometimes of the same or of kindred features, in one of which the name God or Elohim is more prominent, in another the name Jehovah.

Their hypothesis is that the difference of these terms, backed up by other differences of thought and language, can only arise from distinct authorship. Superficial and transparent folly! As if even human writers do not vary their style with their subject and object: how much more when God gives according to His fulness and depth! There is not the slightest sense in the theory. And here is a proof before our eyes in the prophecy of Jonah. There is no question of early documents in this case. As compared with the books of Moses, Jonah after all is rather too late in the day. They contrived to eke out the case that in the dim and hoary age of Mosaic antiquity various documents had somehow been muddled together, and out of the later manipulation of these different records at length emerged the books of Moses as we have them: pretty much, one might suppose, as Jehovah plagued the people because they made the calf, which Aaron made, when he

cast the gold into the fire, and there came out this calf {Ex. 32:24}.

But, however this may be, the prophecy of Jonah rises up to refute this pretentious folly. Bear with me if I cannot but use strong and plain terms in speaking of that which is so irreverent and revolting. One should never find fault with
a man for ignorance; \(^{103}\) still less can one justly lay blame on any man for not being wiser than God has been pleased to make him. It is our business to make the best use of the little which God may have vouchsafed; but that man should allow his mind or acquirements, whatever be his measure, to rise up in judgment of the precious and perfect word of God, to unsettle and destroy as far as his influence extends the absolute divine authority of everything that God has written, -- this I cannot but condemn with all my soul, and believe that it is the truest love even to the wrong-doers. We cannot exaggerate the heinousness of the sin. May the Lord forgive every one guilty of it! But we ought not to forgive the thing itself. Can one conceive that God would have the believer forgive the sin of speaking against His own word? Grace can forgive the worst of sinners; but never let us allow any thought about the sin except that it is most hateful to God. To have the strongest sense of sin is in no way incompatible with the utmost pity for and interest in him who is deceived and guilty and condemned. On the contrary it is as much a Christian’s duty to abhor that which is evil as to love that which is good. So true is this, that the man who does not abhor evil can never be justly thought to have real love in his heart for what is good; because it is always in proportion to moral power that one hates the false and evil, and loves the true and good. As for the shilly-shallying that calls itself charity but really is indifferentness to either good or evil, it is at bottom either intense self-seeking or mere love of ease without a single quality which becomes a man, because there is no thought nor care for what is due to God. Against such heartlessness may all God’s children watch diligently; for the air now-a-days is full of it. Depend on it, there is no grace in such laxity. It is as far as possible from Him who is our only unfailing test.

In his distress then we find Jonah turns to the true God. Even for the heathen sailors it was no time for thinking of their false gods. They felt themselves evidently in the hand of Jehovah. Accordingly they cry to Him, and as we are told,

They took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea:
and the sea ceased from her raging (Jonah 1:15).

What a sight! What solemnity must have filled these poor Gentiles! Thereon, we are told, they feared Jehovah (Jonah 1:16).

They had cried to Him before; they feared Him now. If they cried to Him in their danger, they feared Him yet more when the danger was over. That is right, and shows reality. However common, it is a fearful mockery when a man fears the Lord less when he professes to have his sins forgiven by His grace. It is truly awful and perilsome when the goodness of God weakens in the smallest degree our reverence for Himself and jealousy for His will.

Our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29), but this need not hinder our perfect confidence in His love. So here the mariners offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows at the same time.

Now Jehovah had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17).

Next chapter (Jonah 2) we come to a very great change. It is not a man sent out on an unwelcome errand from Jehovah; nor his endeavour to escape from the execution of God’s commission; nor yet again the divine dealings with him when he proved refractory and kicked against the goads. We see by the way that Jehovah is exceedingly pitiful and of tender mercy as regards the Gentile mariners, when they forsook their vanities and were brought to worship the only true God, Jehovah the Lord of heaven and earth. But now we have the silent and secret dealings of God that went on during those three days and three nights when Jonah lay in the depths and spread his misery before God.

Then Jonah prayed unto Jehovah his God out of the fish’s belly, and said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto Jehovah, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice (Jonah 2:1, 2).

In this there can be not the slightest doubt to the believer that Jonah is a type of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ when He too was for three days and nights, as He said Himself, in the heart of the earth -- the crucified Messiah. But then how different! Jonah’s singular fate was because of his sin -- his manifest insubjection to God. Christ suffered for others exclusively. It was for the sins of His people. Nevertheless the result was so far similar that our Lord Jesus Himself being without sin was utterly rejected, not because He did not the will of God, but because He did it to perfection, offering His body as a sacrifice once for all. Thus our blessed Lord obeyed unto death, instead of disobeying it like the first Adam. Jonah then cries, and Jehovah hears. Deeply does he feel the position in which he found himself; and this was well. Discipline is meant to be felt, though grace should not be doubted.

But I believe on the other hand that his confidence, as was natural, was not unmingled with fear. For if a type of Christ he was a type of the Jewish people. Indeed he sets forth not inapty the people failing in their testimony, misrepresenting God before the Gentiles, not yet a channel of blessing on them according, to the promises to Abraham, but rather a curse because of their own unfaithfulness. Nevertheless, just as Jonah was preserved of God in the great fish, so also are the Jews now preserved of God, and will be brought out to be a joy and praise to His name in the earth, whatever their present lost estate. That day is hastening apace. In Jonah’s history we find its pledge; in Christ’s its righteous ground and the means to accomplish it.

\(^{103}\) The last words of the famous Laplace were, “Ce que nous connaissons est peu de choses; ce que nous ignorons est immense.” Alas! he died without the knowledge of God, without eternal life in Christ. But he is no bad witness of the unsatisfying nature of the knowledge of one who knew much in comparison of most men, though he knew nothing of what man most needs to know.
when Jehovah pleases to His glory.

It is a principle with God that

in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established {2 Cor. 1:13; see also Matt. 18:16}.

This I do not doubt to be at least one reason for the three days, whether one looks at the case of Jonah, or of Christ, or of any other. It means a fully adequate testimony, as in our Lord’s case, to the reality of His death when He had been rejected to the uttermost; so with Jonah. Two would have been enough; three were more than sufficient, an ample and irrefragable witness. So our Lord Jesus, though by Jewish reckoning three days and three nights in the grave, literally lay there but the whole of Saturday -- the Sabbath, with a part of Friday not yet closed, and before the dawn of Sunday. For we must always remember in these questions the Jews’ method of reckoning. Part of a day regularly counted for the four-and-twenty hours. The evening and the morning, or any part, counted as a whole day. But the Lord, as we know, was crucified in the afternoon of Friday; His body lay all the next or Sabbath day in the grave; and He rose early the Sunday morning.

That space was counted three days and three nights, according to sanctioned Biblical reckoning which no man who bowed to scripture would contest. This was asserted among the Jews, who, fertile as they have been in excuses for unbelief, have never, as far as I am aware, made difficulties on this score. The ignorance of Gentiles has exposed some of them when unfriendly to cavil at the phrase. The Jews found not a few stumbling-blocks, but this is not one of them: they may know little of what is infinitely more momentous; but they know their own Bible too well to press an objection which would tell against the Hebrew scriptures quite as much as the Greek.

In Jonah 3 we come to another point. The word of Jehovah comes to Jonah again. How persistent is His goodness, and how vain for His servant to think of evading! A fresh message is given in these terms:

Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of Jehovah {Jonah 3:2, 3}.

And the Spirit of God tells us,

Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown {Jonah 3:3, 4}.

The people listened to the word. And here is another use for which our blessed Lord employs Jonah. He does not merely cite the most marvelous part of Jonah’s history as a type of His own rejection in Israel, or of the consequence of that rejection for Israel, but He holds up before the proud and hard spirit of the Jew in His day the repentance of the Ninevites at the preaching of Jonah, two wholly different references which are main incidents in the history of the prophet.

So the people of Nineveh believed God {Jonah 3:5}.
They did not go so far as the mariners: they believed God.

There was a certain conviction that His moral character was justly offended by their wickedness; for well they knew that they were living as they listed, which practically means without God at all.

They believed God,

it is stated,

and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth {Jonah 3:5}.

Does this again warrant the inference that the book had two authors? Later on, as at the early part, all is recounted with the most perfect order morally, and as naturally as possible flows from one and the same inspired mind. The fact is that the application of the different names for God is quite independent of the question of one or more authors, and is owing to a different idea which the author meant to convey: and this is true throughout scripture early or late, Old Testament or New. Indeed all the holy writings are parts of the same web; but it does not follow that there may not be a different pattern in different parts of it. To make it all the same monotonous color or shape is not always necessary even among men. How strange that vain man should sit in judgment on God, not even allowing Him to do as He pleases with His own word! Of course the use of the names is adapted to a different apprehension of God on the part of men, the one being mainly the general expression of His nature, the other of that specific relation in which He was revealed to His chosen people of old; the one what, the other who He is. Hence under the hand of the Holy Spirit we may surely reckon that God furnishes the terms used with the most perfect propriety. Never is it either arbitrary or unmeaning; but we may not be able always to discern aright. So far indeed is it from being true, that I am persuaded a variety of authors would rather have struck these differences out. Thus, supposing there were two authors giving really conflicting reports, I consider that an editor, finding the two documents at variance, would have in all probability tried to assimilate them; for instance in this case either by striking out

Jehovah

and putting in

God,
or by striking out

God

and putting in

Jehovah.

This would have been no hard task, and most natural if there had really been a mere editor dealing with old relics which he wished to reduce into a tolerably harmonious whole for perpetuation.
Let me endeavor to illustrate the truth by a familiar figure. An artist of intelligence would not represent the Queen in the same way opening the Houses of Parliament as if reviewing the troops at Aldershot. He who could fail to see the reason of the differences in paintings of the two scenes, even if drawn by the same artist, would simply prove that he had no discernment of propriety. In the one case there might be a horse or a chariot; in the other there would be the throne. Horses would not be suitable in the House of Lords any more than a throne at the camp. Every one can see in such a case as this that the difference of the surroundings has nothing to do with a question of this or that artist, of few or many, but is due exclusively to the difference of relationship.

So even we in ordinary life do not always address the same person in the same way. Suppose the case of a judge, and of a barrister who is the judge’s son addressing him in court. Do you think the barrister would so far forget the court as to call the judge his father when addressing the jury, or even the judge? Or do you suppose when at home in the intimacy of his father’s house that his son would call the judge “my lord,” just as he and all else would in court?

It is to me then certain that the objection raised is due to nothing else than an astonishing want of discernment; but I should never blame one for this if he did not pretend to teach and in his effort dishonor God’s word, and injure if not ruin man. If people cannot form a sound and holy judgment as to such questions, it is their own loss. But they are not entitled to publish the fruits of their ignorance of scripture, and palm them off as something new, profound, and important, without being sifted and exposed, especially as the necessary tendency if not the object of all they say is to destroy the true character of scripture as divine. Were the learning in which such efforts may be arrayed ever so real, which it rarely is, I do not think a Christian ought to make a truce for an hour.

Here then we learn that God was believed by the men of Nineveh, who accordingly took the place of the guilty in repentance before God. When the matter came to the king, he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water: but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God {Jonah 3:6-8}.

Here the place of humiliation is kept up in a thorough, if somewhat singular, manner.

Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? {Jonah 3:9} They have not long to wait for an answer of mercy. And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry {Jonah 3:10, 4:1}.

Yes, Jonah is the same man still when proved to the core. It may appear to us wonderful that so it should be after all the dealings of God with him. The mercy shown was too much for him whose message covered Nineveh with sackcloth. What he had warned he had warned; and he could bear no mitigation lest it should detract from himself. This feeling was too deeply ingrained in his nature to be altered even by such discipline as he had passed through. No experience can ever correct the evil of the fleshly mind. So thoroughly hopeless is it in itself that nothing short of death and resurrection with Christ, given to faith and kept up in dependence on Him, can avail. To be swallowed up by the great fish and to come forth again was used for good doublet; but no such measure sufficed to meet the demand. We only live by present dependence on God; and there can be no greater ruin for a soul than to attempt to live on the past alone, still less going back to one's old thoughts and feelings.

Jonah indeed practically set aside the fruit of the solemn discipline for his soul which he had gone through in the depths of the sea. But God was the same God; and had His own way of setting Jonah right.

He prayed unto Jehovah {Jonah 4:2}.

Here we find the propriety of the language again. The prophet does not fall back merely on the place of man as such with God; he speaks to Him as one who knew Him on special ground, according to the covenant name of Jehovah in which He is known to the Jew.

He prayed to Jehovah, and said, I pray thee, O Jehovah, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil {Jonah 4:2}.

This was the secret spring of the prophet's dread -- God's mercy!

Therefore now, O Jehovah, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live {Jonah 4:3}.

He could not bear to live if his word were not accomplished to the letter. He would rather see that word carried out rigorously in the extermination of all the Ninevites than that it should seem to fail. How proud, selfish, and destructive is the impatient heart even of a godly man! And how beautiful it is to find in the apostle Paul what I referred to at the beginning! A man of like passions with Jonah and with us, who nevertheless gives patience as the special, chief, and most memorable sign of an apostle. He says truly that all the signs of an apostle were found with him in reproving the ungrateful Corinthians; but what does he allege as the first great sign of it? Not tongues or miracles. Be assured of this -- that patience is better than any such powers; and patience
in every form God wrought in the heart of that blessed man. Yet it does not seem to my mind from all we read that Paul was a patient man after his own nature. Does it not rather seem that he was amazingly quick of feeling, and as rapid in coming to a conclusion as he was firm in holding to it when formed? Nevertheless, though he had a mind as fitted for deep-sea fathoming as for taking in the various sides of whatever came before him, we know that he was thoroughly a Jew –

a Hebrew of Hebrews {Phil. 3:5}
as he says himself, to whom his nation was unspeakably dear. At the same time he was a man most energetic in carrying out practically whatever conscience and heart received as according to God. This he was even in his unconverted days; and certainly he was not less so when broken down by grace and filled with a love which poured forth from every channel of his large heart. But the permanent quality that marks Paul as apostle, as he urges to the Corinthian doubters and for the good of all saints, is patience. I doubt that any other thing is so great a sign of spiritual power. There is a day coming when power will not be shown in patience; but the truest sign of divine power morally carried on now is this ability to endure. Now this was what Jonah completely failed in. He had known wonders of divine power and mercy in his own case; but there is nothing like the cross, no lesson like that of death and resurrection as Paul had learnt it. Some may think it a very unusual expression of our hearts, bad as they are, to put one's own reputation above the welfare and even the lives of the people of the great city; and that few or none of us would be tempted to feel so hardly. Be assured however that the flesh is untrustworthy; and that self is as cruel as it is paltry when allowed. This may seem to some a dreadful thought; but is it not true? Man is the first man still; and it is in the Christian ready to repeat itself, unless by faith held for dead.

Then said Jehovah, Doest thou well to be angry? {Jonah 4:4}

How admirable His patience!

So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city {Jonah 4:5}.

There sat the prophet coolly and deliberately waiting with what comfort he could muster to see if God would then and there exterminate the people he, Jonah, had devoted to destruction. And now we see the wonderful way in which Jehovah corrected the mischief.

Jehovah God prepared a gourd.

It is not now simply

God,

nor only

Jehovah,

but the blending of nature with special relationship. Such seems the reason why it is Jehovah God in this instance. He prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd {Jonah 4:6}.

Simply as God, we may say, He prepared the gourd; but as Jehovah God He prepared it to be a comfort for His servant Jonah.

But God prepared a worm.

Observe the appropriate change. It is not

Jehovah God

now, but Elohim -- the author of creation.

God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live {Jonah 4:7, 8}.

Indeed impatience must always be about self. The thing that ever most provokes human nature is such a wound. It is never God; nor need the test by which God puts one to the proof provoke impatience, which is found when analysed to be just a finding fault with Him. Do you think that God has not His eye on every thing and every one? Do you forget that God is measuring all the grief and trial and pain inflicted and borne here below? Of course He concerns Himself actively with each and all. Hence it is only when we lose sight of this that the impatience of nature breaks forth; but it is assuredly always there ready to break forth. So it did break out with the vexed prophet.

And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death {Jonah 4:9}.

How manifestly we see the same soul hot but feeble:

I do well to be angry!

Then said Jehovah, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle? {Jonah 4:10, 11}.

You would like the gourd spared. What is the gourd to Nineveh? You value its ephemeral shade: what is it in mine eyes to that great city with its teeming myriads of such little ones as know not their right hand from their left? Yes, God even thinks of and feels for the cattle. What surer or more evident sign of greatness than to be able to take in what we consider petty along with what is to us boundless in magnitude? And such does our God; He despises not any. Such exactly is the God whom Jonah knew so little and was so unwilling to learn. There is no real knowledge of God...
except in crushing nature in its impatience, pride of heart, self-confidence, everything. And it is right that it should be so. It is a poor gain to acquire considerable knowledge of God without its having at the same time a deep moral effect on the soul. God at any rate would have the two things together associated in us.

How admirably complete are His ways and His working! He who prepared the fish prepared the palmchrist and the worm and the vehement east wind. All things serve not His might only, but His gracious purposes. It is as characteristic of our prophet as of all scripture to state calmly every incident just as it was, all under God’s hand, the least as truly as the greatest, and this too not to his own credit, but to the praise of mercy so infinitely above the thoughts of man. And this is imbedded among the Jewish prophets, written in the Hebrew tongue, by one who felt as keenly as ever Israelite did what it was to warn the destined captor of Israel, with the certainty that God would repent Him of the menaced judgment, if they by grace repented themselves of their ways against Him. And so he proved after that he, given back from the grave of the sea, had performed his mission, type of One risen from the dead, as much greater in His grace to the Gentiles as in the glory of His person and the perfectness of an obedience which went out only in doing the will of His Father. But God is as wise as He is good; and the prophet’s grief over the perishing palma-christi is made a reproof to his own rash spirit, and a justification from his own mouth for the mercy of God to the men of Nineveh. Once more out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the weak, as erst out of the strong, comes forth sweetness.

Such then is the book of Jonah, and I cannot help thinking that, as far as it goes, a more instructive book for the soul, and in view of the dealings and dispensations of God with man and creation, there is not in the Bible.
The prophecy of Micah, like all the rest, has its own distinctive properties, though falling into the general current of testimony to Israel, and so far with the others different from the prophecy of Jonah, which was last before us. On the surface we can see a strong resemblance between Micah’s line of things and that of the prophet Isaiah. On the other hand, there is the obvious difference that, while Isaiah is large and comprehensive, Micah presents his testimony in a brief and therefore compressed if not more distinct form. The various points of truth which he was commissioned to declare are here together in a short compass.

The prophecy is divided into two if not three clearly marked sections. Micah 1, 2 comprise the introduction: Micah 3, 4, 5 give us the climax of the prophet’s testimony; and then Micah 6, 7 are the appropriate conclusion.

In the first portion the prophet summons all people, and the earth itself, and all that exists, to hear Jehovah’s testimony, alas! against Samaria and Jerusalem. Adonai from His holy temple, He is coming forth, as He says, out of his place {Micah 1:3}.

A striking expression it is. The dealings of grace are properly connected with where He is; God is in His place when He is showing His own sovereign mercy. For judgment He comes out of His place. In His own nature God is not a judge, but One who gives and blesses. Judgment is His strange work {Isa. 28:21}, as it is said elsewhere -- a work therefore that, if it must be done, He will do shortly. He must make a short work, as says Isaiah. He does not like to dwell on judgment. It is a painful necessity which the wickedness of man compels, and that too because if He declined the judgment of iniquity He must abandon His own moral character. But grace is His normal work, the activities of divine love in spite of evil, not winking at it, but raising out of and above it. Grace suits God and is His delight, as it is the energy of His nature in the face of ruin. Judgment is the provisional guard of His nature, being imperatively that which is rendered necessary by the iniquity of the creature -- whether of the fallen angels or of rebellious man. So here the prophet declares that Jehovah comes forth out of His place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth.

Jehovah cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place (Micah 1:3, 4).

It is in vain therefore for Israel to build themselves up in the conceit of impunity. This cannot be where Jehovah is the judge.

For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel {Micah 1:5}.

Sin is always evil, but never so humiliating as in the people of God.

What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem? {Micah 1:5}

Samaria was the chief seat of Israel, as Jerusalem was of Judah, where the house of David reigned; yet they were both high places of iniquity against Jehovah, Samaria completely and Jerusalem growingly.

Therefore I will make Samaria as an heap of the field, and as plantings of a vineyard: and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof. And all the graven images thereof shall be beaten to pieces, and all the hires thereof shall be burne d with the fire, and all the idols thereof will I lay desolate: for she gathered it of the hire of an harlot, and they shall return to the hire of an harlot. Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls. For her wound is incurable; for it is come unto Judah; he is come unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem (Micah 1:6-9).

Some rationalist commentators for objects of their own are disposed to regard Micah as a very late prophet; but there need be no scruple in rejecting their theories. The prophet himself says it was in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah {Micah 1:1}.

There is not a tittle of evidence against the genuineness of these words, which assert that he was an early prophet. But rationalists have always at hand a summary reason for any conclusion to which their will impels them: another writer,
or even so many more as each difficulty can be conceived to call for! For who at bottom is so credulous as the rationalist? It could easily be shown that the wonders which their system obliges them to receive are in their way less reasonable and worthy than the testimony to which faith bows implicitly: but then they are wonders of imposture and bad faith. Men can believe anything that lowers the credit of a prophesy, pretending withal that they honor the writer and in no way question his good faith or holiness. What a singular notion theirs must be of truth and holiness! If a writer assuming to be a man of God pretended to prophesy at a time when he was not born, and gave out as prophecy that which was only written after the fact, is he not a cheat and his writing an imposture?

If their proofs be demanded, it will be found that, under an elaborate heap of details in style and phraseology, the real difficulty is the assumption common to them all, that there is no such thing as prophecy. If the prophet therefore gives himself out as having lived before the events, they imagine that this is only a figure of speech meant to give more poetic effect for the vulgar mind; but in point of fact the writer coolly wrote about facts which had already taken place as if still future. Thus we may see infidelity always has this plague-spot underneath it, that, with the loudest profession of searching after truth, it really denies all the moral grandeur and beauty of God’s revelation, destroying too dignity or even decency in man. In its anxiety to leave God out of His own word, it robs the faithful of the great witness to His knowledge of the future and of the grace which communicates that knowledge to them here below. By this degrading pseudo-criticism what is truly divine is ruthlessly explained away and reduced to the level of hypocritical imposture. It may be denied; but such is my judgment of the results of that modern infidelity which gives itself the fine name of the “higher criticism”: a poor but not unsuited conclusion for self-vaunting human learning to arrive at. It is possible that its leaders, still more readily its followers, may not be conscious that in the main it is only a modern furbishing up of the weapons of older Deism. But this it really is, with a gloss suited to the taste of the day. Is there any thing grander in the Old Testament? On the one hand the serpent was to bruise the heel of the woman’s Seed; on the other, the woman’s Seed was to bruise the serpent’s head. One of these has been accomplished; the other remains to be. That which is the moral foundation of all, namely, what God had wrought when the serpent bruised the heel of the Messiah and He suffered supremely under God’s hand on the cross -- what God wrought there for His own glory and for the blessing of man is the one ground-work of peace for our souls this day, and for any of God’s saints any day. But the other part remains still future. In its full import we may perhaps say it remains for the far future from God; for it is evident that, although at the beginning of the millennium the serpent may receive a considerable bruise on his head, not until the end of the millennium will the bruising be completed. Thus we see the first prophecy of God stretches out to the very last; so far is it from being true that God does not communicate it for the practical good and joy and blessing of the simplest of his children.

Again, it is altogether and plainly false that prophecy is only to be received and studied when fulfilled. The truth is, when fulfilled it takes another shape and acquires another use; but it ceases to be prophecy and becomes history, one use of which then is to stop the mouth of an infidel. But the proper value of prophecy is to give the child of God before it comes to pass the certainty of his peculiar privilege -- communion with God, who sees the things that are not as though they were. If that be our place, assuredly we ought to value and use it. This therefore may suffice as a plain and distinct answer, not only to the particular facts of Micah’s prophecy, but to the general principles as regards all prophecy.

In the latter part of Micah 1 we have a very animated account of the approach of the great enemy typified by the Assyrian of those days. We know that they were one of the
most formidable adversaries that Israel ever had. Whether one looks at Shalmaneser or at Sennacherib, the Assyrian was the enemy that was before the eyes of Israel. Later we find Babylon; but the case then is altogether different from Assyria. We must never confound the two. The uses that God turned Assyria and Babylon to in prophecy are as precise as they are different. They have been very commonly confounded, but there is no ground for it in scripture; and not only historically were Assyria and Babylon wholly distinct, but the future enemies which each of them typifies are just as different; for as Assyria was before Babylon in developing into a great kingdom on the earth, and was the grand head of the combined nations which were allowed to overthrow the ten tribes of Israel as well as to menace Judah, so on the other hand Babylon was that particular power which arose to supremacy not merely as a kind of suzerain head of nations bound up by a compact with each other, but as a supreme head of subject kings. In short an imperial dignity belonged not to Assyria but to Babylon. For the latter power rose up after Israel had been swept away, in order to carry Judah captive when the last hope of the house of David had completely fled, and David’s son was the chief instrument of the devil for binding idolatry on Judah and on Jerusalem itself. Then God allowed Babylon to come into its marked supremacy -- the golden head of the Gentile image according to the figure which Daniel explained in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar {Dan. 2}. Now this had to do pre-eminently with Judah, and so it will be found in the future. The last head of the Gentile powers typified by that image will rise up and will join in an apostasy with the man of sin: the one being the imperial head of the western powers, or revived Roman empire; the other the religious chief in Jerusalem, accepted as Messiah but really antichrist. When the Lord shall have judged these {Rev. 19}, the last Assyrian will come against not the Jews only but Israel, for these will have flocked back to their land then: at any rate representatives of all the tribes will then, as I suppose, be found in the land.

It is of this Assyrian (not of the intermediate Babylonish power which comes in after the first Assyrian and before the last) that Micah speaks; not the past so much as the future Assyrian. This is of immense importance. We must bear in mind that the great image in Daniel is an intercalated system -- what may be called a parenthesis which runs its course after the early Assyrian empire and before the Assyrian of the latter day. This may help to explain the case. The four great empires have their place between those two points. Now this intervening system is not taken up in Micah. Isaiah presents us with Babylon and Judah, what then? He will punish the stout looks of the king of Assyria. The Assyrian, we may see, is the last earthly enemy before the kingdom, as death is the last judicial enemy (1 Cor. 15:26) which remains till its end. But the Assyrian is none the less sternly dealt with at last: such is the positive statement in Isaiah. The ultimate and greatest is he that is described here historically under the Shalmanesers and the Sennacheribs of the past. It would seem too that with this final enemy of Israel may be identified the king of the north in Dan. 11.

Though notoriously the Assyrian is often taken for the Babylonish king or imperial head, this is certainly a mistake of moment. So the king of the north is altogether distinct from the king or man of sin who will be leagued with the little horn {Dan. 7:8} or chief of the Babylonish empire of the last days. The truth is that the man of sin {2 Thess. 2} will be the false king of the Jews -- the one who will come in his own name and be received of the Gentiles that rejected the true Messiah. He will be in Jerusalem, the apostate power (that began with Babylon) being not in the east but in the west. Rome and Jerusalem are the two great cities of the prophetic word, Jerusalem of all the record, Rome of the intermediate prophecy in its last phase. But when these leaders have been destroyed by the power of God exercised at the appearing of the Lord Jesus, then the king of the north will come forth as the head of the combined nations of the earth outside the image-power of Daniel. This is always to be held fast -- Assyria as the head of the confederate nations in opposition to Israel when owned as the people of God, Babylon and the other imperial powers down to the destruction of the beast while the people are disowned by Him. After the beast and the false prophet {i.e., the Antichrist} are consigned to the lake of fire {Rev. 19}, the king of the north will come forward for a fresh attack with the highest expectations; but he will be dealt with by the Lord in person, who will then have resumed His relationship with Israel and will act in this case through Israel, though there will be evidently divine intervention in the judgment of the Assyrian on the mountains of Israel. Personally however, as the last leader of the power that began with Babylon will be cast alive into the pit, so also will it be with the Assyrian. Their followers will be dealt with in a less distinctly divine manner, though their destruction will be quite beyond an ordinary overthrow. Whatever the means employed as to the kings and their hosts, the Assyrian army will be beaten down by the medium of Israel. God will employ His people as His instruments, though there will not be wanting the fighting as it were from heaven itself against them. Hailstones and fire are described in Ezekiel -- lightning and thunder from God -- marking that, although He employs Israel, still the defeat is under the direct guidance of Jehovah.

The attack of the nations called Gog and Magog
(Rev. 20) is clearly at the close of the millennium, and therefore quite distinct from what we are now describing. But in Ezek. 38, 39 we hear of a final effort before the millennium properly so-called begins. I am not prepared to say that this will not be the last effort of the king of the north. It seems certainly the same policy. The king of the north is described in a remarkable manner as being mighty, but not by his own power [Dan. 8:24]. That is to say, he will be supported by the resources of another power, which I believe can be no other than Russia; but Russia is in the background as the one that will back up the king of the north, or the Assyrian. The king of Assyria will be then the holder of what is now the Sultan’s dominions or the Ottoman Porte. This potentate to the north of the Holy Land will acquire considerable strength, and be found in a state totally different from the excessive decrepitude which we see now. It used to be a common saying with politicians that Turkey was dying for want of Turks; but this will not be the case then. I suspect that Greece and Turkey in Europe, with perhaps Asia Minor, will form a sufficiently strong kingdom where the Byzantine kingdom was once known, the Turks proper being probably driven back into their own deserts.

If this be so, those we now know as Turks will be expelled from Pera, and then the renewed Syro-Greek kingdom will really have its head-quarters in Constantinople, will there play its part once more in the great drama of the future, and be, I have no doubt, as thoroughly unprincipled a kingdom under its final shape as ever it has been under its Mohammedan form. The state of the Greeks we all know to be sorry enough now; but I speak solely from what is revealed in Dan. 8 and elsewhere in scripture. If they are morally among the most degraded people in Europe, and none the less for their sharpness and knavery, their meddling with Jewish affairs will precipitate matters and produce awful results. If they have the pride and vanity of the ancient Greeks, what is it with corrupted Christians without the poor moral elements that heathens could have?

Thus the nations which played their part in Old Testament story will assume their final shape before long, and then come into the earthly judgment of God in the end of this age when the manifested kingdom of the Lord shall bring the earth and all races of mankind into rest and blessing. The coming of the Son of man is not for the judgment of Christendom only, but for the execution of all the purposes of God whether for heaven or earth. This is no doubt of vast importance, though apt to be overlooked where man thinks that there is nothing before us but the divine decision as regards individuals for eternity. What fertile soil for error is the mind where Christ’s glory is forgotten and the word of God has not its just authority! The judgment of Christendom then will precede that of the nations, when Israel must come to the front in the ways of God for the world. I speak of the judgment of the quick, not of the dead. Doubtless Christendom has come in as a specially favored quarter. It has enjoyed the testimony of the truth of God in remarkable ways, though I quite admit that many parts of the earth once enjoyed that testimony which have long become apostate in Mohammedanism, yet more manifestly than the west which has fallen away into Popery; but all nations as such will be judged of God when the day of Jehovah arrives. Those that are real as belonging to Christ will have been taken up to heaven, and thus will not be in the scene of judgment when it comes.

Among the Jews will be those who are to be conspicuous as witnesses on earth in the latter day after the translation of the risen Old Testament saints and the church to meet the Lord above. For the Spirit will begin to work afresh in that nation, and a remnant will be converted in order to be the earthly people of Jehovah, when with His glorified saints Christ comes to reign. A certain number will have been prepared during the awful horrors of the apostasy and the man of sin, some dying for the truth, and others preserved through those days of Satan’s power and rage. For the moment earth is to be blessed as a whole, Israel, now compelled to take the ground of mere mercy, will have every promise fulfilled: they, not we Christians, are the chosen people of God for the earth. Their hopes are bound up with the predicted glory of God on the earth. Our hope is altogether different. We look to be with Christ in the Father’s house on high; in fact the church of God begins with Christ the Lord ascending to heaven, and sending the Holy Ghost from heaven to unite us with Christ in heaven. There was no such thing as Christianity, in the proper sense of the word, till Christ took His place in heaven as the glorified man after accomplishing redemption. I am not denying the faith of the Old Testament saints, nor the quickening of their souls, nor their expectation of a portion above; but the Christian who knows not of other privileges now beyond these has much to learn.

Thus Christianity is characteristically heavenly. He who is essentially its life and exemplar is Christ, as we know Him, risen and enthroned at the right hand of God; and the Holy Ghost is come down, since Christ was glorified, to be the power and guide of the Christian and the church here below. It was the business of the Christian individually and corporately to maintain this for their testimony both as truth and in practise. Not only have they not maintained it, but they have allowed themselves to become Judaized. What the apostle Paul fought against so energetically during his ministry has taken place, and there has been a most painful compound of heavenly truth with earthly rule, practise, and hope. The consequence is that conglomerate which we commonly now call “Christendom,” consisting of Greek church and Roman, Oriental and Protestant bodies of every description, national or dissenting. Where is the witness to the one body animated by the one Spirit? These various and opposed communities may have different measures of light, but in none exhibit an approach to an adequate testimony, either of the Spirit’s presence and power, or of the word of God, in subjection to the Lord Jesus. They really testify to the actual state of ruin which pervades the house of God, though doubtless to His infinite patience and grace.
Every serious believer (no matter who he may be, and I have had real communion with many of the children of God, I am happy to say, spite of much which is opposed to my convictions) must own that not a single fragment answers to the Lord’s will, still less does the whole. I know some who feel and would confess it, not merely in low-church ranks but among high churchmen who truly love the Lord. And here let it be said that, much as I deplore their idolatry of forms (forms utterly erroneous too, and an inroad of Judaism if not Paganism), I cannot but avow my preference of a godly high-churchman who enjoys communion with God to a man of less godliness who boasts of liberal feeling and what is called low-churchism and evangelical doctrine. It is the merest illusion and spirit of party to make notions or names supersede what is evidently of God. It is of the greatest consequence at the present time to the children of God to settle and build themselves up in divine truth. Is there anything else worth living for? Is there anything in the present state of Christendom that has a just claim on the spiritual affections of God’s children? I speak not of sentiment or of old attachment, but as bound up with Christ. What we want therefore is that we should hold simply to the Lord, and seek to manifest by His grace that our treasure is not on the earth but in the heavens -- that the eye is fixed on Christ, and so surrendering ourselves to the word and Spirit of God. Be assured that nothing else is worth caring for. How soon the early saints began to seek their own things, not those of Jesus Christ! By degrees the consequence was that utter declension set in, which, when it ripens into apostasy and the man of sin, the Lord will judge at His appearing.

But in that judgment will be the distinction which we have seen. The west, which will be the main scene of the Christian apostasy, with Jerusalem the connected center of the Jewish lawless one (as we may observe, both the Christian and the Jewish apostate climax), will then be judged; and in that judgment will be the destruction of the beast, the head of the apostate Gentile power, and the man of sin, the head of apostate religious pretension. When this is done, there will follow the great national confederacy headed by the Assyrian and Gog. The latter seems to be the protecting power which stimulates the king of the north, and use him as an instrument at first, and then at length comes up to fall for ever under the hand of Jehovah.

This I believe to be a true sketch of the predicted future. After the destruction of these enemies will come the peaceful reign of the Lord Jesus. Thus it is plain there will be combined in the future two qualities: the Messiah will answer to David, the victorious king, before He shows Himself the anti-type of Solomon, the peaceful king. He will put down the foes, and then reign in peace when there is no one longer to defile, oppose, or destroy.

It follows of course that the extent of the judgment of Christendom will be a much wider area than the simple overthrow of the congregated nations who oppose the Lord near Jerusalem. For instance, the judgment of Babylon will involve in it the humiliation and punishment of all the different parts of professing Christendom, then of course apostate under the seventh vial just before Christ appears. The downfall of Babylon is just before He comes for the judgment of the world. There will remain the lawless beast and false prophet, with all that follow them to be destroyed when He appears in glory. The last providential judgment will be soon followed by the shining forth of Christ’s coming. Thus not merely corrupt Christendom will be smitten in the form of Babylon, with Rome its active center, as it will continue to be to the end; but the final rebellion that the Lord will judge when He comes will arrange itself under the beast and the false prophet, which is not the state of Babylonish corruption, but a condition of open wilful rejection of God and His Christ. This last will comprise the head of the revived Roman empire of that day, who will sustain the antichrist against the king of the north; and the scene of the destruction will be Jerusalem or its neighborhood.

Thus the judgment of Christendom will be in a certain sense providential judgments before the brightness or appearing of the Lord’s coming, when He destroys them by the breath of His mouth. Who can suppose, for example, that America, or Australia, or India, will be unscathed in the judgments of the latter day? The truth is that no place or nation bearing the name of Christ, or having had the gospel preached there, will escape.

It is true that some of these lands, as America, are not expressly named in prophecy. But this in no way hinders the application of general principles. The judgment of the habitable world will take all in. Nor is God mocked by an ocean. His hand will surely deal with those who despise Him, east or west. It is not always understood that, when Babylon is judged, she sits not only on the seven hills but upon many waters. These waters, I suppose, mean all the streams of professedly Christian doctrine that spring from Babylonish principles. They constitute the main corruption of Christianity. The apostasy follows, but is a much more open avowed hostility than any such corruption of Christianity, though apparently its reactionary result. It would seem to be more centralised than Babylon’s influence, and to have a more circumscribed place. Then, after the beast’s judgment as well as Babylon’s, the confederacy of nations will cover again a larger sphere, because this is not necessarily professing Christendom at all. They may be heathen nations or not. I presume that the nations of central Asia will all succumb to Russia, and will perish most signally on the mountains of Israel. It is well known that, even to the Chinese and others, the eastern races are sinking under the control of Russia, not without resistance and checks, but sure in the end to fall under its steady never-abandoned policy. It is not more certain for the Porte than for Persia, or for central India; not all to be absorbed into the empire, but all to accept its leadership. Astonishing is the blindness of men to what is coming. Such
will be the part played by the Assyrian, who appears to be the great north-eastern instrument of Russia's designs; but they will all come under the judgment of God. The fact is that in due time all the nations must be judged as such: only there will be different measures of judgment according to differences of privilege. The greater our favor from God, the more strict the account to be rendered. Every one can feel the righteousness of this, and in judgment it is a question of righteousness. But the portion of the Christian is of grace which reigns through righteousness: and hence therefore his place will be with Christ. They will be all taken away from the earth and its varied circumstances of sorrow here to meet the Lord Jesus and dwell with Him in the Father's house. This is not of course revealed in the Old Testament, but only in the New where the proper revelation of Christianity is given.

In Micah 2 we have the conclusion of the first strain of the prophecy.

Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage {Micah 2:1, 2}.

Surely all this would be strange as addressed to the Christian. We never find such a style of warning in the New Testament. The reason is plain. The law was the rule of the Jew. Now the law claims in natural righteousness, and deals with the want of it. What therefore they failed in was the practical answer to natural righteousness. But the Christian, even supposing he were ever so righteous in natural duties, is far from rising up to the standard which becomes a Christian. We have to walk according to Christ in spiritual things as well as in natural. Consequently we need the light as it shone in Him, and the truth of the New Testament as the rule and guide of our walk, not merely the moral law that deals with man in the flesh.

Manifestly then our position is not in the flesh before God, as we are carefully told in Rom. 8, where walking in the Spirit is insisted on. Of course nobody denies that the flesh is in us; but as Christians we are not in it. Such is the doctrine of the apostle Paul; and only unbelief would think of explaining away or even essaying to correct his language. It is not for believers so richly blessed either to dispute his accuracy or to forsake their own mercies. The apostle Paul says positively of all Christians,

Ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that God's Spirit dwell in you {Rom. 8:9}.

Such then is the distinctive standing of every Christian man. What is the meaning of it? Clearly this, that it belongs to me characteristically as a Christian that I am in Christ; that, instead of being defined as part of the race by fallen Adam, I have in Christ a new life and a new place. In short there is a new standing before God in Christ. This is as true now as it ever can be: the better resurrection will not confer but display its blessedness. When we go to heaven, we shall not be simply in Christ, we shall be with Christ; but we are in Christ while we are on earth. 104

It is needful to heed the distinctions made and given in scripture. Fear not to believe the word. Cavillers may and do say that these are fine-drawn distinctions. If God has so revealed His truth to us (and scripture alone decides that He has), they may be exquisitely fine, but they are according to Him in whose wisdom and goodness we confide. We are bound to distinguish where and as God does; and if we fail to follow, we shall find out too late our loss. The truth is that there is a great deal of latent unbelief in those who cavil at the distinctions of the word of God. For all progress in real knowledge is tested by, as growth in true wisdom largely consists in, distinguishing things that differ. When a man is learning a new language, the sounds seem much alike to his ear; the characters too wear a sort of sameness of appearance which he fails at first properly to discriminate. Thus he who begins to hear the Hebrew language, or who looks at the written words, is struck with their monotony, and sees a set of strange square letters, many of them so similar as to create for his eyes no small embarrassment.

Such is more or less exactly the case with a person reading the Bible at first, and seeking to grow in the truth. The ignorant are apt to fancy that it is all merely the way to be forgiven of God and our duty. Everything is tortured to this, because it is the thought of their own minds. But when justified by faith, we have peace with God. Then we begin to distinguish the truths of scripture, and we learn that some passages treat chiefly of the divine nature, others of redemption; some of priesthood, others of justification; some of the riches of grace, others of the horrors of antichrist; some of salvation, others of the walk, and others again of the hope. The Jews, the Gentiles, the church, all have their place. Then the distinctions begin to crowd upon us, when wants are met, conscience is exercised but cleansed, and the heart set upon Christ. Yet it is plainly not in the nature of things to be spiritually fit for understanding the scriptures with fulness before we have found rest in Christ; but when this is known by the new man, do not yield to the selfishness which would stop there, but let us use the peace and rest of faith to increase by the knowledge of God -- to

grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ {2 Pet. 3:18}.

Thus we shall soon learn the broad distinction, that to the Jew the evil denounced is of a much more external nature -- oppression, covetousness, idolatry. These are the great iniquities with which they were charged. These are not our characteristic perils, though of course we may fall into any of them. But in the New Testament we find another class of evil; namely, bad and false doctrine, which destroys

104. {When we are with Christ, we shall remain in Christ, our eternal position.}
communion and undermines and corrupts the walk. Such uncleanness of spirit does not seem spoken of in the Old Testament. Why? Because we stand in a new and peculiar place. We have doubtless all the benefit of the ancient oracles, but we have the special instruction, help, and joy of the New Testament, which those of old had not; and our calling, being a peculiar thing, requires therefore peculiar scriptures to give us the light that is wanted for the glory of God. I make this remark by the way. Hence the upshot of what I am saying is this, that there are certain moral immutable principles, and that they always abide. Consequently what is true from the first of Genesis remains true to the end of Revelation; but then we have our own peculiar words and exhortations given us. We must distinguish between old things and new. The general truths of God which direct the Jew or the Gentile are surely for the Christian, besides that calling of God in Christ Jesus which we now know in His name and by the Spirit of our God.

As Israel has the prominent place in Amos, so the converse is seen in Micah, who does not omit the kingdom of Samaria, but has Judah and Jerusalem as the prime objects of his exposition. They pre-eminently are warned of those natural offences against the moral ways of God, which the false prophets bore with and even cherished. But they learn that their prophets shall be taken away from them. The prophets had flattered the people, prophesying smooth things and deceits. Of course they were not really servants of God, but from the mere school of prophets. When prophesying became traditional, it soon became corrupt. Those that God raised up extraordinarily dispense the true light of God on the earth, and therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast a cord by lot in the congregation of Jehovah. Prophesy ye not, say they to them that prophesy: shall not prophesy to them, that they shall not take shame {Micah 2:5, 6}.

What they had misused they should lose.

Then comes a most animated appeal in the latter part of this chapter.

O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of Jehovah straitened? are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly? {Micah 2:7}.

So we have a solemn call to them.

Arise and depart, for this is not your rest; it is polluted {Micah 2:10}.

Here is a grave and precious principle. The people of God are never to rest in that which does not suit Him. Jehovah decides that the only rest which He can sanction for them is the rest that is worthy of Himself. Hence from the beginning we see, graven even on the time which fleets away, that God, when he sanctified the seventh day as the sabbath of rest, gave a sure pledge that remains for His people to the end of the world. The sabbath consequently has a most important place in the order of God for man on the earth, as we learn from His word. But the Jew was always prone to be premature in looking for his rest. The same fault repeats itself in Christendom. But it is not so. Whatever we may have before God in Christ, we are still in scenes of war and labor. Our rest is not here; nor is it now. What do men flatter themselves they are going to bring about by discoveries and inventions? They hope that they may turn the moral wilderness of the world into a paradise, and thus find a present rest here. Is not this what they yearn after? Unconverted men, as the rule, are full of vaunt and vain glory: and I am afraid that too many of the converted yield to these fleshly dreams of the world. All will come to nought. The truth is that God means to effect rest; yet it will not be the fruit of man’s work but of His own. It was after the six days in which He made heaven and earth that God sanctified His rest at first, and, as our Lord, my Father worketh hitherto, and I work {John 5:17}.

He is still active, carrying forward the work of grace, the new creation; and after this is done the true and final rest of all will come to nought. The truth is that God means to effect rest; yet it will not be the fruit of man’s work but of His own. It was after the six days in which He made heaven and earth that God sanctified His rest at first, and, as our Lord, my Father worketh hitherto, and I work {John 5:17}.

Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast a cord by lot in the congregation of Jehovah. Prophesy ye not, say they to them that prophesy: they shall not prophesy to them, that they shall not take shame {Micah 2:5, 6}.

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responsibility, the chief weight must necessarily be according to the position of individuals. Wickedness in him who holds an office of trust is worse, and justly dealt with as more serious, than the same evil would be in a subordinate person. Iniquity for instance in a judge has a graver character than dishonesty in an ostler or his master. Corruption or tyranny in a king is deeper guilt than delinquencies here or there in any of his subjects. It is granted that this may not suit the doctrinaires of the present day; but I hold to what God has laid down in scripture. People may give it up; but they will prove before long that there is nothing like the truth of God. Now the word of God explicitly lays down these principles to which faith will adhere; and, whatever the inventions of man meanwhile, God will surely judge according to His own inflexible revelation, so that men will merely suffer the consequences of their own folly in departing from it. Consonant to this the prophet speaks in the opening of this chapter.

Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; Is it not for you to know judgment? [Micah 3:1].

The sin of the people had been exposed in the first two chapters; the sin of the heads comes forward here, and among them the wickedness of the prophets.

Thus saith Jehovah concerning the prophets that make my people err [Micah 3:5].

What can be more delusive and fatal? It is bad enough when a man’s will makes him err; how much worse when that which ought to be the strongest check on will and the surest guard of holiness impels him head foremost into everything that is contrary to God.

Hence these false prophets were the mere instruments of the people, and Micah predicts that night shall be unto them instead of their pretended light.

Ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them [Micah 3:6].

Nothing can be more magnificent than his figures; but, what is better, they are true.

Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God [Micah 3:7].

Those who misguided others shall be left to their own delusions. They preferred darkness to light because their deeds were evil; and so Jehovah distinctly lets them know by Micah; for it is the prophet who speaks.

Truly I am full of power by the Spirit of Jehovah, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgressions, and to Israel his sin. Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. . . . Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest [Micah 3:8-12].

And what next? Glorious news! God takes all into His own hand. As is commonly felt and said, “Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity;” so it will manifestly be in the latter day. How blessed to have believed before that day! The last day to man has always the sound of death and judgment: to him no funeral note so tremendous. At others he may find fuel for pride: this is a death-knell to himself, with an indescribable dread of eternity. The present day is always what man finds his joy and his activity in. The last day presents ideas confused no doubt, and not without popular error, but so far justly it is to man ominous of divine judgment; and this he dreads, not without reason. The last day to the believer is a prospect of perfect unending joy, blessedness, light, and glory. It is the day when righteousness and truth will have the upper hand; the day when man will be most truly elevated, because God is exalted; for how can there be real order and due honor if God have not His supremacy? Is it not the basis of rights that God should have His? This is exactly what will be vindicated in the last day; and therefore when God has His just place on earth as in heaven, man will have his true dignity secured; for assuredly God’s delight is in the blessing of the creature. This is what love always devises, and if able effects; it delights in the good of the object it loves; and such is the feeling of God in respect of His creatures. Consequently when He is glorified, man will have the fulness of His blessing.

Hence therefore we do wait in hope for these last days, -- not the fond and baseless vision of man’s vaulting presumptuous ambition, but the day when God, having put down corruption and lawlessness, shall establish His own way in the peaceful reign of the once despised but now and for ever exalted man, the Lord Jesus, Jehovah, Messiah of Israel, and Son of man.

This is what the prophet brings in:

But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of Jehovah shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it [Micah 4:1].

Instead of merely flowing down, which is the natural course of rivers, the peoples will flow up around the sanctuary of Jehovah, then indeed a house of prayer for all. The change will be supernatural everywhere. Heaven and earth will bear glad witness of the glory and the power of Jehovah, yet withal displayed in the man Christ Jesus, and in those that are His above and below. No room will be left for the idolizing of nature more than any other idol. That day will proclaim the Lord, making a clean sweep of what man prides himself in, and proving that, although man may have done his best, the time is come for God to show His incontestable superiority.

I am persuaded therefore, whatever may be the
progress of the age, that not a single shred which gives room to boast of the first man will remain in the day of Jehovah. Take for instance the electric telegraph and the railways. I see no ground to believe that the Lord will condescend to have either used during the millennial reign. Do you suppose that divine power can or will not outdo any invention, let it be ever so prodigious in man's eyes? If they ask how these things can be, a believer need not be concerned to find an answer save that which revelation furnishes as to the fact itself. It is enough for him that he certainly knows God will put down self-exalting man and in that day exalt Himself. Not a single relic shall be left. God will make a *tabula rasa* of all the busy works of man on the earth for the last six thousand years, or at least since the flood; and He will show that, wherein man has most pride, God will do better. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life must pass away. Even the grandeur of nature as it is must fall, still more the imposing structures of man, petty in comparison: for what are their high towers and fenced walls in presence of lofty hills and sublime mountains? Strong and stately ships shall be broken and pleasant pictures fade into nothingness. Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day. Isa. 2, 3 says much but by no means all of the vast changes that day will introduce among things small and great. In fact the Lord will set Himself then to do everything here below in a way and to an extent suitable to His own glory. To my mind, there is no ground apparent for drawing the line of exceptions. Jehovah's exaltation to the exclusion of the first Adam has the widest application -- all by which man has sought to set himself up, and gain glory and delight -- yes, everything.

There is to be the shaking of the heavens and the earth, with the immense accompaniments and consequences of an act so solemn and unique. The day of Jehovah strikingly combines two things: that God will deal with the immense bounds of creation, the heavens and the earth, at the same time that He will stoop to deal with the pettiest fripperies of men and women. We are apt to connect the judgment of God only with things on a great scale, if indeed men think at all of the judgment of the quick. To counteract an impression so opposed to scripture I draw attention to this. Nothing will escape His eye and hand.

But then there will be moral changes of moment and of the highest interest, as here we read that

> Many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares. {Micah 4:2, 3}

Such, according to the Bible, is the reign of peace then, and not before. All attempts of peace societies meanwhile are at best an amiable illusion, at worst an infidel confidence in man, always ignorance of God's word. They may possibly influence in isolated cases, though it may be doubted whether when kings or statesmen or countries have made up their minds to a policy which enlists general sympathy within their own spheres and with means adequate at their disposal, any such theories or sentiments will avail to hinder. It is certain that wars have their roots in the passions and lust of man: to escape the bad fruit you must first make the tree good. But the day of Jehovah will deal with man in righteousness and power, and peace will result according to His mind and glory.

Besides there will be outward plenty. A thought full of comfort it is that the day is coming when the earth with every creature of God shall yield its increase, not now the poor and stunted growth of hill and dale, but teeming harvests and rich fruits and flowers of sweetest odor and varied beauty in form or hue, which, if they show the hand of God now, as they surely do, nevertheless confess the blighting fall and curse in decay and death. Disappointment and sorrow meet one everywhere: scripture is plain as to both the cause and the effects. But it is equally plain that a Deliverer is coming for that day {Micah 4:6},

> they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of Jehovah of hosts hath spoken it {Micah 4:4}.

What is weightier still morally, there will be a cessation of idolatry,

> For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of Jehovah our God for ever and ever. In that day, saith Jehovah, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted {Micah 4:5, 6}.

This is the Jewish people.

> And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her dominion they possessed then, for every Jew looked back wistfully to those bright days. They will return again, and yet more, under a greater than David or Solomon.
Meanwhile they taste sorrow, for Jehovah will surely deal in discipline with His people. He will not take them up and re-establish them without moral exercises and a deep spiritual process in their souls. This is now described. Also many nations shall be gathered. Not only will there be a question of sin raised in the breast of every Israelite then to be saved, but there will be outward distress under the retributive hand of God, when the nations gather with the thought to defile and destroy Zion. But Jehovah says,

They know not the thoughts of Jehovah, neither understand they his counsel; for he shall gather them as sheaves into the floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thin horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many people [many nations], and I will consecrate their gain unto Jehovah, and their substance unto Jehovah of the whole earth. Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us [Micah 4:12–5:1];

that is, against the Jew. It is the Assyrian who will then come up -- the last king of the north.

He hath laid siege against us.

There is to be a future siege of Jerusalem when the Jews return in unbelief unto their land and God is beginning to work in some of their hearts.

He hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek [Micah 5:1].

The Jews once despised and insulted, rejected and crucified the Lord of glory, their own Messiah; and this is what brings in the wonderful prophecy that follows:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel [Micah 5:2].

This is the judge of Israel already spoken of. Thus the second verse is unequivocally a parenthetic description of who this judge of Israel is. Though there may seem to be remarkable abruptness in the way it is introduced here, it is scarcely possible to doubt that what has been already explained gives the object and accounts for the manner of the prophet, and is the key to the passage. Why is it that the Lord allows the last siege of Jerusalem? He says it is because of their conduct towards their ruler and judge. Who was the judge? He was born in Bethlehem, but not this only, for

his goings forth have been of old from everlasting [Micah 5:2].

He was a divine person. He in grace became a babe in Bethlehem; but He was Jehovah the true God of Israel. Then follows the conclusion of the sentence begun in the first verse.

Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel [Micah 5:3].

It is Zion which travaileth.

This is a most important statement to understand. When Christ, the judge of Israel, came the first time, they would not have Him, but contumeliously refused Him. The consequence of His death on the cross was that God raised Him from the dead, and He went up in due season to heaven. Christ ascended to the right hand of God, and there He began a new work, namely, the calling out of a heavenly people to share His portion on high. This is what is going on now. If we have Christ at all, we have Christ for heavenly glory; that is, a Christian has; and this is what we are if we have any living portion in Christ. But then He means to have an earthly people by and by, and consequently in the midst of this final siege of Jerusalem the judge of Israel will re-appear. He has given them up for the time because of their unbelief and rejection of Himself; but He does not give up for ever.

The gifts and calling of God are without repentance [Rom. 11:29].

As sure as He chose that people of old, He will renew His links with them by and by. But they are none the less allowed to suffer the consequences of their own mad and wicked rejection of the Messiah meanwhile; and when He comes back again, it will be in the midst of their bitterest sorrows. Under such circumstances she that travails will bring forth.

The end of her pangs will come through His grace, and the morning without clouds shall succeed the long night. Oh, how deep will be the joy when He whom they had rejected of old is once more restored to them, the Judge of Israel! when, instead of taking Jews out of their Israelitish position to bring them into the church of God begun at Pentecost and going on ever since, the remnant of His brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. They go back to their Jewish hopes. Such is the meaning of the third verse. The remnant of His brethren, instead of being taken out of their old associations and made Christians as now, will resume their place as children of Israel. For the earthly blessing, according to prophecy, there is nothing more important. It is impossible for a man to understand the verse, or expound it properly, who does not see the difference between the heavenly calling now and the earthly calling by and by. This is the reason why the Fathers felt such a difficulty, and went so far astray; for not one of them believed in the restoration of Israel; yet some of them had a measure of light; but they all slipped into the groundless conceit that the Gentile has displaced the Jew permanently, and the church and Israel are to be under the glorious reign of Christ on earth, I may say, jumbled strangely together. That is, it was the most incongruous mixture of heavenly and earthly things that can be imagined.

But the revealed truth is that the heavenly people will be on high, and the earthly people on the earth. All is
perfect order in the mind of God as usual; and when the Lord will have finished His heavenly work He will come back as Judge of Israel. He is now Head of the church. On earth He will be the Messiah of the Jews, who will then resume their own earthly standing, instead of being absorbed into the church, as believers from among them are now. Next, we are told that

he shall stand and feed in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah his God; and they shall abide.

Thus the Jews, instead of being swept out of their land, shall be once more settled in it;

for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth {Micah 5:4}.

All their strength depends on His greatness.

And this man shall be the peace.

He that is our peace in heaven shall be their peace on earth.

This man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land {Micah 5:5}.

How plain that the Assyrian is to re-appear for the final dealings of Jehovah at the end of this age, and even at the beginning of the new age! It confirms what we saw in Isaiah. Jehovah will have renewed His connection with Israel when the Assyrian comes up to meet his doom -- the head of the combined nations in the great confederacy which is broken just before the millennium.

Then we have this description pursued.

And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from Jehovah, as the showers upon the grass, that tarryeth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men {Micah 5:7}.

They shall bring fulness of comfort for the earth; but besides that they are to be as a lion. Now the church may and ought to be like dew, but I do not think -- nay am sure - - they are never called to be like a lion. Assuredly it would be hard for the most sprightly of popular preachers to elicit any tolerable spiritual significance out of the figure so as to suit the church. The truth is, if we take the word of God as He has given it, all is plain; Israel are once more in question, for they will be charged with a judicial task on earth.

And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off.

And it shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots: And I will cut off the cities of thy land, and throw down all thy strong holds {Micah 5:8-11}.

Graven images are to be destroyed, and vengeance taken on the heathen, such as they have not heard.

Then comes the conclusion of the prophecy. The first portion of it {Micah 6} is in part a most solemn pleading of Jehovah.

Hear ye now what Jehovah saith; Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, Jehovah’s controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for Jehovah hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto thee? {Micah 6:1-3}.

Jehovah appeals to their own feelings of what is right.

O my people, what have I done unto thee? Wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me. For I have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam {Micah 6:3, 4}.

Had He ever been but the same God?

And then the answer comes.

O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of Jehovah. Wherewith shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? {Micah 6:5-8}.

Very far from this was Israel’s walk.

But nobody does so until he is brought in as a converted soul and receives the grace of God in Christ. It is impossible to act justly and to be really humble before God, until we have turned to Him in faith, though we may not yet have seen our sins covered by His grace, nor by any means clearly know that He will not impute iniquity to us. There is a real repentance wrought in the soul first; and Israel will be brought into this. It is faith which produces real repentance and true humility; where faith was not, we find to the end of the chapter the solemn proof of evil manifested in both people and king. Then the prophet takes the place of intercession.

Woe is me!

says he,

for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat: my soul desired the first-ripe fruit.

The good man is perished {Micah 7:1, 2}.

It is a plaint of the prophet which passes at length into a
prayer. Then he describes in the most striking manner the fearful rupture of all bonds and the treachery prevalent among the Jews.

Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide; keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoreth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man’s enemies are the men of his own house {Micah 7:5, 6}.

It is a solemn thought that these are the words that Jesus applies to the effect of His message of the kingdom. What an awful proof of man’s evil that the state of things which will bring God’s final judgment of the Jew at the end is that which the Lord prepares the disciples to expect as the effect where this gospel is preached now. Nothing brings out the malice of the heart so much as the pressure of God’s grace on men; nor does anything else expose a man to so much contempt or hatred; yet it is returning evil and nothing but evil for the greatest good that God ever gave man on the earth. Thus then the Christian ought to know all through his course on earth, as the godly Jew will know in the last day, what Micah shows us here. We anticipate everything as having Christ. We know the good in God and we know the evil in man even now. The Jew will have to learn it by and by, waiting a special time; the Christian knows it at all times, if faithful to Christ and the truth.

Then the prophet breaks out in noble words, warning the enemy not to rejoice, for Jehovah is going to espouse the cause of His people. Grant that they do not deserve it; but Jehovah is going to do it for His own mercy and word’s sake. Accordingly we have

The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of Jehovah our God, and shall fear because of thee {Micah 7:16, 17}.

The prophecy ends with the expression of his soul’s delight in the forgiving grace of God to His ancient people. All the good He will do in the latter day is but the accomplishment of what He promised from the first: so blessed are the ways of God from beginning to end. He is the unchanging Jehovah spite of all the changes of His people.
Singular was the reproach of the Jews in the time of our Lord (John 7:52); for there were prophets who had arisen out of Galilee. Jonah and Nahum were both Galileans. There is nothing in which men are apt to be so blind as in reading the Bible; and even the facts of scripture are too commonly passed over with greater carelessness than those of any other book. People readily forget what it does not suit them to remember.

“Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,
Quam quae sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, et quae
Ipse sibi tradit spectator.”

Affections too govern the judgment. Hence the tendency to forget the plainest facts, and to find some artificial means of exalting whatever to our minds takes the highest place in religious matters. As once by God’s appointment Jerusalem had such a place, the Jews spite of their reversed sentence were striving hard to exaggerate whatever invested it with halo, and to deny what God had wrought elsewhere. But God loves to work in unexpected grace; and hence I do not doubt that there was a fitness in the call of these two prophets, both of them having to do with Nineveh. Galilee was a district which both bordered on the Gentiles, and had not a few dwelling in its midst. Hence people there, though prejudiced as everywhere, could not but be open to thoughts and exercises of heart about the Gentiles. Nevertheless, as we have seen in Jonah, there might be a feeling as decidedly Jewish as in any prophet that God ever raised up even in Jerusalem itself.

First of all Nahum brings before us the character of God in remarkably vivid terms, and indeed with a majesty of utterance most suitable to the subject God entrusted to him.

The burden of Nineveh {Nah. 1:1}

means the heavy sentence of God against that famous city, a phrase customary in the prophets. In Isaiah we may remember the burden of Babylon, and of one place after another; that is, a strain of judgment which was therefore called a burden.

The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. A God jealous and avenging is Jehovah; Jehovah revengeth, and is furious; Jehovah will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. Jehovah is slow to anger {Nah. 1:1-3}.

Are we not all of us apt to set these things against one another? But it is not so in truth; for the stronger the feeling of God against that which destroys His own glory, the more worthy is it that He should be slow to act on His indignation, as we should be for quite different reasons. Indeed slowness to anger is ordinarily the proof of moral greatness, though there are extreme cases where waiting would bespeak want of right feeling. Scripture shows us both the rule and the exceptions. Not that it is of God or even of man that there should be slowness to feel; but to act on feeling is another thing. I am persuaded that the more there is the sense of the presence of God, and of what becomes Him, and consequently of what becomes us who are His children -- to have the interest of His kingdom at heart, and also the sense of His honor dear to us, yea, dearer to us than any other consideration -- so much the more ought we to cultivate in presence of evil a patient spirit.

Yet is it certain that anger in the true and godly sense of abhorrence of evil formed part of the moral nature of our Lord Jesus. There is no greater fallacy of modern times among not a few Christians than the exclusion of holy anger from that which is morally perfect. Our Lord Jesus on one occasion looked round about with anger; on another He used a scourge of small cords with indignation; so also He thundered from time to time at religious hypocrites who stood high in popular estimation. The Christian who does not share such feelings is altogether wanting in what is of God, and also in what becomes a man of God. I grant you that anger is too apt to take a personal shape, and consequently to slide into vindictive as well as wounded feeling. It is not necessary for me to say that there was an entire absence of this in our Lord Jesus. He came to do the will of God; He never did anything but that will -- not only what was consistent with it, but only that. But for this very reason He too was slow, not of course to form a judgment, but to execute it on man; indeed, as we know, He refused it absolutely when here below. He could await the due time. God was then displaying His grace, and, as part of His grace, His long-suffering in the midst of evil. And there is nothing finer, nothing more truly of God, than this display of grace in patience.

Here too it seems a remarkable feature that, even when the prophet proclaims the approaching judgment of God, he takes such particular pains to assert, not only the certainty of His avenging Himself on His adversaries, but His slowness to anger.

Jehovah is slow to anger, and great in power, and
will not at all acquit [the wicked]: Jehovah hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet {Nah. 1:3}.

It is clear that the expression “holding pure he will not hold pure” is not at all inconsistent with His justifying the believer in Jesus up to that time without God and ungodly. It was not yet the fit and destined occasion to reveal the grace of God in justifying; but even so there is no acquitting any one as wicked. And this it is important to hold clearly. His not imputing iniquity is a very different thing from acquitting. He never acquits the wicked as such. There is no stronger condemnation of wickedness than when He does not impute iniquity, because the ground of His not imputing iniquity to the believer is that He has not only imputed it, but dealt with it according to His own horror of evil and just judgment of all in the cross of Christ. More manifestly when it is a question, as here, not of His grace but of His righteous government on earth, it always remains true that God does not treat the wicked as innocent.

Now the believer has to imitate the character of God; for we must remember that it is our point as Christians. Anything else becomes self-righteousness. But there is nothing more important than being true to the character of God, who is our Father, whose nature we have now, who has revealed Himself perfectly in Christ. And we find this most beautifully in His servant Paul, who puts patience above all the other signs of an apostle. It is as eminently Christ-like as any quality manward. There is nothing that more thoroughly shows superiority to all that Satan can do. It had of course also a more trying character in the midst of those who should have known better, as, for instance, among the Corinthians. For they were souls which took the place of serving the Lord and bore His name; but it is exactly to them he says that truly the signs of an apostle were shown by him in all patience. He brings in afterwards in their place miracles and extraordinary revelations; but patience takes precedence, and justly so, because it supposes evil and this in power, and nevertheless proves superior to it. How can you deal with a man whom nothing can overthrow, and who, no matter what you do or he may suffer, cannot be driven from the line of Christ? Now this, I think, is exactly what shone in Paul so very conspicuously. No doubt there were qualities from the Spirit’s operation most blessed and refreshing in Peter, John, Barnabas, and in others, whether apostles or not; but I do not think anyone approached Paul in the draught made upon his patience in circumstances calculated to try to the uttermost, and provoke to the quick. Although Paul had like passions with the rest, still there was such a sense of Christ as made him thus practically more than conqueror.

So here, in respect of His government of man on earth, Jehovah is revealed in certain qualities; and this is to be heeded, because Jehovah is that special revelation of God, which was meant for His people as one who governed them. Even so He was slow to anger and great in power, and would not at all hold as guiltless. Jehovah hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him {Nah. 1:3-5}:

of course a figure, the word mountains being used to indicate the great seats of power on earth.

The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him {Nah. 1:5, 6}.

But this is not all.

Jehovah is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble {Nah. 1:7}.

Now we come to that which is in relation to the righteous. He is patient even as respects the wicked, whom He will finally judge, but He has given a strong hold.

He knoweth them that trust in him. But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies {Nah. 1:7, 8}.

Then comes a challenge.

What do ye imagine against Jehovah? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time {Nah. 1:9}.

There may be perhaps an allusion here to a blow which had already fallen on the Assyrian.

Affliction shall not rise up the second time: for while they be folded together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry {Nah. 1:9, 10}.

But we must bear in mind that the Spirit of prophecy sees and declares things that are not as though they were. I have therefore said “perhaps;” for either way the believer need feel no difficulty. The destruction of Nineveh by Cyaxares and Nabopolassar is generally put B.C. 625; as Nahum is by most considered to have flourished near a century before. After this comes a direct allusion to the enemy, which draws out this magnificent description.

There is one come out of thee that imagineth evil against Jehovah, a wicked counsellor. Thus saith Jehovah; Though they be complete, and ever so many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass away {Nah. 1:11, 12}.

It is thus plain that there are two elements God has combined in these revelations -- the judgment on the one hand of what was wrong in His own people, and on the other of merciless adversaries, who knew not the gracious purpose of God to chasten His people. He would not leave
them unpunished; but could He permit a full end? Thus on the one hand the chastening was measured, and its end was according to the goodness of God. On the other hand, God lets the adversary pour out without scruple or bound hatred on His people; but He does not merely use their animosity against them for the good of His own people, and for the punishment of their unfaithfulness, but would surely turn on the malignant foe when His purpose was accomplished. For does God sanction implacable hatred of Israel? utter indifference not to pity only but righteousness, nay, contempt and pride against Himself? turning the fact that God permitted them so to ravage the land and people of Israel into a delusion that there was no God at all, or that they had gained an advantage against the true God? Jehovah accordingly would righteously turn round on the adversaries and destroy them, as surely as He had used them in the first instance to deal with what was faulty in Israel. This we may find everywhere in the prophets, and in none more conspicuously than in the use made of the Assyrian. Nahum also looks like the rest to the end.

Thus the first blow was, I suppose, Sennacherib; the second would be not from the threatening of the Assyrian rebuked but the destruction of Nineveh; and the destruction of Nineveh is the type of the final judgment of the great Assyrian in the last days, the king of the north.

Though Jehovah had broken down Israel by the enemy for their good, there would be no such trouble more. The passage looking onward to the end:

 Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more. For now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder. And Jehovah hath given a commandment concerning thee {Nah. 1:12-14},

now He turns to the Assyrian, and addresses him,

Jehovah hath given a command concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown. Out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image: I will make [it] thy grave; for thou art vile {Nah. 1:14}.

I think that

thee in Nah. 1:12 means Israel, and in Nah. 1:13 means the Assyrian. Hence Jehovah is represented as addressing each personally in turn.

Then in the last verse, or, as some prefer, forming the beginning of the second chapter, the chapter is wound up by the beautiful words,

Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! {Nah. 1:15}

for the judgment of the Assyrian will be the established peace of Israel, and the proclamation of it everywhere when Jehovah shall have completed His full work in Jerusalem. That is, when the moral work is complete there, He will do His last deed of judgment in principle on the Assyrian, and then will come the reign of peace, of which there is the announcement here.

It would appear that Israelites will go out to the nations with the testimony of the kingdom after the destruction of the Assyrian and their settlement in the land. Thus the word of Jehovah will spread far and wide, backed by the power which has interfered on behalf of His people so conspicuously. For the knowledge of Jehovah and of His glory is to cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea; and Israel will be the messengers of it among the nations. There will be, I think, a Jewish testimony both before and after they are settled in the land. It appears clear that there will be an active preaching during the period between the rapture of the saints and their appearing with Christ from heaven in glory; but there is ground to believe this will not be given up though its form may change, after the Lord will have come.

For be it observed that there are two great transitions in prophecy, which are apt to be confounded in many minds, and yet must be distinguished in order to have anything like a grasp of the subject. There is a transition after Christ takes saints to meet Him above, before He displays Himself and destroys antichrist; that is between the translation of those destined to heavenly glory, and the manifestation of the Lord and His own before the world. During this time when providential judgments fall on guilty Christendom, the Lord is mainly occupied, as far as the earth is concerned, with preparing a remnant of the Jews, some of whom will be put to death, afterwards by grace to be raised up in the first resurrection. Having suffered with Christ, they shall reign together. This is the invariable principle of God. But others who will not suffer thus will be delivered, and have a distinguished place of honor in the kingdom on earth. But when the Lord shall have appeared and destroyed the beast with the false prophet, and their adherents Jewish or Gentile, there will be another transition in which Jehovah will have set the ten tribes in due order, as He had done for the two tribes in the first transition, when in fact He will reunite and re-establish the people as a whole. Thus the two transitions have mainly for their object the setting right, first the Jews as such, and next Ephraim, making finally the two sticks one in His hand (Ezek. 37), and the destruction of the Assyrian holds a similar relation to the ten tribes that the destruction of antichrist does to the two. The one is before He shall have appeared; the other is the interval that takes place after He has appeared, but before He establishes the millennial reign of peace, properly so called. There will be the public message given and heard. It will be still a time of proclamation before all is fully accomplished.

But further, in the millennium, I think the Jews specially will go out to the nations with the word of Jehovah (Isa. 2; Micah 4). No doubt glory will be manifest in the land of Israel, but still there will be a certain testimony, I suppose, for the conversion of the nations (Isa. 66). Of this there would seem to be little doubt. There will be, particularly during the period of the second transition, as
well as during the first. The first will have
giving the gospel of the kingdom
going out; but there seems to be a further message.
Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that
bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O 
Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows

Israel may not be fully gathered; –
for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he
is utterly cut off (Nah. 1:15).

Thus if all be not yet established in peace as far as the
whole people are concerned, the fall of the last Assyrian
is the sign of stable peace ensuing. (Compare Micah 5:5.)

There is another passage which refers to something like
the ministry of the heavenly saints. The nations shall walk
in the light.

The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the
nations (Rev. 22:2).

I have not the slightest doubt that the glorified saints will
exercise a beneficent action or ministry of grace over the
world in general, although the light of the heavenly state
may be more general, perhaps, than this. The leaves of the
tree seem to represent special means that the Lord will use
for the healthful condition of men on the earth during the
millennium; the fruit is, so to speak figuratively, for lips of
heavenly taste.

In Nahum 2, 3, we have very distinctly and fully the
prime object of the prophecy of Nahum, to which the first
chapter is a preface, though in the latter part of it quite
without reference to the direct subject-matter, namely, the
Assyrian. But now the great city comes most prominently
before us.

He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face:
keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins
strong, fortify thy power mightily (Nah. 2:1).

The challenge is forthwith given to Nineveh to defend
herself as best she may; for there is the utmost danger
staring her in the face.

For Jehovah hath turned away the excellency of
Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers
have emptied them out, and marred their vine
branches (Nah. 2:2).

Thus we see the collateral subject, namely, the judgment of
Israel by their enemies; but inasmuch as the Assyrians
executed that judgment in such a way as to insult God
Himself, and not only to chasten His guilty people, they
must be prepared for their own doom. Thus we see the
combined truth brought before us -- the destruction of
Nineveh, but not apart from the discipline of Israel. Jehovah
does judge Israel, and if He judges His own people who had
at any rate the knowledge and after a larger measure the
responsibility of righteousness, how must the ungodly and
the sinner appear? Nineveh had been a godless city which
had no thought nor care, still less formal profession, of
doing the will of God. But the people of Israel had, and they
suffered the consequence.

Here follows the most animated description of the
preparations of the Ninevites to defend themselves against
their enemies. Historically the foes that destroyed Nineveh
were, as is known, the Medes; and though there is little
information in human history about the circumstances, it
appears certain that Babylon helped. Though a city as old if
not older than Nineveh, it was not until God had
overthrown Assyria and Egypt that Babylon was permitted
to leave the background. It was hundreds of years, like an
animal in training, kept in the leash till the right moment
arrived, when it shot forth beyond all competitors. Other
cities or races might show a speedier maturity; but Babylon
in due time, after having been thus held in check from
remote antiquity, was brought out into the first place of
imperial supremacy in this world. Nineveh was the capital
of Assyria, which was quite a distinct power.

As to all this it will be found, I think, that the heathen
authors are a mass of confusion; and there cannot be a
greater contrast in early history than the precision of
scripture and the blundering of the best lights of Pagan
antiquity as to these powers. The ignorance even of the
Greeks is something astonishing. The celebrated Xenophon
passed within a few miles of the city of Nineveh, but does
not seem to have known anything about it. He shows the
greatest want of acquaintance with such facts before his day.
Possibly he stumbled on some of the outworks of Nineveh
without knowing it. He calls it merely a Median city,
erected in later times no doubt out of some remains of
ancient Nineveh. I merely mention this to show what a
wonderful book the Bible is, even as a book, and how
deeply we are indebted to God. The man who uses the Bible
with simplicity will have the certainty of knowledge not
merely of divine things, but even of the nations of the
world, with which not all the books that ever were written
outside the Bible could supply him. In fact, one of the worst
historians in point of trustworthiness was a man who ought
to have known best, if knowledge depended on long
residence in the east (as physician to Artaxerxes Mmemon);
but he is almost a fabulist, and his intermingling of what
was intended to hide the dishonor of the Assyrians and to
exalt the greatness of his Persian master led him, if not to
falsify, certainly to propagate the Persian view of their
policy, habits, &c. This naturally misled others, as for
instance historians of note who wrote on this subject at a
later day adopted some extravagant errors of this man.
Ctesias was the name of the physician; and Diodorus
Scilicus followed suite. He consequently has given us a
statement of alleged facts which can be disproved by other
writers of antiquity. The consequence is that the Greeks
who were the nearest, and the Romans who usually
followed the Greeks, are in the greatest confusion on this
head; and hence those who are trained in subjection to the
classics, and taught to look up to these historians as
authorities on the subject, are led astray. Who are more
confused in these matters than men of letters? The reason is
because they look up to such as were themselves in the dark. Hence all these authors are apt to confound Assyria with Babylon. Never will any distinct light be enjoyed, as far as we may speak of others, in any ancient human historian on this subject; but the divine light, when used firmly, enables us to sift out remarkable confirmations.

Were there an adequate examination of Gen. 10 we might gain not a little historically from its copious early details, and be shown the different lines that penetrated through the earth, tracing them forward to their ultimate developments. It would be of considerable interest, but would require a goodly volume to itself. It is certain that there is unerring light in scripture and nothing else; but it may be doubted much whether a continuous history could be made of a genealogical line. This would be just the difficulty. Completeness men would like, if it could be; but I do not think it is according to what may be called the moral system of the word of God to give that kind of unbroken continuity. Thus, even in the life of our Lord Jesus, it would be an exceedingly precarious task to form out of the four Gospels a continuous history of the ministry of Christ. I have not the slightest doubt that everything stated there is exactly and divinely true; that is, it is not merely true according to man’s observation, but according to God’s perfect knowledge of all the facts; yet for this very reason it is much above man, as also it is on a different principle from man’s; for there is no thought of continuity in the Gospels, but only of facts selected for a moral purpose. I suppose it is the same thing in the glimpses of the Old Testament history: first, the beginning, the sources; next, perhaps after hundreds of years, another glance at their collision with Israel, and then finally the judgment, which concludes all.

I conceive that the great object of scripture is to show us the sources in order to compare them with the final scene and not with the continuous line between, this being the proper work of history. Hence would be just the difficulty of the matter; but it is a difficulty in the main due to the want of historic materials found outside the Bible. Undoubtedly Damascus is mentioned in an early part of Genesis, and is frequently referred to in the time of David, and at various other epochs of scripture. Thus it is one of the oldest cities in the world, and on the other hand it is a city flourishing now in a certain way. Again, several of the primate cities in Gen. 10 have been identified within the last few years; and of course it would have its interest, more or less, to point this out clearly with the proofs of each. At the same time it would be a task of considerable delicacy, and of enormous labor, even supposing it possible, to do it well.

The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken. The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall justle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings. He shall recount his worthies: they shall stumble in their walk; they shall make haste to the wall thereof, and the defense shall be prepared. The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved {Nah. 2:3-6}.

This is certainly a striking picture of the last scenes; for it is not only that we have minutely enough that which recent discoveries have shown as to the abundance of scarlet and of chariots, and all the preparation of war which was characteristic of Nineveh, but the manner in which Nineveh was to fall is most vividly and exactly foreshown; and the more so because of its contrast with, as well as resemblance to, Babylon; for the city in the plain of Shinar was a capital not inferior in extent, and even superior in magnificence, to Nineveh; both being built upon famous rivers -- rivers of Paradise. Nevertheless, although both were typical, and the fall of the one like that of the other has in either case a most important character (Babylon even more than Nineveh), and the river in each played a very important element in the capture of the two cities, yet there is a contrast quite as much as a resemblance. For the special means of the destruction of Babylon was by laying the bed of the river dry by turning the river off; whereas the crisis which led directly towards the destruction of Nineveh was the irruption of the river in -- not turning it out. This was surely remarkable; at the same time it convicts of singular dulness those who failed to see the differences clearly. The whole is a good lesson for human nature, and no unimportant hint for us to read the word of God a little more closely. He who wrote scripture had no difficulty. It was all as plain as possible to Him. The real obstacle does not arise in general from its language, save in very exceptional cases, but from our own slowness of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

The gates of the rivers shall be opened -- not merely the gates of the city. A gate of the city was opened in the case of Babylon; and we know the splendid description of it in Isaiah, with its doors of brass and bars of iron, which must yield to righteousness from the east; for God called Cyrus to his foot, and gave kings as the dust of his sword, as driven stubble to his bow. When the moment came, the difficulty vanished, and the Persians entered the imperial city through the dried bed of the Euphrates, which was turned into another channel. Thus the doors were opened for the rest, when the drunken guards were despatched. But in the case of Nineveh it was the waters of the river which dissolved the palatial dwellings and defenses. It was not the place taken by an army which stealthily crept up the emptied bed of the river, and then let in the main body through the gates. The converse of this happened to Nineveh. The Euphrates was turned off from Babylon, but the Tigris burst its bounds and swamped and otherwise destroyed a vast portion of Nineveh; so that the very foundations, and not the walls only, were swept away. In vain then does the king summon his nobles: they stumble in their march; they hasten to the wall; and the defense is prepared. The flood-gates are opened, and the palace is
dissolved.

And Huzzab shall be led away captive, she shall be brought up, and her maids shall lead her as with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts. But Nineveh is of old like a pool of water: yet they shall flee away. Stand, stand, shall they cry; but none shall look back. Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture. She is empty, and void, and waste: and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and much pain is in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness {Nah. 2:7-10}.

That is, all the vast store of what contributes to the pride of life, all that ministered to selfish enjoyment and vanity, was now shown to be so much laid up for the conquerors -- so much gathered together for utter destruction, if not carried away by the captors. Such indeed is the history of man generally.

Then comes the prophet’s exultation over the city that had been the terror of Israel, the old enemy that had triumphed over them so haughtily and persistently; for Assyria was the principal enemy which God had used in the days of the kings to check or crush the pride of His people by their own pride.

Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feeding-place of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion’s whelp, and none made them afraid? {Nah. 2:11}

This is a most animated picture of the lordly place among the nations which Assyria had long possessed up to the moment of its ruin.

The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin. Behold, I am against thee, saith Jehovah of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions; and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard {Nah. 2:12, 13}.

At the same time we must carefully remember that, whatever might be the greatness of Nineveh, and whatever the terror the city inspired among the nations, imperial power never had belonged to it. Those who say so mistake the facts, and confound the position of Assyria with Babylon. It will be found on examination of scripture that Assyria was only the greatest among confederate or independent powers. But this is not the true meaning of an empire, which really means a power that is not only greater than any other, but that keeps the kings and nations as vassals, not simply towering above a crowd of compeers, but rather a lord and master of all others. Such was the position to which Babylon subsequently rose by divine appointment, to which Assyria, like Egypt; had long aspired in vain. The desire was in no way new; the accomplishment was. The old taskmistress of Israel, Egypt, would have liked well to have it, and so would the Assyrian, as we find in the prophet Ezekiel. These both strove hard and long for the mastery. They no doubt thought it morally certain that supreme dominion must fall to one or other of the two; and so they sought to the death, Egypt succumbing first, and then Assyria. A power which neither suspected or feared was held in reserve; for it the God of heaven kept the highest place from the beginning. Nebuchadnezzar became the

head of gold {Dan. 2:38}.

Babel was the cradle of the Babylonish empire.

In the last chapter {Nah. 3} says the prophet,

Woe to the bloody city.

Such had Nineveh been to Israel above all,

It is all full of lies and robbery

-- rather violence, the usual twofold form of iniquity.

The prey departeth not {Nah. 3:1}.

The allusion is no doubt to the people carried off and not restored.

Then is given (Nah. 3:2, 3) a most animated sketch of the enemies’ advance to assail and slay.

The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots. The horsemen lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses.

And this carnage and ruin are attributed to the idolatry of Nineveh, and their efforts, too successful, to entice others.

Because of the multitudes of the whoredoms of the wellfavored harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts {Nah. 3:4}.

Next follows the stern condemnation of Jehovah, who once spared but now would have Nineveh know that it was no mere jealousy of others, but His own resolve to disgrace her who had so enjoyed herself and misled others.

Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts; and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will show the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame. And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and will make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazingstock. And it shall come to pass, that all they that shall look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will

105. This word has led to great discussion. On the one hand Gesenius takes it as "and made to flow away;" on the other hand Dr. Henderson prefers, "though firmly established;" both construe it with the preceding phrase. Mr. Leeser translates "And the queen." Ewald among recent Hebraists adheres to Huzzab as the name literal or symbolical of the queen.
bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for thee? {Nah. 3:5-7}.

Nah. 3:8-10 set forth as a warning to Nineveh the awful desolation of the famous No-Amon. This was neither Alexandria nor Egypt, but Thebes with its hundred gates; which was the more pointed because the Assyrians themselves ravaged it both before the prophet’s days and later, till Cambyses caused it to drink the cup of Persian insolence to the dregs.

Art thou better than populous No, that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about it, whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was from the sea? Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite: Put and Lubim were thy helpers. Yet she was carried away, she went into captivity: her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets: and they cast lots for her honorable men, and all her great men were bound in chains {Nah. 3:8-10}.

Then from Nah. 3:11 the prophet addresses Nineveh once more, and declares that she must fare no better.

Thou shalt also be drunken: thou shalt be hid, thou shalt seek strength because of the enemy.

Indeed Nineveh should fall more easily still, as they are told in Nah. 3:12, 13.

All thy strong holds shall be like fig trees with the firstripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater. Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars.

Prepare as they might (and the crisis called for it), fire and sword should take their course over the devoted city.

Draw the waters for the siege, fortify thy strong holds: go into clay, and tread the morter, make strong the brickkiln {Nah. 3:14}.

Merchants, princes, satraps, viceroys, nobles, people, all should vanish, save those who should remain only to sink irreparably.

Like Babylon afterwards, Nineveh is never to reappear as a capital city; but the kind of power which prevailed in the Assyrian and Babylonish monarchies will each have its representative in the last days. At that time the order will be just the converse, as prophecy shows, of what it was in history. And this is a very important means of demonstrating that they are altogether mistaken who think that we have only to do with Babylon and Nineveh in the past. For the fact historically is that Nineveh fell first. Indeed the overthrow of the Assyrian capital was no unimportant step in God’s providence for the remarkable position, unique at that time, into which Babylon was allowed to rise, as Nebuchadnezzar saw in vision and Daniel recalled and expounded according to the sovereign will of the God of heaven. Consequently the order of old was Nineveh towering up into its own place as the chief among a number of distinct powers; then, according to the prophetic warning, it fell utterly as Egypt had done before. Next Babylon was raised by God to be the head of gold, the first great representative of imperial power in the earth. The fall of Babylon, the first which attained such a character, typifies the fall of the last of these imperial powers. The final holder of the system which began with Babylon will be the beast, or Roman empire revived, and in its final apostate state at the end of this age. The beast then answers to the Chaldean monarchy, or Babylon viewed as an imperial power.

I do not mean by it of course Babylon in the Revelation; because this is clearly corrupt ecclesiastical power. But, the last holder of imperial power being typified to a certain extent by the first holder of it, the judgment of the Babylonish empire shadows to no insignificant extent the judgment of the fourth empire in its resuscitated form when it goes to destruction. But it is plain as it is important to observe in the prophetic account of the future, that what answers to Assyria will be after Babylon’s destruction, not before it. In history the fall of Assyria was before Babylon. In the future, according to prophecy, the fall of Assyria will be after the power that represents the imperial system of Babylon. Therefore the distinction between the two excludes controversy for such as read prophecy believingly; and those who contend that all is done with Babylon and Assyria are really without excuse.

The same conclusion results from the very plain words of Isaiah.

O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets {Isa. 10:5, 6}.

That is, the Lord employed him as a means of beating down the pride of Israel.

Howbeit he meaneth not so {Isa. 10:7}.

He only seeks to gratify his own pride. O that Israel had stood for their true boast, even Jehovah, and humbly looked to Him to plead their cause. But no, they sought what the Gentiles sought; and their God gave them up to the haughty and cruel foe. But assuredly if the Lord chastise the faults of His people, He will not fail to punish the overbearing iniquity of His enemies.

But it is in his heart to cut off and destroy nations not a few. For he saith, Are not my princes altogether kings? {Isa. 10:7, 8}.

This he valued, and would have liked yet more, but God did not allow the Assyrian to have all he wished. Supreme dominion was his ambition; but Babylon was given it by the sovereign will of God.

Is not Calno as Carchemish? Is not Hamath as Arpad? Is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose
graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria: shall I not as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? Wherefore it shall come to pass that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith. By the strength of my hand? have done it, and by my wisdom {Isa. 10:9-13}.

This is all recalled for the purpose of clearing as much as possible the final character of the judgment to be executed on the Assyrian. It is when the Lord shall have performed His whole work. Consequently we gather here an important item of divine truth, namely, that the Assyrian (speaking now in a general manner) is the last. It is the closing operation before the millennium in the full sense of the reign of peace, which accordingly is given just after in Isa. 11. But in the description there given we have the introduction by the way of the Antichrist. He is destroyed, as it is said, by the breath of Jehovah’s lips, but the time is not defined like the Assyrian. When we advance a little after we have more. In Isa. 14 for instance it is said,

Jehovah will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land {Isa. 14:1}.

It is now evidently, therefore, a question of settling the people in the land of Palestine, -- not merely a part of them, but the whole. Then follow the standing types of the final enemies of the people. It shall come to pass in the day that Jehovah shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou hast been made to serve, that thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! Jehovah hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath, and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth {Isa. 14:3-6}.

Then we find the earth at rest, and even Hades full of congratulation over the fall of the king of Babylon, -- a highly figurative picture, of course, but as exact as sublime. The empire of Babylon or first beast so far shadows the fourth beast, which was, is not, and shall be present. The beast, as we know, has extremely intimate associations with the Antichrist of St. John; so that it is very difficult indeed to distinguish between these two allies in lawlessness at the end. Prophetic students differ immensely as to this; and I do not wonder at it, because the two are so closely combined in their policy. The main features are these: they both claim to be objects of divine worship, and both play a great and combined part in the great apostasy of the future. The beast is of course the empire of the West, but he is also closely connected with Jerusalem, where the man of sin sits in the temple of God. They are seen as the two beasts in Rev. 13. But the false prophet will be in Jerusalem, whereas the beast’s central seat of power is Rome. Whether he lives there or not, it is not for any man to say; but it is plain enough, no matter where he resides, that he will possess the old capital of imperial Rome, as Jerusalem will be that of apostate religious power. They are therefore so leagued and similar in policy and objects that one must not be surprised if many confound them, though it is not meant that each has not his own distinctive place and dignity in the future crisis.

But the connection of the beasts is so close that the difficulty of drawing the line is often great. Thus many think that the description of Lucifer in Isa. 14 points to Antichrist, whereas it appears really to be the king of Babylon as he is energized by Satan. Nevertheless the most subtle power of Satan will be shown in the false prophet, and not in the beast; but inasmuch as they both work into one another’s hands, it is sometimes a delicate task to discriminate between them. In point of fact they are both judged at the very same instant, both cast alive into the lake of fire together. Therefore, even if somewhat confounded, such a mistake does not matter as to their doom; it is of more consequence when it is a question of their character, work, and usual sphere. But it would seem that the true distinction between them is that the beast is greater politically, and that the false prophet is higher religiously, and that they divide the spoil between them, in this way accommodating each other in their bad eminence and little dreaming of the common doom that awaits them. The beast exalts the false prophet, and the false prophet exalts the beast; and thus they consequently are as friendly as wicked powers can be to each other, Satan being the head of both and employing them variously and together in his efforts against God and His Christ.

In the end of the same chapter, Isa. 14, when the prophet has done with the subtle king of Babylon as the type of the haughty imperial power, we read what it is well particularly to observe:

Jehovah of hosts hath sworn, saying. Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders {Isa. 14:24, 25}.

It is what was promised in Nah. 1:

This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all nations. For Jehovah of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back? {Isa. 14:26, 27}.

I consider therefore that it is plain, both from Isa. 10 and from Isa. 14, that the future fall of the Assyrian is distinct from, and subsequent to, that of the king of Babylon. But beyond doubt in history this was not the case. For in the past the destruction of Nineveh took place before
Nebuchadnezzar became the head of the golden image. The general impression among chronologists is that the fall of Nineveh took place more than six hundred years before Christ. Indeed, if I mistake not, Sir Henry Rawlinson and others are of opinion that it took place nearly twenty years before the commonly assigned date. Even this, however, suffices; and we shall leave the archaeologists to sift the question more fully among themselves. It is a matter of no great moment to my object now. We know that it took place at any rate before Babylon’s supremacy, which was consequently subsequent to either of those dates, and that is the main point, and the only one essential -- a point confessed on all sides. If so, it is surely evident that, if there must be the fall of the king of Babylon, and then the destruction of the Assyrian, it is quite impossible to refer to the past as the complete accomplishment of prophecy.

God has taken particular pains to cast us on the future for the exact fulfilment; and nothing can be more admirable than the perfectness of the word of God in this. It was essential that prophecy should have an accomplishment in the days in which it was written. This was needful for the comfort of the people of God. In order to mark that this was not the whole exhaustive scope of the prophecy, the very order is changed, and yet there is no dwelling on the fact nor an explanation. Thus, we see, God has pity upon His people, and would guard us against the miserable principle of regarding prophecy as little better than an old almanac -- as that which has been accomplished, and is of no direct use longer. The reverse is true. Prophecy has been accomplished; but the most important bearing of its predictions is yet to be in the future.

There is no need of dwelling particularly on the various forms of Nineveh’s wickedness here brought before the mind of the prophetic Spirit.

Thou also shalt be drunken: thou shalt be hid, thou also shalt seek strength because of the enemy. All thy strongholds shall be like fig trees with the firstripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater. Behold, thy people in the midst of them are women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars {Nah. 3:11-13).

So great should be Nineveh’s weakness when the hour struck for her doom.

It seems that even the figure of drunkenness is not without a literal import; for although one may conceive that the charge of drunkenness does in a figurative sense take in that false security in which Nineveh lay, like Babylon afterwards in a later day, yet as a fact it is notorious that there was a surprise at Nineveh during a religious festival of their gods, which may remind us of the infamous feast of Belshazzar the very night that Babylon was taken. Thus there was an unholy revelry, not without either impious honor to their false gods on the one hand, or impious dishonor to the true God on the other hand. In short, a feast with the drunkenness that attended them was bound up with the siege of Nineveh, just as with Babylon’s. But the way so far differed, as the camp of Nineveh seems to have been surprised before the city was taken. Consequently we hear in Nah. 1 how they were caught as thorns folded in drunkenness. All this is described before the account of taking the bloody city. But if such was the case with Nineveh, not so with Babylon: notoriously the drunken feast of King Belshazzar took place on the night when it was taken. At Nineveh the surprise of the camp was without the city before its fall. Thus each has its own peculiar features; and both show the admirable perfectness of the word of God.

Again the interval between the fall of Babylon and that of Nineveh may be set down at less than ninety years in round numbers. The captivity of Israel measures the supremacy of Babylon. This was seventy years; and we may allow a margin of some few years in consequence of the inability of chronologists to settle the exact time when Nineveh fell. It was certainly taken before Nebuchadnezzar acquired his imperial power, and therefore more than six centuries before Christ.

Do what they might, the prophetic sentence is,

There shall the fire devour thee {Nah. 3:15}.

Just so it is a matter of common history that, when the king found he could not defend himself, he set fire to the place himself. It was not the enemies that did it, as in the case of the Chaldean capital. In Babylon the enemy secured the victory in this way, but it was otherwise with Nineveh. Again only a partial fire consumed Babylon, which therefore remained an humbled but proud city long after the days of Alexander the Great, who in fact died there. But the Assyrian city perished then. Nineveh fell, not only never to rise again, but not even to survive in any measure. The hand that chiefly effected its conflagration was that of the unhappy prince who saw the hopelessness of escape, and therefore, surrounding himself with his wives and concubines, his jewels, gold and silver, and every other valuable, set fire in desperation to the whole.

Hence we have this described as regards Nineveh in a way not found in the description of Babylon’s fall.

Draw the waters for the siege, fortify thy strongholds: go into clay, and tread the mortar, make strong the brickkiln.

Alas! no care should avail.

There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the cankerworm; 106 make thyself many as the locusts. 103 Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven: the cankerworm spoileth, and fleeth away. Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, 103 which

106 Some as Dr. Henderson take these as “the licking locust,” “the swarming locust,” and “the largest locust” [literally “locust of locust”] respectively.
camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are. Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria; thy nobles shall lie down {Nah. 3:14-18}.

It is a completeness of ruin for its grandeur unexampled in history.

Thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them. There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is fatal: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually? {Nah. 3:18, 19}.

Nevertheless there is this difference to be seen, that Assyria will certainly have a place in the millennium, and a distinguished place -- not Nineveh indeed but Assyria (Isa. 19). As for Babylon or Chaldea, we never hear of either when the kingdom comes. Jehovah in the midst of His judgment will remember mercy; and Egypt and Assyria are particularly mentioned as having a leading place along with Israel in that day.
Lectures on the Minor Prophets
Lecture 8
Habakkuk

There is no prophetic delivery among the twelve lesser books more peculiar and characteristic than that of Habakkuk. It has no longer the occupation with the enemy as its main feature, although the enemy is referred to; but for its prominent topic we find the soul of the prophet himself, as representing the faithful among the Jews, brought into deep exercises, and indeed a kind of colloquy between God Himself and the prophet, so as to set out not only that which gave him trouble of heart, but also divine comfort, as well as exulting hope into which he was led by the communications of the Spirit of God. We shall see too that the hope proves its divine quality; for there is all that which is calculated to sustain in patient waiting, though there be nothing shown outwardly, save indeed the extreme of earthly trial. Still the prophet rejoices in Jehovah, and counts on as undisturbed possession of all that is promised above every foe, as gazelles enjoy on the heights where no other foot can tread in safety.

The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. O Jehovah, how long shall I cry, and thou dost not hear? even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou dost not save! Why dost thou show me iniquity, and beholdest grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth; for the wicked do compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth {Hab. 1:1-4}.

Hence there is a goodly measure of spiritual resemblance between the short prophecy of Habakkuk and the longer one of Jeremiah. At the same time Habakkuk is no mere imitator. He alludes to the previous prophets as he does to facts in the early history of Israel: so all the prophets did. There was no avoidance sometimes of direct quotation; nay, we have seen that the Spirit led them to adopt and reiterate that which other prophets had said before them. If the consciousness of originality and affluence of thought sometimes enable men to rise superior to the charge of borrowing from a compeer, much more did divine guidance make prophets less careful and sensitive on this head. Vain souls who yearn after and affect original power are too feeble to act candidly and with freedom, and are apt to show extreme jealousy lest they might be thought to make use of another; if they do not, it is to their own loss and that of their readers; for “non omnia possimus omnes.”

Hence in scripture we see the contrary of this weak narrowness. Daniel for instance, who is stamped with a characteristic style of his own from beginning to end, was a diligent student of Jeremiah, and, certainly from no lack of power to express himself, prefers to take up the language of Moses where it suited the Spirit’s purpose. So we saw Micah and Isaiah furnishing important portions not only in thought analogous, but in many respects identical in expression, yet each having its own proper object. Consequently the use which they serve remains characteristic for each, so that the very points of resemblance only strengthen the real difference in the object before the Spirit of God. In fact this is so true of scripture, that whether it be the same writer or a different one (most probably the same), we find in the book of Psalms that two of these compositions are almost word for word alike; and yet I am persuaded that neither could be spared without positive loss, and that the few words which differ between Psa. 14 and Psa. 53 are of the greatest moment to take into consideration if we would rightly divide the word of truth and understand their scope. Consequently while there is instruction in the sameness, there is also the most important key to interpretation by the difference. But almost all this is and must be lost save to those who look carefully into their words separately and as compared with each other, but every word is full of instruction when once clearly seen.

In this way then, although there is a certain spirit of complaint observable at first in Habakkuk as well as in Jeremiah, a burdened sorrowful-stricken spirit, nevertheless we may say of him, as Paul said of himself,

Cast down, but not destroyed [2 Cor. 4:9].

He shows us not sin indeed but infirmity, the infirmity of the earthen vessel; but there is a brilliant testimony in both to the treasure that divine grace put in it.

Here then the prophet groans, but he does what the Jews did not in Hosea -- he groans to God.

O Jehovah, how long shall I cry, and thou hearest not? even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou savest not? {Hab. 1:2}.

Jehovah had other purposes; and if He appears not to hear, and if He does not put forth His arm to save -- for salvation, we must remember, here means by external power, or deliverances shown on the earth, -- if such be not exerted it is always for the accomplishment of better things. We may always count on the perfect goodness of God and the resources of His grace wherever there is faith; for all good

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for failing man is of faith that it might be by grace; and Habakkuk particularly is the prophet who is charged with the mission of giving its due place to faith. But invariably, wherever there is real faith, it must be tried. We find accordingly the trial even before the faith is distinctly in evidence; yet had there not been real faith underneath, we may be perfectly assured there would have been no such putting to the proof.

Hence the very severity of a trial ought to comfort the believer; for the Lord never puts a heavier burden than He gives grace to bear; and therefore it is always an honor to have a trial as far as it goes. It is no honor to slip aside from what God has given us to do or bear. To be unfaithful as a steward is a disgrace in the eyes both of God and man. But Habakkuk’s distress was that there should be such a state of things in the people of God, that He should delay His answer, and that He should not be able morally to put forth salvation in the way of external deliverance I have just now described.

Why dost thou show me iniquity {Hab. 1:3}, if it is so exceedingly distressing? -- iniquity even in the very place where righteousness might have been looked for. It was among the people of God. This the more harassed him. That the Gentiles should be iniquitous was no wonder; that the Jews should be so was a deep trouble to his soul.

For spoiling and violence are before me, he says further;
and there are that raise up strife and contention.
Therefore the law is slackened.
He is speaking of those who had the law and were formally under it.
And judgment doth never go forth.

There was no proper answer to it.
For the wicked doth compass about the righteous;
therefore wrong judgment proceedeth {Hab. 1:3, 4}.

But if man and His people fail, Jehovah answers; He at least heard. Therefore so far there is an immediate appearance of the Lord, though not in the way in which the prophet had looked and yearned for it; but Jehovah must always be above the thoughts of the heart. The foolishness of God, as it is said, is wiser than man, let him put forth his best wisdom.

Jehovah then is here represented as calling on His people to see what He was going to do. Great changes were in progress; greater still in store. The fall of the Assyrian kingdom was a grave and alarming event: so should Egypt and all others who proudly resisted Jehovah’s will and word -- the more strikingly shown when His own people were going to be put down among the rest. So much the worse for the Jew if he believed not what God made known to him beyond all the world.

Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you {Hab. 1:5}.

We see that every chapter throughout the prophecy has for its kernel the folly of unbelief and value of faith. This was quoted by the apostle Paul, and that too among the Jews, when they were in danger of letting slip the blessing because of its very magnitude: so perfectly does the Spirit of God always apply the word even in circumstances which might seem to be unlike.

In Acts 13:38, 39, the apostle applies the passage to the assembled Jews:

Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things.

This was the great emphatic point; first the Man that has brought in by His work that blessing, the forgiveness of sins, the boon of divine mercy to the needy sinner when awakened.

By him all that believe are justified from all things,
-- a precise and full expression though in the simplest elements of the gospel. It is not only the forgiveness of sins, but justified,
which, of course, includes it, but goes farther.

By him all that believe.

Therefore there is the grace that imparts this rich blessing to the feeblest faith, for it is not a question of depth or power but of reality. God is real, and by His grace He gives unlimited blessing to those that are simple and true. This is proved by faith, which honors Him in spite of appearances. It is for all that believe,
says Paul, though all the virtue be by him.

The whole value of redemption stands in Christ, and turns on His work --

By him all that believe.

Yet it is inseparable from the believer. Although faith may have in itself no such quality as could be a meritorious ground for the blessing, nevertheless without faith it is impossible to please God {Heb. 11:6}.

Grace and righteousness are not at issue but in harmony through the cross of Christ. How else could man righteously be blessed, being a sinner before God? Faith takes him out of himself, and brings in all the blessing that comes through another, even through Christ our Lord.

By him all that believe are justified from all things:
Everything here is, as it should be, in fulness -- justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses {Acts 13:39}.

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The state of Israel was clearly one of unrighteousness; law could only condemn. Grace could save through the faith of the Messiah, and save in a deeper way than Habakkuk was permitted to see; for the prophet undoubtedly, as is usual in the Old Testament, looked on salvation largely, though certainly not exclusively, as a deliverance from outward misery and danger by the gracious intervention of God, and not so much to that still more wondrous deliverance which has come in already to faith in a dead and risen Christ. All things around us remain unchanged; the power of evil still goes on. Fraud and oppression are not judged and gone from the world; but there is One who has broken right through the power of evil, and made a way into heaven itself for those who believe on Him. This is Christianity, and of this the apostle is full, though he does not scruple, as we shall see, to apply the prophecy to it on the principle of faith, and according to the divine depth of the written word.

Beware, therefore,
says he, turning to those who refuse the testimony,
lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in nowise believe, though a man declare it unto you {Acts 13:40, 41}.

Now it is very evident that this has a reference to Habakkuk, though I should think not to Habakkuk only. We can easily see the exactness of it.

That which is spoken of in the prophets.
It would seem that Isaiah is referred to as well as Habakkuk, though one need not dwell upon the reasons for the thought just now.

But there is also wisdom in omission; for the prophecy says,
Behold ye among the heathen {Hab. 1:5}.

This might have appeared ambiguous, and capable of being turned aside by the Jew, who would say, “This is exactly our conviction: we all know the heathen to be in a dangerous state; but why overlook the favor of the people of God?” Therefore in the application the direct reference to the heathen is dropped, and all is made pointed and personal to the people themselves; for undoubtedly if God resent despite to His truth and righteousness among the heathen, much more will He judge it among His own people. No prescriptive place given to the Jew can justly be pleaded to preserve them from the consequences of slighting and blaspheming God and His grace. On the contrary, nowhere is judgment so insupportably severe as among those who take the place of the people of God and yet set Jesus at nought. If bad in Israel, it is incomparably worse in Christendom: what is it in this land of Bibles and free preaching?

I do not, it will be seen, contend that the death and resurrection of Christ is explicitly named in our prophet; but that a principle is laid down which covers the work of the Savior. The particular application is left entirely open. We know what the work is which alone could meet the need of guilty man before God. On the surface it is rather the work of judgment which Jehovah had then in hand in raising up the Chaldeans to supreme power, and thereby both destroying Assyria and chastising the Jew sorely. That testimony put the Jew to the test then. Now what is such an object of witness as redemption? Despising it, our Lord teaches (Matt. 22:7), would bring a worse judgment from the Romans. But I am inclined to think that the apostle applies the principle to what God was doing then in grace, in view of a judgment which the Lord will execute at His coming. For no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation. We must not limit it to the past. All is part of an organic whole with Christ and His kingdom for its center. If this be so, it was God who had wrought in Christ, and by the Spirit was still carrying on and out His work, grounded, as we know, on the mighty work of redemption.

As to the latter clause of v. 41 {Acts 13:41}, it refers to the opposition of their will.

A work which ye shall in nowise believe.
It is no question of a decree on God’s part, but of the people’s will against Him, of which He gives them ample notice. I should doubt its being the judicial sentence, but a prophecy used for a solemn warning of what unbelief would render imperative. The judicial aspect in the book of Acts is reserved till Acts 28. There and then it is pronounced. That is, we have the full testimony going out persistently and most patiently; and the more patient God may be with His testimony, the more unsparing the judgment when it comes. But He is slow to anger, as we know, and a strange work to Him is judgment; yet, when it comes, it must surely take its course according to His holy nature and majesty. But it seems to me only pronounced judicially in the last chapter of the Acts. Here it was in progress, as the Jews were being put to the final proof. There was a highly significant act done, and recorded there at the end of this very chapter {Acts 13:51} -- the shaking off the dust from the disciples’ feet; which shows that, although sentence might not formally be pronounced, there was nevertheless a loud testimony to it, and an intimation that they had better beware, for their danger was as extreme as their unbelief.

However, the prophet hears from Jehovah that He was going to raise up the Chaldeans; and this all know was the proximate judgment then impending, though far from being all that awaits the Jew in this way.

For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs {Hab. 1:6}.

They were spoilers whom God employed in His providence for the purpose of breaking down the apostasy of Judah, and also for chastising the pride of other nations.

They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are
more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; and they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it. Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god {Hab. 1:7-11}.

Thus there would be a permitted prevalence of the Chaldean scourge for a certain time; but when they forgot that God was employing them for the purpose of dealing with those who had offended His name and glory, directly they imputed their power not to the sovereign will of God but to the positive influence and agency of their own god, then the true God would take them in hand. Their self-proceeding energy would come to nought just as much as the haughtiness of other nations. This action of the Chaldeans is to be assigned to the moment of their coming up under Nebuchadnezzar down to the overthrow of the Babylonish monarchy. It was then that all should be changed. The culminating point of this outrageous iniquity was the insult that was done to Jehovah by Belshazzar, when they praised their gods in presence of the dishonored vessels of the temple at Jerusalem, as if Jehovah could not preserve His own people before the superior power of their idols, or of Chaldean hands.

Then comes the answer of the prophet to Jehovah’s word.

Art thou not from everlasting, O Jehovah, my God? {Hab. 1:12}

This brings out now a measure of rest to the spirit of the prophet. Now, instead of yielding to the plaintive tone in which he began, he is emboldened to speak plainly of the Chaldeans. He bows in a measure to the wisdom and righteousness of the discipline; and if not complete as yet, we shall find it has its perfect work before he closes. It is of deep interest to mark such progress in the soul, and it is always thus where there is reality. Nothing more painful than when believers settle down in a barely dogmatic statement of truth, or in a monotonous experience from day to day, without gathering fresh strength from the Lord, instead of seeking to turn everything, whether of sorrow or of joy, into a means of a better knowledge of Himself. This is all-important. It is one of the grand differences between law and grace. According to law you have demands and directions all definitely out, and it is not in the nature of law to produce increase in acquaintance with the divine mind; whereas as surely as grace takes its way, souls grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ {2 Pet. 3:18}, --

increasing,

as it is said,

by the knowledge of God {Col. 1:10}.

Just so is it with the prophet here.

Art thou not from everlasting, O Jehovah my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O Jehovah, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction {Hab. 1:12},

the Chaldeans. There is but little said about their history. They were brought out fully as a scourge; and this is clearly set forth; but it cannot be without God’s taking them in hand in the end. All was measured. His mercy always measured the trial where His people must needs come under a chastening. How blessed that even those self-assertive Chaldeans with an unexampled energy of man should nevertheless be but employed of God for the correction of His own grievously failing people! This is what comforted the prophet at length as he weighs it all.

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.

He evidently refers to language used elsewhere, as early as Job, but still with an entirely new application.

Therefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? {Hab. 1:13}.

For after all this is what drew out the prophet’s heart -- that the people of God, let their faults be what they might, contained whatever was righteous at that time on the earth, and that these Chaldeans, raised up to humble the Jews, were as merciless in their dealings with them as they were forgetful and contemptuous toward God Himself.

And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad {Hab. 1:14, 15}.

But as Jehovah told the prophet that they should offend, imputing this very power to their god, so the prophet tells Jehovah,

Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous {Hab. 1:16}.

We see how skilfully he turns the little word that Jehovah had given him as a groundwork now to plead reasons why He should not spare these ruthless enemies of Himself and His people. Nothing can be more beautiful than the way in which a single eye -- an eye that knows the love God has to His own people and above all to Christ Himself -- lays hold of the suitable truth and employs it in the interests of the needy who cleave to His name.

Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations {Hab. 1:17}.

Will Jehovah allow them then to go on in this unsparing way? It cannot be. But the issue must be waited for.

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I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved {Hab. 2:1}. This closes the matter. I do not know why this verse should be dislocated from Hab. 1, which it naturally closes. It is the conclusion of the question which had so sorely tried his spirit at first; not so much looking to events in providence but to see what Jehovah will say. There does not seem the least real ground for the hypothesis of a late writer who will have it that the prophet wrote Hab. 1 under Jehoiakim, Hab. 2 under Jehoiachin, and Hab. 3 under Zedekiah. Such a scheme breaks up an admirably connected whole.

Jehovah replies to the prophet in Hab. 2:2].

And Jehovah answered and said, Write the vision and make it plain upon the tables, that he may run that readeth it. There is but one reason why it seems to me that it may be taken with the first verse: namely, that it is a plain allusion to what the prophet had just before uttered; but still we must always bear in mind that, except in the Psalms and in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the division of chapters is not divine, but merely according to the judgment of men. The Psalms are by inspired authority written separately one from another; and, again, they appear to be divinely grouped in the order in which we find them. Jeremiah in a somewhat similar way has a peculiar internal construction, which proves that God divided the Lamentations practically as we see in our common English version. But with all the rest of the Bible, Old and New Testament, spiritual judgment alone can discern where the divisions ought to be made; and the manner in which much of it was made might prepare us for not the happiest results. The distribution into verses is said to have been done during a journey on horseback by a printer, of learning, no doubt, but possessed of no such qualities of a higher order as one could consider requisite for anything like a satisfactory execution of so delicate a task. It certainly will not be pretended by competent judges that either the person or the manner was at all favorable to a judicious dealing with the word of God. I think it would have been better done on one’s knees in the closet, than \textit{inter equitandum} from Paris to Lyons. \footnote{107} However so it has too often fared with the word of God, though it claims and needs a holy and reverent attitude beyond all other books. Is it too much to say that no book in the world has met with such unworthy usage at the hands of man? On the other hand never has God shown Himself so truly and fully as in the way in which He gave it and watched over it, spite of faithless guardians to whose responsibility it was entrusted.

Jehovah then answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry {Hab. 2:2, 3}. It is well known that the apostle Paul applies this to the very center of the vision, and of all visions, to Jesus Christ the Lord coming back in glory. In Heb. 10 we are told that He who shall come will come, and will not tarry. Such is the way in which the Spirit displays His admirable use of Old Testament scripture. Already had the Lord Jesus personally come the first time, and been rejected by the Jews to their own ruin. The apostle’s use of it gives the words a much more personal force; yet, we can see, not departing from but only adding to the evident issue contemplated in Heb. 2, 3, which can have no greater fulfilment short of that crowning event.

But then there is another remark to be made here. The prophet lets us know that the vision of God is written so that a man does not require I know not what accessories in order to understand it. It was to be made plain on tablets, distinctly set out in large impressive characters. But it is not said, as the common view assumes, that the runner may read, but rather that the reader may run, and thus, it would seem, spread the joyful intelligence one to another. It has been suggested that we should compare Dan. 12:4; but this, I think, carries out the idea of running to and fro, and increasing knowledge thus among such as have an ear to hear. The passage then holds out no premium to the careless reader, but shows how the reader of the vision will be stimulated thereby to earnest spread of the truth he receives.

It is granted, however, that scripture does meet and bless, those who take but a scanty draught from the waters of life to which it points in Christ the Lord. At the same time they only enter into its depths who believe in its divine fulness, and have confidence that the Spirit, who made it the word of God in all the emphasis of that expression, delights to lead the believer into the understanding of all the truth.

Thus, while the power of the vision is shown in Hab. 2:2, the sureness of it in Hab. 2:3, whatever may be the delay meanwhile, from Hab. 2:4 we learn another thing, that is, the all-importance of faith to make it good for the soul before it comes. The result is not yet come; but this is no reason we should not gather the profit by that faith which is the substance of things hoped for. It cannot be denied that this is an immensely important principle; and more particularly in prophecy. The common notion is that prophecy never does people good unless it treat directly of the times and circumstances in which they themselves are found. There can be no greater fallacy. Abraham got more good from the prophecy about Sodom and Gomorrah than Lot did; yet it clearly was not because Abraham was there, for he was not in Sodom, while Lot was, who barely escaped and with little honor as we soon sorrowfully learn. But the Spirit teaches us by these two cases in the first book.
of the Bible His mind as to this question. I grant entirely that when the fulfilment of prophecy in all its details comes, there will be persons to glean the most express directions. But I am persuaded that the deepest value of prophecy is for those who are occupied with Christ, and who will be in heaven along with Christ, just as Abraham was with Jehovah, instead of being like Lot in the midst of the guilty Sodomites. If this be so, the book of Revelation ought to be of far richer blessing to us now who enjoy by grace heavenly associations with Christ, and are members of His body, though we shall be on high when the hour of temptation comes on those that dwell on the earth.

It is freely allowed that the Revelation will be an amazing comfort and help to the saints who may be there. But this is no reason why it should not be a still greater come to pass, though comfort will be given, when they the communion of His own love and mind before the things come to pass, though comfort will be given, when they come, to those that are immersed in them. Consequently we see in the Revelation (Rev. 4, 5, 6) already with the Lord the glorified saints of the Old and New Testament who were taken up to meet Him, including those to whom the prophecy was primarily given. Afterwards we see the judgments come in gradual succession; but when they take place, there are saints who evidently witness for God on earth, some suffering unto death, others preserved to be a place, there are saints who evidently witness for God on earth, some suffering unto death, others preserved to be a blessed earthly people. To such undoubtedly the prophetic visions will be of value when the actual events arrive; but the most admirable value always is to faith before the events confirm the truth of the word. This is an invariable principle as to the prophetic word and indeed in divine truth generally.

Here we have faith and its ground thus stated:

For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith {Hab. 2:3, 4}.

I suppose the proud soul particularly refers to the Chaldean. He was absolutely blind; but the principle of it is just as true of the unrighteous Jew or of any man who hardens himself against the divine word. For certainly the wrath of God is against all ungodliness, and indeed, if there be any difference, against those most of all who hold the truth ever so fast in unrighteousness. It does not matter how orthodox they may be; but if men cleave to the truth in unrighteousness, so much the worse the sin. The truth in this case only condemns the more peremptorily. They may tenaciously hold the truth; yet truth was never given to make righteousness a light matter, but urgently due to God in the relations that pertain to us. The object of all truth is to put us in communion with God and in obedience. But the man whose soul is lifted up is not upright, as is plain. The invariable way of God is this,

He that humbleth himself shall be exalted {Luke 14:11, 18:14};
and faith alone gives humiliation of self. It may be here observed that there are two forms of it: the happiest of all is to be humble; the next best thing is to be humbled. It is better to be humble than to be humbled, but there is no comparison between being humbled and being lifted up. Humility is the effect of grace; humiliation rather of God’s righteous government where we are not humble. This is what He did with His saints of old and outwardly with His ancient people. It is what is too often needful for ourselves. The best place of all is to be so realizing what the grace and glory of the Lord are that we are nothing before Him. Humility is the effect not so much of a moral process with ourselves, but of occupation with Him. Humbling is the effect of the Lord dealing with our souls when He sees the need of breaking us down, it may be to use us, certainly for further blessing. We could not so deal with ourselves. Judgment must come instead of humbling, but in every case anything is better than to have our soul lifted up: where is the uprightness there?

The just, it is said,

shall live by faith {Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38}.

This is used repeatedly in the New Testament. There are three well-known quotations in the Epistles, on which a few words may be desirable before we leave the subject. It is the apostle Paul who uses this text on all these several occasions. In writing to the Roman saints he tells them that in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith {Rom. 1:17}.

Such is the only way and direction of the blessing. The righteousness of God is necessarily outside the reach of any unless it be revealed; but being revealed it is revealed out of faith {Rom. 1:17},

(ἐκ πίστεως,) and in no other way, and consequently unto faith {Rom. 1:17}.

wherever faith might be. It could not be in the way of law: not even the Jew could suppose this, for the law claims man’s righteousness, and does not say a word about the righteousness of God. The fact is that the law simply convicts man of inability to produce the righteousness which it claims; for though it demand it in God’s name, there is only the answer of unrighteousness. According to the law a man ought to be righteous; but he is not. This is what the law proves wherever a man fairly confronts it -- that he is not righteous according to the divine requirement.

This state of ruin Christ has met by redemption; and consequently the gospel is entirely a question of God revealing His righteousness, though so many real Christians misunderstand it through their tradition. The meaning of the phrase is that God acts consistently with what is due to
Christ, who has in redemption perfectly glorified God. He glorified Him as Father during His life; yet this could not have put away sin. But He glorified Him as God, when it was expressly a question of our sins, by His atoning death on the cross. Thenceforward God reveals His righteousness in view of that all-efficacious sacrifice; not only vindicating His forbearance in past times, but in the present time justifying the believer freely and fully in consequence of that mighty work. The first effect of God’s righteousness, though not referred to in the Epistle to the Romans, is that God sets Christ at His own right hand on high. The next result (and this is the one spoken of there) is, that God justifies the believer according. Rom. 1 no doubt treats of His righteousness in the most abstract terms. The manner of it is not described till we come to Rom. 3, 4, 5. But even in the first statement we have the broad principle that in the gospel there is the revelation of divine righteousness from faith (not from law), and consequently to faith wherever it be found. Such I believe to be the force of the proposition. Probably the chief difficulty to most minds is the expression from faith.

It means on that principle, not in the way of obedience to law, which must be the rule of human righteousness. Habits of misinterpretation make the difficulty. Faith alone can be the principle if it be a revelation of divine righteousness; and consequently it is to faith, wherever faith may be.

It is purposely put in abstract style, because the Spirit has not yet begun to set out how it can be and is. It would be anticipating the doctrine that He was afterwards to expound. For manifestly the work of Christ has not yet been brought in; and hence the consequences could not be explained consistently with any true order. It is mere ignorance to assume that scripture is irregular; for in fact there is the deepest order in what man’s haughty spirit presumes thus to censure. It is entirely due to the haste which leads men naturally to admire only the order of man. As to the difficulty of the expression from faith to faith, it is quite admitted that the idea is put in a very pithy and compressed form; so that to men who are apt to be wordy in the usual style, of course such compactness does sound peculiar.

This it is that answers to the expression of the prophet,

The just shall live by his faith {Hab. 2:4}.

Success had great weight with the Jewish mind. They wondered at the prosperous career of the Gentile. But the prophet is explaining the enigma as Isaiah had done before. He insists that the only righteous man is the believer. It is not the justified but the just;

and this in order to keep up the link between doctrine and practise, as it seems to me.

The righteous shall live by his faith.

It is the combination of the two points, that faith is inseparable from righteousness, and a righteous man from believing. The Chaldean saw not God, and had no thought of His purpose or His way. The Israelite would find his blessing in subjection to His word and confidence in Himself.

Behold the proud! his soul is not right within him; but the just shall live by his faith {Hab. 2:4}.

The expression then does not say the justified, but it is implied; and there is no real righteousness in practise apart from it. What preachers ordinarily mean is in itself true. We are justified by faith; but we do not require to draw out more than is in the prophecy; nor is justification explicitly developed in Rom. 1 but rather in Rom. 3, 5. Let every scripture teach its own appropriate lesson.

Again, in Gal. 3 we have a slightly different use of the same scripture.

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God it is evident; for the just shall live by faith {Gal. 3:11}.

Now here it is sufficiently plain that the apostle is excluding the thought of justification by law, and the way he disproves it is by the cited passage of Habakkuk. Hence the difference between Rom. 1 and Gal. 3 is this, that in Romans we have the positive statement and in Galatians the negative. There he positively affirms that God’s righteousness is revealed from faith to faith, supported by this text; whereas the point here is to exclude the law distinctly and peremptorily from playing any part in the justification of a soul. Justification is in no way by law; for

the just shall live by faith:
such is the point in Galatians. It is God’s righteousness revealed by faith; for
for
the just shall live by faith:
such is the point in Romans. The difference therefore is plain.

In Hebrews the passage is used again in a way quite as different by the same apostle Paul.

For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith {Heb. 10:37, 38}.

The emphasis here is not on the just

which is strong in Romans, nor upon faith

which is strong in Galatians, but on live

which is as strong here. Thus every word seems to acquire the emphasis according to the object for which it is used in these three places. In the end of Heb. 10 the apostle is guarding the believer from discouragement and turning
aside. He quotes once more

the just shall live by faith.

Accordingly we are shown in Heb. 11 the elders or Old Testament saints who obtained testimony in the power of faith. So they all lived in faith, every one whom God counts His worthies. It might be shown by faith in sacrifice, or in a walk of communion with God, or in anticipating judgment coming on the world, and accepting the divine means of escape. It might be in wearing the pilgrim character; or in the exertion of such power as delivered from the foe. But whatever the form, there was living by faith in every case. Hence we have here the most remarkable chapter in the Bible for its comprehensive grasp of the men of old who lived by faith, from the first great witness of its power here below to the blessed One who summed up every quality of faith, which others had manifested now and then: they separately and not without inconsistency, He perfectly and combined in His own person and ways here below, indeed with much more that is deeper and peculiar to Himself alone.

Thus I do not think that it is necessary to vindicate the wisdom of God at greater length. The passage seems most instructive, if it were only to show the fallacy of supposing that each shred of scripture can only warrant a single just application. Not so; though clothed in the language of men, scripture affords in this respect an answer to the infinite nature of God Himself, whose Spirit can unfold and apply it in distinct but compatible ways. Even among men there are not wanting wise words which bear more than one application, yet each true and just. If faith distinguished and secured the righteous in presence of the Chaldean invader, its value is even more pronounced now in the gospel, where it is a question of a soul before God, refusing false grounds of confidence, and walking unmoved in the path of trial among men.

Certainly the word of God is here proved to be susceptible of different uses, weighty and conclusively authoritative. That it is applied by the same apostle Paul makes the case far more remarkable than if it had been differently employed by various writers. Had it been so, I have no doubt that the rationalists would have set each of the different writers against the truth. But they would do well to weigh the fact that it is the same inspired man who applies to these different ends the same few words of our prophet. He was right. And yet it is very evident that in its own primary application, in its strict position in the prophecy, God is particularly providing for a state which lay before the Jews in that day: but then the same Spirit who wrote by Habakkuk applies it with divine precision in every one of the three instances in the New Testament. For what is common to all is that the word of God is to be believed, and that he who uses it holily, according to God by faith, lives by it, and is alone just and humble in it, as only this glorifies God withal. But what is true in the case of an Israelite so employing the prophetic word applies at least as fully to all the word of God used by faith, and more particularly to the gospel, because the latter is an incomparably deeper unfolding of God’s mind than any word strictly prophetic. Prophecy shows us the character of God more especially in government; but the gospel is the display of God in grace, and this in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. Is it possible to go beyond or even to reach this in depth? A simple Christian may indeed be led far beyond that which is usually proclaimed by preachers; but it is impossible to exaggerate the infinite character of the gospel as God has revealed it. We also learn from the use in Hebrews, as well as the prophet’s context, that the vision looks on to the future coming of the Lord for the deliverance of His people. This indeed belongs to the prophetic word generally, and is no way peculiar to this vision in particular. It is a striking passage -- the vision, as setting forth under the Chaldean the downfall of the hostile Gentile, proud as he might be, though Israel might have to wait for the accomplishment. And that the full force is only to be when the Lord is actually come in person, and in relationship with His ancient people renewed by grace, is the gist of the prophets in general.

But it is important of course to bear in mind that, save in special revelations of the Jewish prophets, the vision of coming deliverance vouchsafed did not discriminate the time between the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow. Perhaps we may safely say that none seems to have known beforehand that there would be a long interval between the two advents; yet when the interval came we can bring passages from the prophets to prove it. So perfectly did God write the word by them, and so far beyond the very men who were the inspired witnesses of it; for no prophet knew the full extent or depth of his own inspired communications. This was a far better proof that God wrote by them than if all had been known; because whatever might have been the ignorance of Jeremiah or Isaiah, of Daniel or of Habakkuk, the Holy Ghost necessarily knew all from the beginning. Thus what they wrote, going far

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108. "Interpret the Scripture like any other book. . . . First, it may be laid down, that Scripture has one meaning – the meaning which it had to the mind of the Prophet or Evangelist who first uttered or wrote it, to the hearers or readers who first received it" (Essays and Reviews: On the Interpretation of Scripture, 327). Not the worst answer appears in the next two pages. "There are difficulties of another kind in many parts of Scripture, the depth and inwardness of which require a measure of the same qualities in the interpreter himself. There are lessons in the Prophets which, however simple, mankind have not yet learned even in theory. . . . All that the Prophet meant may not have been consciously present to his mind; there were depths which to himself also were but half revealed” (328, 329). It is no wonder that, when men forget that they are speaking of the word of God, they speak foolishly of Scripture and contradict themselves.

109. I do not stop here to state the overwhelming evidence that Paul and no other wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. The peculiarity of the style and method can be simply and satisfactorily accounted for by the consideration of his writing to believers of his own nation outside his Gentile apostleship. The doctrine is pre-eminently his own.
beyond their own intelligence, rendered His mind who employed them evident. Hence we read in 1 Peter; of

The Spirit of Christ which was in them {1 Pet. 1:11};
and the same scripture which indicates the reality of the inspiring Spirit in the prophets just now quoted shows that they themselves did not enter into all they wrote. They were searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow {1 Pet. 1:11}.

Certainly they did not know, but like others had to learn; and when they searched into it, they were told it was not for themselves, but unto us they did minister the things that are now reported unto us by them that have preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven {1 Pet. 1:12}.

It will be observed that the expression,

The Holy Ghost sent down from heaven,
as we know Him now, is in full contrast with the prophetic Spirit who wrought in them and is called

the Spirit of Christ {1 Pet. 1:11}.
The Lord Jesus was the great object of all the visions; and this it is important to note.

Spirit of Christ,
in Rom. 8:9, I think, goes far beyond this. As employed by the apostle there, it means that the Holy Ghost characterizes the Christian with the full possession of his own proper portion as in Christ and Christ in him. The Holy Ghost is the seal of all, and dwells in the believer on this ground.

Then we find a remarkable series of what may be called strophes or stanzas, from Hab. 2:6 to the end of the chapter, -- a number of woes in regular succession, with a reason annexed to each case. Hab. 2:5 seems to be a general introduction.

Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people.

Here we find that what was pronounced on the Chaldean by the Lord, and what was laid hold of by the tried prophet, when pleading for the people in spite of their faults, is now formally brought out. The evil must be judged before the blessing can be introduced in power. Consequently the evil is now fully set out before us. The reason why the Chaldean must be taken in hand by God flows simply and necessarily from the moral nature of God -- the impossibility that He should sustain one whom He had employed as His instrument when the instrument dared to exalt itself to the dishonor of God.

Here the derisive ode properly begins, or the first stanza.

Shall not all these (speaking of the nations that he was gathering unto him) take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say,

Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that lazed himself with many pledges! 110 Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them? Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men’s blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and all that dwell therein {Hab. 2:6-8}.

Such is the first woe here pronounced on the enemy for his cruel rapacity without.

The second woe pursues the matter more within.

Woe to him that covetheth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil! {Hab. 2:9}

It may begin with mere self-aggrandisement or coveting another’s; but the end of it is his own exaltation against all adversaries. He might not have so used his resources, but have simply vanished them away; but they are as selfishly employed as they were won -- to

set his nest on high that he maybe delivered from the power of evil.

Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul {Hab. 2:10}.

Violence follows in the wake. Hab. 2:11, as is easily seen, answers to Hab. 2:8

For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it [Hab. 2:11].

Then comes as the third woe (Hab. 2:12) another divine denunciation on more daring evil, not private only, but public and on a great scale.

Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stabliseth a city by iniquity! Behold, is it not of the Jehovah of hosts that the people shall labor in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:12-14).

What a picture of the futile labors of the peoples, more particularly of the energetic Chaldean -- first of the Gentiles to come into the place of supreme power and universal authority! Jehovah reserves it for Himself in the only true
sense. The kingdom of Messiah introduced by solemn judgments shall see the peaceful sway of good inseparable from the manifestation of the divine glory. That, and not at all Christianity or the church, is what is referred to here. It is the millennial age which will be the true time for the public establishment of all authority to the glory of Jehovah. The destruction of the Babylonian empire is no doubt of special interest in the mind of God, because the fall of that first world-empire shadows the fall of the last, when the dispersed Jews shall be freed and return from a still longer captivity; and a greater than Cyrus shall rule the world. All will be unrest among the nations till then, however truly grace may give souls far and wide to know a portion in Christ above and apart from the world. But there is no hope for the earth to be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah’s glory till that day: on the contrary the apostasy must come before it and be judged by the righteous power of the Lord. What is called “the gospel dispensation” has another object and character, is inconsistent with the special pre-eminence of Israel, and stands aloof from the execution of judgments on the Gentiles.

The next is,

Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness! Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the Lord’s right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory. For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts, which made them afraid, because of men’s blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein (Hab. 2:15-17).

Here we see the most grievous corruption added to violence. No doubt there was shameless dissolution of manners spread by the Chaldeans; but I agree with those who give the words a larger and deeper bearing than such personal excesses, followed by ignominious exposure when judgment shall come on the nations.

But it is observable that there is a slight divergence from the order in what follows, possibly because it is the last woe here pronounced upon the foe. Consequently there is a purposeful difference, and the sin here is brought in before the woe -- it was so flagrant. In other cases the woe was pronounced, and then the ground of it was explained. In this case, as being idolatry it was not merely a sin against men; neither covetousness nor violence nor corruption of others for selfish purposes; but the making and worship of graven images, an insult to God Himself who handed over power to the Chaldean. Such a return he must be made to feel. There is no room for other woes after this.

Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it {Hab. 2:19}.

God might be patient; but to set up a golden image for instance in the plain of Dura, after the God of heaven had formally given him his world-empire, was no small offence in the Chaldean. As usual, the first thorough departure from God is fatal. God may linger ever so many years after before the blow fell on the Chaldean; but when God does judge, this sin comes up before Him. The profane and corrupt Belshazzar was the immediate occasion; but the cause lay deeper -- the first open insult to God after power was given of God. The last verse of the woe shows how after this the scene changes.

Jehovah is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him {Hab. 2:20}.

Habakkuk, however, breaks forth in prayer. It is now a question of the righteous, and not of the judgment of the Chaldean. Hab. 3 accordingly is a most beautiful and sublime outpouring of the prophet.

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet on Shigionoth. 111 O Jehovah, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid. O Jehovah, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy (Hab. 3:1, 2).

And so He does.

God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise (Hab. 3:3).

Although it be a prayer, it assumes the form of a psalm.

And his brightness was as the sunlight; he had rays streaming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and made the earth tremble: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting (Hab. 3:4-6).

Nevertheless God occupies Himself with that which men may despise. He takes notice of the little; and this just because He is infinitely great. Those who merely aspire after a greatness which they do not possess are afraid of demeaning themselves by noticing that which is small. Not so where there is real greatness. Israel were His object, not the rivers or the sea. He sought and would save His people.

I saw the tents of Chushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Was Jehovah displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thy horses and thy chariots of salvation? Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the

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111. It seems plain that יָשָׁרָה לְפָנֵי יְהוָה refers here as in the Psalms to music, instruments accompanying the song suitably. In this case it was no doubt of a wild enthusiastic measure, expressive of joy and triumph.
overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the nations in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people (Hab. 3:7-13).

There we see what was near the prophet’s heart: was it not also near Jehovah’s heart?

Even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah (Hab. 3:13).

To a Jew’s mind, and very properly, the salvation of Israel is as a rule bound up with the judgment of the Gentiles when the chosen people shall rise to their allotted and good eminence, at length fitted for it after humiliation, and the Gentiles willingly subject (though there may be, especially and growingly at the end but feigned obedience) spite of their long-continued resistance in pride. With the Christian salvation has another sense, and implies our calling out of the world to heaven. The world is left undisturbed: the individual soul is called by faith out of it to the Lord, and so it will be up to His coming for us and our change into conformity with His glory. But when salvation comes to the Jews it will be by the putting down of the enemies that strive round about and against them. That is, it is power that comes down to earth, and deals with the world, leaving the Jews for blessing, by the destruction of their enemies under the hand of God. We, on the contrary, are entitled to enjoy the salvation of God in Christ by His cross while the evil of mankind remains unjudged; and we, being thus delivered and knowing it in the power of the Spirit, are therefore called out to be separate to the Lord in grace, yet with full sense of personal victory through His death and resurrection.

The account of the judgment proceeds:

Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters (Hab. 3:14, 15).

The prophet then expresses even his awe at such a solemn interference for Israel: what should those feel who must be objects of divine vengeance?

When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops (Hab. 3:16).

Although however there is such a magnificent description of the sure judgment of the enemy in all its extent (not merely the Chaldeans now, but all their enemies), and although there is the assured salvation of the people of God, even the Jews, the prophet meantime answers to the faith of which he had himself been the preacher by one of the finest expressions of that faith which the Old Testament contains.

Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

none able to show them any good.

Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Jehovah the Lord is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my 112 stringed instruments (Hab. 3:17-19).

Thus, with this song which (in strains equally suited and magnificent as a whole) brings out the triumph of glory at the end, and meanwhile the path which faith pursues in the confidence of divine grace spite of all adverse appearances, the prophet closes his remarkable message.

112. That there is any ground to infer from the “my” that the prophet was a Levitical chorister is refuted by Isa. 38:20, as another has remarked. Certainly Hezekiah was no Levite, as he should be if that reason were valid. I am aware that so runs the tradition, as we learn from the Chisian MS. of the Inscription to Bel and the Dragon in the LXX.; but this is all very precarious.
Lectures on the Minor Prophets

Lecture 9

Zephaniah

Zephaniah like Habakkuk will be found to have some points of resemblance with the prophet Jeremiah; and this not merely in the fact that the Chaldean is the enemy of which both treat, but also in their both setting forth the blessedness reserved for Israel and Jerusalem when the judgments of Jehovah shall have been executed on the nations. Nevertheless there is this wide difference between the two lesser prophets; that Zephaniah in treating of the glory of God is much more external, while Habakkuk dwells far more on the needed exercises of heart with God’s answer to the Jew both now and hereafter. Thus the two minor prophets take up each a separate item of the prophet of Anathoth. Jeremiah’s prophecy abounds in internal exercises of heart, and here Habakkuk resembled him: we see his grief and hear his complaints and laments to Jehovah when evil was allowed to prevail. On the other hand he shows us the execution of divine judgment which will set aside the proud Gentiles, and reduce the people of God to their true place, in order that, being abased in heart, they may be exalted outwardly. Zephaniah presents rather the latter, as Habakkuk the former. Jerusalem is in the foreground, but in connection with the general judgment of the nations from whose evils the Jews had in no way kept themselves apart. Thus there is no precise mention of the apostate powers of the latter day. As Antichrist therefore is not named or specially described, so neither is the Messiah, save in the time of Josiah and subsequently. Jeremiah was rather the latter, as Habakkuk the former. Jerusalem is in the foreground, but in connection with the general judgment of the nations from whose evils the Jews had in no way kept themselves apart. Thus there is no precise mention of the apostate powers of the latter day. As Antichrist therefore is not named or specially described, so neither is the Messiah, save generally as the Jehovah God of Israel.

The word of Jehovah which came unto Zephaniah
the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of
Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah
the son of Amon, king of Judah [Zeph. 1:1].

Thus we have a full and clear account of Zephaniah, as also of the time in which he wrote. It was of no small importance that there should be prophets raised up during the time of Josiah and subsequently. Jeremiah was rather the latest of the three already named. The importance morally of their prophecies then was, that no one either at the time of Josiah or afterwards should be deceived as to the facts of the partial reformation accomplished during the reign of that pious prince. There is nothing that is more apt to deceive and to disappoint than a wave of blessing which passes over a nation so far gone from righteousness as the Jews of that day. Josiah’s eminent piety, his remarkable zeal in dealing sternly with what profaned the name of Jehovah, above all the subjection of heart to the word of Jehovah which peculiarly characterized himself; in no way set the nation right. Undoubtedly there must have been then, as always, sanguine hopes indulged by the excellent of the earth. It was of great moment therefore that God’s mind about the matter should be made known in order that none, if deceived for the moment, should be too bitterly disappointed at last. We ought to appreciate heartily whatever of blessing God gives, and seek to be kept from a passive or insensible spirit.

On the other hand to look for more than a partial and passing accomplishment of good to individuals through the grace of God is not wise. The blessing that is given, while a matter of immense thankfulness towards souls and of praise to His own mercy, really leaves the moral state of those who reject it worse than before. It does not fail in the end to accelerate the downward course of the mass, and thus brings in a time of deeper ruin. So we see that there was but a short space indeed that separated Josiah’s bright burst of pious effort for God’s glory from the awful evils which succeeded and brought an insupportable judgment from God on the guilty people. Zephaniah was one of those who spoke in Jehovah’s name during these promising times; and thus he begins his message:

I will utterly consume all things from off the land,
saith Jehovah [Zeph. 1:2].

I do not doubt that such times as those of Josiah answer more or less to revivals of religion, or awakenings in our own or other days under the gospel. And assuredly it is solemn to feel that, besides the blessing to souls here and there, the general result is that they only increase much the responsibility of those who do not profit by the testimony God thus renders. We may and ought to be thankful for fruit to His grace, but should not forget that they evidently seem on the background to be a visitation not without grave consequences to the despisers.

At the same time, I think that the resemblance is stronger to such a dealing of God as the Reformation. For a revival is more a work of awakening sinners; whereas this was a recall of the people of God also to their place from idols and profanity. No doubt sinners were awakened, but there was a loud call to the people of God generally to hear the word of God instead of acquiescing in their own declension and dishonor. Now this is not always the case. We hear of some such effects locally; for instance in the revival which God wrought by Jonathan Edwards and others of his day in their districts of America. The Whitfield-Wesleyan movement was widespread in arousing sinners, but extremely partial as to any dealings with the state of Christian people. They were both, however zealous, too
ignorant of the word and ways of God to help the church of God to any appreciable extent. I need not speak much of the comparatively recent revival chiefly in the North of Ireland, which spread over various parts of the world about the same time; but it seems plain that whatever may be God’s goodness in a revival, it is in general a rebuke to the wickedness of man in its day -- a strong reclamation on God’s part against the routine in which the mass consent to go on, as well as a display of grace exceptionally. But the effect of slighting such a summons of His, not only in others, but even in those who have shared the revival and thus enjoyed blessing from God, leaves them as the rule in a worse state than before. This seems to have always been the history of such movements.

Some I know believe that there has been a change in a large part of Christendom outwardly since the revival in the North of Ireland and in America, from 1857 to 1860, especially in its operation, so as to call forth a great many preachers of all sorts outside the clergy or the various official guides of the denominations. But I am disposed to attribute the impulse given to lay preaching to a very different testimony, though it is possible that the distress among the souls awakened at that time may have impressed on it a more practical shape. And this continues. The force of free preaching does not appear to be spent as yet, so far as outward appearances go. Whether, and how far this may be an important event towards the close has been a question sometimes. The worst sign is that in a large part even of that evangelizing which continues, it takes the shape of considerable bitterness against such truth as condemns themselves. Those who do so cannot but help on the Latitudinarianism of Christendom in these days. Latitudinarianism will be increasingly a snare; and the most systematic and guilty part comes from those who should know better, but are really so much the worse because of the mercy God had shown them and of their deliverance in measure from mere traditionalism. What an ungrateful return from the heart for such goodness of God! -- the using grace to slight what is due to Christ and the truth and holiness of God, who calls us to a thorough renunciation of self and of the practical form for His name. This certainly cannot be said to have been the effect of the movement hitherto; is it so still less as time goes on? If not, a free spread of truth which does not separate to Christ from worldliness, and forms which ignore the Holy Spirit, must in the long run contribute to help on the apostasy more or less decidedly. In fact, as far as we can see, everything moves in that direction.

It would be hard to say what does not in one way or another tend to lessen the authority of divine truth in men’s minds. Take, for instance, the Ecumenical Council. The promulgation of absurd decrees about the infallibility of the Pope will no doubt largely increase the superstitious party and their pride of heart and blindness. On the other hand there is the reaction of those that despise and laugh it to scorn, knowing who and what are those who put forth such exorbitant pretensions, that the claim of God’s truth is the merest imposture, covering over a group of ambitious priests working out their own glory by the most glaring perversion of the word of God, and this in a way highly calculated to deceive many, because they say a great deal that is unquestionably true and right. They talk about the church just as if there was reality in the Romish system; they also decry the amazing pride and profanity of modern science in setting itself against the word of God; so that in this way there is an immense deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish. Thus on every side is seen that which leads both directly and indirectly to the abandonment of divine revelation, and more particularly of Christianity, which is called the apostasy.

The Lord then pronounces through Zephaniah the clean destruction that is coming, not only in a general sentence, but by a minute enumeration of particulars.

I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith Jehovah {Zeph. 1:3}.

The completeness of the ruin would prove the hand of Jehovah; for why else beast as well as man? why birds of heaven and fishes of the sea? But the root lay in the stumblingblocks (or idols) of the wicked, who should all perish together. Hence the cutting off man from the face of the land (or earth) closes this emphatic sentence of Jehovah. The judgment should be universal.

But there is more than that:–

I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, the name of the Chemarim [that is, idolatrous priests only named besides in 2 Kings 23:5, Hos. 10:5, and supposed by Gesenius to be so designated from their black ecclesiastical dress] with the priests {Zeph. 1:4}.

What made this idolatry so offensive was the joining of the idols of the nations with Jehovah. To be what we might call a plain right-down idolater was not nearly so evil as to show that you know the true God and yet put false gods on a level with Him. Such an outrage against God as this is specially described here.

And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear to Jehovah, and that swear by Malcham {Zeph. 1:5}.

And them that that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear to Jehovah, and that swear by Malcham {Zeph. 1:5}.

And certainly, to apply the principle to the present day, as we have just now been speaking of revivals such as Josiah’s and their bearing on the future crisis of Christendom, as then on the crisis of Judah, this confusion is remarkably characteristic of both times.

And them that are turned back from Jehovah; and those that have not sought Jehovah, nor enquired for him {Zeph. 1:6}.

There might be both -- two rather different classes -- those on the one hand who owned Jehovah in a measure, and then
had abandoned Him with slight and insult; and those on the other hand who never had been even outwardly awakened to care for Him or even enquire after Him. Then comes the warning.

Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord Jehovah: for the day of Jehovah is at hand; for Jehovah hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of Jehovah’s sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king’s children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel [Zeph. 1:7, 8].

He would begin with those who had the chief responsibility.

In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters’ houses with violence and deceit. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, and an howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills.

It will be universal consternation and chastening from God.

Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people 113 are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off. And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles [Zeph. 1:9-12].

Not merely those that were openly violent -- no one should escape, no class or condition. They say in their heart, Jehovah will not do good, neither will he do evil [Zeph. 1:12].

It is Sadduceanism before the Sadducees.

Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof [Zeph. 1:13]; that is, they shall be struck in the very point of their unbelief.

The great day of Jehovah is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of Jehovah.

They denied this altogether; they said Jehovah would do neither good nor harm: He was a God that took His ease as they did.

Even the voice of the day of Jehovah: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness [Zeph. 1:14, 15].

It is of great importance that we should hold and testify that day,

- not merely the coming of the Lord but His day. Although it indicates undoubtedly much more for the state that the coming of the Lord is dear to us as our heavenly hope, nevertheless there may be an unwillingness to face the solemn truth of the day of Jehovah. Where there is high truth and low practice, the day of Jehovah can never be honestly testified; it does not then receive that place in our practical service which it has in the word of God. It will not satisfy the heart to substitute for our proper hope that which bears on the world in the judicial excision of evil here below; it will never do to live in or on it, because it is not the suited food for the soul; still it is a solemn and necessary truth to hold up before our own eyes and those of all others. Were there truthfulness with a graciously exercised heart, not only would there be a free and joyful waiting for Christ, but nothing could be allowed knowingly inconsistent with His mind to call forth His judgment. For instance we constantly find this kind of self-deceit where a Christian lives in worldliness, which leads him to say that at all events his heart is not in it.

Now it is quite possible there may be cases where one can quite understand meek trust to be the genuine feeling, as where a wife or a child may be held responsible to obey. Thus suppose such an one in the worldly mansion belonging to a worldly Christian of rank: clearly one under authority is not at liberty to enter on a crusade against splendors of furniture, equipage, or the general style of living that belongs to a great house. Nevertheless the Christian child should undoubtedly seek, while personally a Nazarite, to abstain from offensive demonstrations to its parents. This would not hinder a decided taking part with what was despised and rejected whenever an opportunity was allowed. Faith now as ever shares the afflictions of the people of God, and more particularly identifies itself with what is scorned and hated in separation from the world. But it is most happy where, along with fidelity to the Lord, one sees a meek and lowly mind giving conspicuous honor to father and mother, from which I need not say Christ in no way absolves. At the same time there should be the constant manifestation that the heart is with Him who is the treasure in the heavens. If possession came, such an one would know how to turn all to a testimony, not of sanctified worldliness, as if this could be, but to Him who suffered on the cross, whereby he is crucified to the world and the world to him. Love for Christ’s appearing strengthens the pilgrim in his path, though only Christ’s love makes one a pilgrim. But it is evil where one perseveres in going on with what grieves the Lord on the plea that He will set all to rights in His day.

Nor is it to be doubted that in the day of the Lord there will be something like a reflection of what the path has been here, loss in case of unfaithfulness and reward for the service of His name. But it would appear from the New Testament, I think, that this to us is rather called the day of Christ, thus distinguishing between it and the day of Jehovah. Assuredly Christ is Jehovah; but still it is a very different thought where He is so styled, as in the

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113. It is literally “all the people of Canaan,” which may be, as has been thought, a cutting designation of the men of Jerusalem generally, rather than of the trading classes. It appears to me, however, that the clause which follows is favorable to the more common version.
Revelation. And it is remarkable that in Zephaniah -- so external is its usage comparatively -- we never see Him brought in as Christ at all. We find simply Jehovah here. It is therefore more judicial. If

the day of Christ

may be received as judicial too, it has certainly more application, even in that character, to what was based on and flowed from Christ.

The day of Christ

is that aspect of the day of the Lord in which those who have lived and walked and suffered in grace will have their portion assigned to them by the Master. Hence the apostle Paul says a good deal about

the day of Christ

in the Epistle to the Philippians. There we have the results of service and of suffering, of thorough identification with Christ now.

In the common version of the second Epistle to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:2), it is a twofold mistake to present the error then at work among the saints, as

the day of Christ is at hand. 114

Had the false teachers said this, they had not gone far astray. But they pretended the authority of the apostle and indeed of the Spirit for the assertion that the day of the Lord was actually arrived, or then present -- not “at hand”; just as in another epistle we hear of such as affirmed the resurrection to have taken place already. Thus

present was what they meant. They had, no doubt, some idea of a figurative day of the Lord, pretty much like what obtains at the present time in Christendom generally. For, strange to say, not a few theologians hold that the baptized are in the first resurrection, and that we are all throughout the Christian period reigning with Christ! The thousand years are thus of course taken as an indefinite period in a similarly vague sense. The chief difference is that the saints at Thessalonica had better knowledge than those who indulge in such thoughts now. They saw that the day of the Lord was a day of darkness and trouble; and in danger of feeling overmuch the troubles then come on themselves (cf. 1 Thess. 3:3-5), they too readily believed them to be at any rate the beginning of that day. Encountering persecution, they thought that the day of the Lord had come at last. But the very error shows they were so full of the coming of the Lord as to be open through lack of intelligence to a delusion on that side. Only observe it was not through excited hope but terror; because, when their troubles came, they thought that the day of the Lord was actually on them. They needed to be recalled to their hope and the gathering of the saints to the Lord so as to come with Him in that day. Such is the apostolic correction; not putting off the hope (as most do now), but distinguishing it from the day of the Lord which few seem to see; for that day cannot be till the evil is ripe which is to be then only put down.

Thus

that day,

the day of Christ,

is to have an aspect toward those who are now Christians, who will be with Him in the glory in the heavens. But it is

the day of Christ

more particularly which affects a Christian.

The day of Jehovah in scripture is invariably that which deals with the world, with living men and their works on the earth, and finally with the frame and elements of the universe itself, but this rather at the close of His day than at its beginning, as we gather from the comparison of several scriptures.

The great day of Jehovah is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of Jehovah: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against Jehovah: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of Jehovah’s wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land [Zeph. 1:14-18].

Nothing can be plainer. It is distinctly judicial, and this as regards the habitable world.

The day of Christ has also a discriminative bearing, and this with a view to rewarding the saints who shall have labored for the Lord or suffered meanwhile. All will be made up to them then. It is possible that this has been overlooked: what has not been? Excellent men, in their desire to give grace its scope in redemption and our justification by faith, have failed now and then to leave room for another principle equally plain. The apostle Paul, if weighed, would keep us by the Spirit both large in heart, and free from the confusion of things that differ. It is he who insists that we are saved by grace [see Eph. 2:5, 8], and that

every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor [1 Cor. 3:8].

Not only will God be justified by our account of all as it is to Christ, but the ways and work and suffering with Christ of those who are His will have their due place and display in

114. The true reading is the day of the Lord, not “Christ;” and the proper rendering would be is present, not “at hand.”
the glory of the kingdom by and by.

The apostle had this certainty before him as a measure and test of the present. See it in 1 Cor. 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 15, to take but one epistle; and this not the most abundant in such interweaving of the future with all the present life.

That day becomes even more before his spirit as he approaches the end of his own labors, though we know that from the first he had not failed to preach the kingdom. I admire the exceeding breath of Paul, as indeed well one may in every one who, steering clear of laxity, its counterfeit, proves spiritual capacity for it. It becomes not the Christian to be narrow. Nevertheless who can avoid seeing the tendency to be so on this or that? Be assured that it is not only weakness but a danger wherever it may be. I grant, however, that even narrowness in and for God’s truth is far better than that lax uncertainty and spurious liberalism in divine things which is growingly a snare in this evil day.

Take the contrary of this in the apostle and his preaching. The very man to whom all are most indebted for the gospel of the grace of God, set forth as none else did that particular phase of it which is called the gospel of the glory of Christ. At the same time he preached the kingdom of God as decidedly as possible. He never was afraid of the ignorant outcry that this is low ground. The fact is that hasty and little minds say so, unable to take in more than one idea, and apt to be intoxicated with that one; but the apostle exhibits that excellent largeness and elasticity which gives its place to every message which God has revealed, which pretends not to choose in scripture, but thankfully takes and uses the testimony of God as it is given. It seems to me that we really lower the revival of truth grace has wrought by allowing the idea that this truth or that is the only truth for the day. The speciality of our blessing is that we have got into a large place, contemptible as it looks to that which ever spares flesh, but what gives us to mortify our members on the earth, as well as what in divine love suits the varying wants of souls around us, and above all His glory, who has given us not only a particular part of His mind, but the whole of it. Thus, as it has been well said, the peculiarity really of the right position is its universality. That is, it is not merely a special portion or phase of truth, no matter how blessed, but the truth in all its fulness as the divinely given safeguard from particular views, and the communication of the exceeding largeness of God’s grace and truth and ways for us in the world.

All things are yours {1 Cor. 3:21}. Anything that tends by distinctive marks to make a party by bringing forward one’s self or one’s own views as practically a center is self-condemned.

For this reason it is, I think, that, while holding fast, for instance, the precious hope of Christ’s heavenly glory, and that which is so connected with its revelation, namely, the church in its heavenly relationship and privileges, to see every other aspect is in its own place of great importance. Again, the individual is important just as much as the body, and in a certain sense more so. Above all to hold up Christ is to my mind of incomparably greater moment than either the Christian or the body. Indeed the way most of all to profit both the body and the individual saint is by the constant maintenance of Christ’s glory, and this too not more as the exalted man in heaven than as a divine person in the fulness of His grace on earth, yet within the dependent and obedient man, who never sought His own will or aught save the glory of His Father who sent Him.

And as we touch on the subject, let me just make the passing remark, which may be helpful to those who desire an entrance into God’s revealed mind, that a phrase too often misunderstood spite of its plain force in 1 John 1:1 --

That which was from the beginning -- does not refer to Christ in eternity or in heaven, but to Him on earth: so utterly mistaken is the principle of merely directing attention to that which seems the nearest object or the highest point of view. The truth is, that the snare lies in this, because the mighty work of redemption, and the position which Christ has taken, may be too much regarded in its resulting consequences for us. What brings ourselves into such special blessedness is thus in danger of being made more important than what has even glorified God the Father morally. For this last we must look not to our heavenly place and privileges but to Christ’s person and work in all its extent. Here the manifestation of Christ on earth is of capital moment. It is the beginning of His presence and path here. In the beginning (John 1) He was before all things were created. The only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father declared Him. The work lays the ground for an association with Him; but His manifestation here is the beginning from which God revealed Himself in grace. In due time redemption and union with Him in heavenly places and all else follow. We must thus leave room for all the truth; if one is merely occupied with a
particular point of truth, very great harm may result to one’s own soul and to others.

A few words on a subject often referred to, the difference between the gospel of grace and the gospel of glory, may be seasonable here. The gospel of the grace of God is the larger expression; the gospel of the glory of Christ is a part of it. It is therefore an error to set the two in contrast, though we may distinguish and use in due season, as we find each used in the word of God. But that the one is an advance on the other is a blunder. The gospel of the grace of God includes the gospel of the glory of Christ, while it embraces a great deal more. It takes in the unfolding of redemption such as we have it for instance in Romans, --

propitiation through his blood {Rom. 3:25}; it takes in His death and resurrection with its immense consequences. On the other hand, in looking only at the gospel of the glory, all this may be left out; souls carried away by what is new to them are even in danger of slighting what is deepest without intending it. Let us then beware of making a system, instead of being subject to the truth. Of course it would be done unconsciously by every godly person; but in itself it is always a serious feature.

If the first chapter set forth the coming ruin of Judea because of the corruption of people and princes, and the horrors of the day of Jehovah falling on their selfish security and vainly trusted appliances, we have a call to repentance in the Zeph. 2.

Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of Jehovah come upon you, before the day of Jehovah’s anger come upon you {Zeph. 2:1, 2}. It is an appeal to humble themselves before the Lord.

Seek ye Jehovah, all ye meek of the earth.

We see there are these two calls. To the nation there is a suited warning; but an earnest appeal is made to the remnant of righteous Jews. These were the meek of the earth.

Seek ye Jehovah, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of Jehovah’s anger {Zeph. 2:3}.

Throughout scripture we see this to be the portion of the godly Jew. They do not look to be caught up to heaven as we do, but they hope to be hidden on earth. They are not removed from the scene and then the wicked judged, neither are they displayed with the Lord returning from heaven for that day; but they are hidden in the day of His anger. It is the precise opposite of the Christian’s portion, though both are to be blessed. When the day comes, we shall come along with Him who brings it. In that day of judgment on the world they will be hidden in His mercy and faithfulness. Instead of their going to the Father’s house, they will have their chambers to hide them on the earth. This is what Isaiah (Isa. 26) shows clearly in his ample account of that day.

Come, my people, enter thou -- not into My mansions, but -- into thy chambers {Isa. 26:20}.

Before the dawning of that day we enter into the heavenly chambers, or the Father’s house. We are taken and seen there before the judgments begin. Compare Rev. 4, 5. When the day comes, instead of being hidden, we are displayed, whereas the Jews (the godly alone, of course) will not be seen, or at least they will enter into their chambers till the indignation is overpast. That hiding place is prepared for them by the pity of God. We see something analogous in Rev. 12 where the woman had a place prepared of God for her in the wilderness. It is the same substantial truth whether before the day comes, or when it does come.

Hide thyself as it were for a little moment until the indignation be overpast {Isa. 26:20}.

By the indignation is meant God’s wrath, which will be poured out on the nations, and more particularly on the apostate Jews. The indignation of God takes in both; but it is very evident that the Christian has nothing to do with either. He is called out from the earth and man’s portion here, and is entitled to wait for heavenly hopes with Christ.

Not so even the faithful Jews at the end of this age. Their hope can only be enjoyed when their enemies are destroyed by divine judgments, during which they are preserved of God. For behold Jehovah cometh out of his place to punish {Isa. 26:21}.

But our hope is to be taken into the Lord’s place before He comes out of it in vengeance. Thus in every respect the position and hopes of the Christian are contrasted even with those of the righteous remnant who follow us on earth.

We go out in spirit to meet the Bridegroom, and will have our hope at His coming for us in peace. It is no question of a special tribulation, or of being hidden, as far as the heavenly saints are concerned. To the godly remnant of Jews it will be so when the Lord deals retributively with their guilty brethren after the flesh and the nations. With the remnant common views hastily confound the hopes of the Christian; whereas a closer knowledge of the scriptures proves them to be distinct.

The essential difference arises from this, that all through a Christian is one not of the world, even as Christ is not, and hence is looking to be taken out of the earth. Accordingly it is not only true morally from the time when he is brought to God, but it runs through his calling up to the end: I do not say from conversion simply as such. For
important as this may be, the work of conversion is more what takes place always in every renewed soul, Jew or not. But certainly in the believer’s separation to Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost he is called out of everything here to God as manifesting Himself in Christ; and the issue will be that he, as thus called out, will be taken up to be with the Lord without disturbing things or people outside. The world goes on. The Christian hears what the world does not hear; the Christian sees a glory that is invisible to man as such. Truly if the rulers of this world had seen it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory {1 Cor. 2:8}.

We do see it. Accordingly our portion is to be thus called out from first to last; and so it will be when Christ comes for us. Then we shall be taken, as we have remarked, into His chambers -- not merely enter chambers of our own on the earth, as the Jew at a later day, and be hidden there till the indignation is passed away. We are called out for heaven in the day of grace: they will be hidden in their chambers in the time of Jehovah’s indignation. At that time will they be severed to Jehovah; and then will He come out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth; whereas during the whole dealing with the church of God the earth and its inhabitants are left to pursue their own way. The only testimony which goes on is one of grace towards them, if peradventure they might hear and believe.

Then we have the warning of what will take place in the day of Jehovah’s anger, which no doubt has been partially accomplished, and will be yet more.

For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day, and Ekron shall be rooted up {Zeph. 2:4}.

These were cities of Philistine power.

Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! the word of Jehovah is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant. And the sea coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon; which has clearly not been accomplished yet to the full.

In the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down in the evening: for Jehovah their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity {Zeph. 2:5-7}.

In fact the Jews have been carried off into a longer dispersion since then. The captivity in the days of Nebuchadnezzar was nothing at all so extreme as their scattering to the ends of the earth, consequent on the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.

I have heard the reproach of Moab.

It is not merely the Philistines on the west, but Moab, &c., on the east who must come into judgment for their proud enmity.

I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and magnified themselves against their border. Therefore as I live, saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them. This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of Jehovah of hosts. Jehovah will be terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen {Zeph. 2:8-11}.

It is not here the rejected Son of God turning away from the jealous religionists of tradition, and opening out the grace of the Father and the power of the Spirit, which characterize the hour that now is, during which neither Jerusalem nor Samaria is more than Japan or Sierra Leone for sanctity, but Christ received by faith displaces the old man, and flesh and forms vanish before the gift of the Holy Ghost consequent on redemption. In the period which Zephaniah contemplates there is no such absolute blotting out of special place and outward show as according to John 9:21-24 we now know or ought to know in Christianity. Hence we see no sentence of death as it were on the ancient city of solemnities, but only, as in Mal. 1:11, the opening for worship elsewhere each from his place, even all the isles of the nations.

That the great change for the earth -- the full putting down of idolatry -- awaits the execution of divine judgment is plain everywhere. We can clearly see that idolatry goes on, with the worst forms in Christendom itself; for there is nothing so bad as idolatry where Christ is named, and there is nothing that more characterizes Christendom than the prevalence of Romanism which is essentially idolatrous, besides the monstrous assumption of the Papacy more than ever towering up in its vanity against God. For what is idolatry, if not the worship of images, in whatever measure they may mete it, the worship too of saints, angels, and the Virgin Mary? Whatever may be judged of the Greek and Oriental bodies, I should say that idolatry is not characteristic of Protestantism at all, but rather headiness, and, among the worst, high-minded self-will, which sets up to judge the word of God. This is much more the public vice of corrupt Protestantism, which therefore tends to rationalism. But the ritualistic system is another root of evil, which does not tend to idolatry only, but is in fact idolatrous (Gal. 4:9, 10). I should not however call it Protestant. We all know that a certain portion among the Reformed in these and other lands is falling into Ritualism and ripe for Rome whenever it suits both.

Having seen the divine dealing with their neighbors, we
find a judgment that takes place on some of those who, though farther off, came into contact with the chosen people -- the Ethiopians on the extreme south, and again, on the north-east, Assyria:

Ye Ethiopians also shall be slain by my sword. And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness
{Zeph. 2:12, 13}.

It is evident, save to those who regard the prophets as impostors, that this utterance of Zephaniah must have preceded the destruction of Nineveh. He lived, there can be little doubt, in Josiah's reign.

And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations. Both the cornorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work. This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand
{Zeph. 2:14, 15}.

Thus we find it is a judgment which selects two classes, nations near and others afar off, to show the character of an universal judgment upon the world. It is the day of Jehovah on the earth.

But there follows a closer threat for the Jew.

Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city!

This is not Nineveh, but Jerusalem. The most solemn word of God is always reserved for His own people, city, and sanctuary. Judgment must begin at His house: the denunciation may end with it, but judgment begins there. Hence, therefore, we find this woe to complete all.

She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in Jehovah; she drew not near to her God. Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow
{Zeph. 3:1-3}.

We find here therefore failure first towards Jehovah, then towards every one else -- oppressive cruelty, and this persisted in too. Shamelessness in evil, once it is yielded to, always characterizes the fall of those that enjoyed better light but gave it up. There is nothing more blessed than light from God: where the heart basks in it, the conscience is quickened by it; but there is nothing so tremendous as where it is despised and becomes a name, a profane and common thing.

Her prophets are light and treacherous persons . They ought to have had most of all the mind of God.

Her priests have polluted the sanctuary.

This would have been bad enough in the dwellings of Israel; what was it for the priests in the temple of Jehovah?

They have done violence to the law. The just Jehovah is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame
{Zeph. 3:4, 5}.

He abides faithful; so much the worse that the unjust

should be not a heathen but an Israelite.

Consequently we have what Jehovah must do not merely to the heathen but to Jerusalem.

I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings
{Zeph. 3:6, 7}.

As Jehovah rose early to send them messages and warnings, they rose early to indulge in their wickedness. Hence comes the sentence,

Therefore wait ye upon me, saith Jehovah, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy
{Zeph. 3:8}.

But the day of judgment on the quick ushers in the predicted era of earth's blessedness: as it is said by an earlier prophet,

the acceptable year of Jehovah and the day of vengeance of our God
{Isa. 61:2}.

How strange that good men should overlook what God's word makes so plain, if one knew not the blinding power of tradition

For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of Jehovah, to serve him with one consent
{Zeph. 3:9}.

This does not mean the people of Israel, but the peoples in relationship with Jehovah among the nations. But it does not hence follow that the spread of Christianity and any check thereby given to idolatry throughout the world are here specifically predicted. When it is fulfilled, it will be no dislodgment of idolatry here or there in parts of the globe, still less will it admit of the rising up of the pollutants of anti-Christian systems, while vast regions still remain the theater of varied and most degrading idolatry. Scripture reveals an age to come, distinct from the present and before the judgment of the great white throne
{Rev. 20}, during which divine mercy will bless the nations far and wide. This, and not Christianity properly so called, is here set forth.

Then again we read,

From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants,
even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering [Zeph. 3:10].

These suppliant worshipers are the Jews who return from beyond the rivers of Cush (the Nile and the Euphrates) which ordinarily girded them round. In that day shame for the past will be taken from the Jews: not of course that they shall not deeply mourn and truly repent, but the reproach shall be removed from them. Their vain self-exaltation shall disappear, and they shall be the meek of the earth. The reference is not to gospel but to Messianic times, after the execution of the judgments just spoken of. It is impossible therefore justly to bring in here the spread of Christianity, which has not overthrown idolatry, but after subverting it within the Roman Empire has apostatized to it largely far and wide. Hence even the advocates of such a loose interpretation are obliged to own that it has hitherto been only partially fulfilled. There is anything but the “one shoulder” in Christendom for the service of the Lord. Do they not understand that it is only when divine judgment has been poured out on all the assembled nations that Jehovah will work this mighty and beneficent change to His own glory? It is the blessedness of the earthly kingdom of our Lord.

For along with God’s judgment of the nations will be a new heart to Israel; and upon Jerusalem shall be the glory for a defense. There shall be then the returning tide of divine mercy, when the promises shall be fulfilled to the full and established for ever.

In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain {Zeph. 3:11}. It is the fruit of grace undoubtedly; but it is want of intelligence to see in this the picture of the gospel state. We must leave room for the varied dealings of God according to His word. It is the new age, not the present evil age.

I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people {Zeph. 3:12}. There must be moral integrity as well as true lowliness before they can be entrusted with the throne. They are destined to have the first dominion: before that they will know a humiliation not by circumstances only but by grace in spirit which will fit them for their future greatness.

And the afflicted and poor people shall trust in the name of Jehovah. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies — the very faults they have been so notorious for during their sorrowful and often persecuted sojourn among the Gentiles. Deceit has peculiarly marked the Jew in his exiled state: it is apt to be the character of a down-trodden people. Those who have things their own way can afford to have a kind of honesty after the flesh; but in the case of people for ages hunted and destroyed, and the object of unprecedented rapine and cruelty as the poor Jews were, it was not to be wondered at. Where grace is not known in Christ, persecution generates this kind of deceit in language as well as iniquity in many an other way. But the change is at hand and here announced:

The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid {Zeph. 3:12, 13}.

There will be the removal of all the old occasion for fear externally; and even before this a moral change will have been produced by the grace of God within them. It is not in outward things really to form the heart in any case. But where mind and conscience are depraved, circumstances furnish incentives to the inroad and practice of evil, and thus aggravate, no doubt. On the other hand Jehovah in His mercy will work His own mighty work within, as He also will mow down their adversaries. Thus circumstances will be turned in their favor at the very time when Jehovah has wrought His great work. It will be what the Lord Jesus calls the regeneration (Matt. 19:28), when the twelve tribes of Israel shall judge and be blessed in more than royal glory under the Son of man. For we must remember that regeneration does not mean as is commonly supposed a subjective change or a new nature given as in the new birth, but a blessed position into which we are brought now by divine power in Christ, or by and by established publicly when He comes in glory. It is now known to faith of course, yet is not so much the inward work of the Spirit, but rather the new place that we enter by resurrection in virtue of His death.

Hence we read of being saved by the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5; compare 1 Pet. 3). It is not merely that we are born again, but we have left the old behind and are now a new creation. Of course it supposes the new birth, or it is only a hollow form. The two things are identified in ecclesiastical writings, and frequently too in baptismal services we see the same mistake perpetrated which the Fathers first introduced. They always confound new birth and regeneration. Few Protestants have emancipated themselves from the error. But post-apostolic ecclesiastics were those that brought in the error. Regeneration goes beyond new birth, and supposes a passage into the new order of Christ, of which baptism therefore is the sign. Accordingly I should say that all saints were born again from the beginning, but that none (in this the only true sense of the word) were regenerate till after Christ’s death and resurrection, when Christian baptism was

115. The meaning is not, as Dr. Henderson seems to incline to, a people in the west of Abyssinia, called Falashas. Isa. 18:1 tells us that a nation beyond the rivers of Cush (for there was an Asiatic as well as African Cush) should interfere for Israel; but this would come to nothing. Here Jehovah promises that the Jews shall bring His offering from beyond the seats of their old enemies of chief power.
instituted to set forth this truth. It is thus in my judgment not less but more full and significant. And though many may be baptized who are not born again, every one regenerate (save only in form) must à fortiori be born again. The theologians, like the Fathers, hold that every baptized person is born again, using the phrases as interchangeable. If baptized, a man was regenerate or born again according to their system. It appears to be true, however, that the washing of regeneration in Titus 3:5 refers to baptism {}??}; but then, as it seems to me, the language of the passage proves that the introduction into the quite new order of things in Christ is accompanied by a new nature or life; that in short the new creation supposes new life and much more, all being bound up together.

But after that the kindness and love of God appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us. It is not man merely dead in sins or owning it, but he saved us by the washing of regeneration {Titus 3:4, 5}.

We must not neutralise nor attenuate salvation. It would be dangerous to take

he saved us

as here spoken of the Christian in any sense barely external.

Indeed I think a great vice at the present moment is making

salvation

too cheap and too common a word. You will find many evangelicals constantly saying when a man is converted that he is saved; whereas it is probably quite premature to say so. If truly converted he will be saved; but it is unwarrantable to say that every converted person is saved, because he may still be under doubts and fears -- that is, under law more or less in conscience.

Saved brings one out from all sense of condemnation -- brings one to God consciously free in Christ, not merely before God with earnestness of desire after godliness. A soul is not converted unless brought to God in conscience; but then one might be the more miserable and all but despairing in this state. Does scripture allow us to call such an one saved?

Certainly not. He who is saved as here in Titus is one who being justified by faith has peace with God. It seems therefore that the distinction between what some call being safe and being saved is quite true and even helpful. Not that those safe could be lost, but that they are not yet brought out of all difficulties into rest of soul by faith. Then they are not safe only but saved. But it clearly is not possible that a converted person can be lost, for the life is eternal. One might be enlightened, and even be a partaker of the Holy Ghost, and yet be lost. Such a statement may surprise some; but such is the unequivocal intimation of Heb. 6; and no believer need be in the least afraid of standing to the word of God. To state it so is but repeating what scripture says: it is another matter whether we can help people to understand it. Let the truth be ever so clear and sure, with some you may not always succeed. It is easy enough to give scripture for it, which ought to be sufficient.

Hence it is a mistake to regard as saved any person who is not brought into happy relationship with God through our Lord Jesus. Thus, to take a scripture example, Cornelius was obviously converted, and not a mere self-righteous man, before Peter went to him; but he certainly was not saved until Peter preached the word which he and his house received as the glad tidings of God. Thereon they were not born again, but they received the Holy Ghost; and who could forbid water? They were saved. Such is the whole matter to my mind. It is not the difference between quickening and conversion, which is only one of different aspects of the same substantial truth. Quickening regards man, and conversion is a turning to God; but the quickened soul is converted, and the converted soul is quickened. Such distinctions may be true enough, but require more delicate handling than they too often receive; for those who could treat them properly would hardly think it worth their while. As they have no practical value for the soul or the Lord, and no particular bearing on the word of God, they should be avoided. It seems to me trifling with souls to dwell on them. One ought almost to apologize for saying so much about the matter, which I do chiefly to warn all, and especially those who are young in the enjoyment of truth, from occupying their minds with shades of distinction which have no solidity whatever in them. Wherever the word is received, there is conversion, or turning to God, and there must be life in order that this should be real, not the mere effort of nature. If there be life, assuredly they must turn to God. It must be that the life is in a feeble state if the turning to God is not manifest. We cannot affirm that there is life unless there be a manifest turning to God. We may hope that life and conversion are there; but it must be felt to be serious when anything is equivocal about the soul in such a question. It is dangerous to be over-sanguine or to foster ungrounded hopes, though nothing excuses our encouraging souls to doubt. Uncertainty here is a wretched condition; but the feeblest desire Godward is not a thing to be crushed. It is right to foster the soul spite of that state, to entreat and warn, if they may thus get through their obstacles.

The only remark I would further make about conversion is, that scripture uses it not merely for the first turning to God, but for a turning again to Him if one has slipped away. This is really the main distinction between conversion and quickening. For quickening can be only once, but conversion may be repeated. Though this is not at all its usage in our tongue, it is the fact that scripture uses the word for both turning to God, and turning back if He have been departed from. That is, it includes what we call restoration of soul; as Peter after his first conversion was

Here restoring may be a fair paraphrase; but the literal meaning of the word is converted.

Conversion, however, in modern phraseology is restricted, especially by Calvinists, to the first effectual work. This, however, is not well. Those who identify quickening with salvation naturally slip into a disuse of scriptural language if not really bad doctrine. Such is the effect always of an error -- it puts you in collision with scripture. Do not think it so slight a matter after all. Although we should never force the thought on any one, at the same time there need not be the slightest doubt of the distinctness of quickening from salvation, and of its importance. Identify quickening with salvation, and you are driven to think that Cornelius was a mere formalist at the time that he is said to be such a pious and prayerful man, abounding in almsgiving, which was not forgotten by God. Undoubtedly he was no common Gentile: there was, I doubt not, a wise choice of him to whom the gospel was sent first. To me there is not the slightest difficulty, because the same principle applies to every Old Testament saint. The peculiarity here is, that he, a pious Gentile, was brought into the proper New Testament or Christian state (and this is what is called salvation), not when quickened or converted, which he may long have been, but only on hearing the gospel.

The two things then coalesced. This is sometimes important to remember; for supposing a soul heard the truth preached, and received it, there might be not conversion and quickening only, but also salvation,

practically all at once, though not, I think, ever at the same instant in any case. I doubt that it ever has been since the world began that a soul has known precisely together both conversion and salvation. So far from this, I admire God’s wisdom that it is not so; if it were, it would be no small injury to a soul, because this supposes it passing in a moment out of its sense of guilt, and consequently of sin and sins of every sort, into perfect peace with God, without time left for the most needed moral exercise. To my mind such an instantaneous transition would be a real loss, not gain. That life is imparted by receiving the Lord Jesus at once is most true; as forgiveness is when the soul bows to the gospel. But we must leave room for all, without hurrying ourselves into a system which agrees neither with scripture nor experience.

In most of the epistles salvation is spoken of as a future thing. But I have spoken here of salvation as an accomplished fact, as in the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles. But the twelve men who formed the first nucleus of the church at Ephesus were clearly converted {Acts 19}, and in a transition state before they received the gift of the Holy Ghost in the name of the Lord Jesus. They were meeting as disciples, not knowing anything beyond the testimony and baptism of John. Were not they converted? They were as truly converted as the Baptist was, and this was a very real thing no doubt: nevertheless they had not yet received the Holy Ghost in the way that they afterwards experienced. In this we have the case clearly; and it was many years after Pentecost.

There is another sense of the word save, &c.

in Timothy, where it has a providential bearing.

The Savior of all men, specially of them that believe {1 Tim. 4:10}.

To Timothy and Titus it is the truth of salvation already effected, and the subject is looked at from the same point of view. But the way people reason on the point is quite a mistake. They assume, because it is said,

He hath saved us {Titus 3:5},

that we were brought into the whole blessing from the first moment of our faith. I am not aware that this is ever said in scripture. If it be without scripture, they have no right to lay down so absolutely,

He hath saved us;

for this is said, not when we were first attracted and broken down in soul and truly converted, but when we have submitted to the righteousness of God and received the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation.

The Lord added to the church [or together] daily such as should be saved {Acts 2:47}.

This is doubtless a peculiar expression, meaning those destined to salvation out of the Jews, who as a people were on the way to judgment, and to the prison in which they still lie. Such as should be saved are the righteous remnant, really who are now added to the church instead of being left in their old place as Jews. We must remember there were a great many brethren -- not only the hundred and twenty, but other names in Jerusalem. We hear of six hundred who saw the Lord at one time, and must have come to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. There may have been more. No doubt all these composed the assembly on whom the Holy Ghost first came. Then there were three thousand souls converted, who were added to those before, and all formed the assembly on the day of Pentecost. But the point here is that salvation precedes and is by the washing of regeneration.

He hath saved us by the washing of regeneration {Titus 3:5}.

This is not an expression of man, but of God; and of this change of place or standing baptism is the sign.

But besides the washing of regeneration there is the renewing of the Holy Ghost {Titus 3:5}, the washing of regeneration being, as I suppose, our
introduction into the new place given us in Christ risen, as
the renewing of the Holy Ghost is His mighty action
internally, but operating in us conformably to it. That
accompanies union; but I do not see that such is the point
here. Regeneration is thus the new order of things seen in
Christ risen, who makes all things new. As Christians we
have this new place in Christ. So it is said in Rom. 8:1,

There is therefore now no condemnation to them
that are in Christ Jesus.

That is the position, but of course there is also an internal
reality which those have who are there. Its being a position,
and so objective, does not set aside a real subjective change:
still it is a position. The Christian is no longer in Adam: he
is (not merely going to be) in Christ Jesus. Along with that
there is a real life given. Of this Rom. 8:2 treats, which
may perhaps answer to the renewing of the Holy Ghost
here.

For the law of the spiritual life in Christ Jesus hath
made me free from the law of sin and death.

It is thus the work of the Spirit, and not merely so
because the work of the Spirit is true in a new nature, but
the new internal work of the Spirit is suitable to our new
place. Of the renewing of the Holy Ghost it is therefore
said,

which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ
our Savior {Titus 3:6}.

It is the full place and life of the Christian by the power of
the Holy Ghost.

Thus there are three things in this text. First, there is
salvation distinctly stated; secondly, there is position by the
washing of regeneration; and thirdly there is full nature and
power of the Christian by the Holy Ghost. The salvation is
made ours by the grace of God; then follows what puts us
into our new place and attests it outwardly; and lastly the
new power of the Spirit in the new nature which
accomplishes the Christian position. There is the general
result, and then the means by which that result is attained,
as I think. The great fact is that He saved us, and this is the
way in which it is effectuated and enjoyed; and this
abolently. In John 10 it is rather

life more abundantly {John 10:10},

life in resurrection power and fulness. Here it is said that
the Holy Ghost is shed abundantly. Life in Christ is the
main doctrine of John. Here the fulness of the Spirit’s
power is brought before us in connection with the work of
regeneration. I think that there is an allusion to baptism
{??} in

the washing

of regeneration (and I agree with the Auth. Version that the
sense is

washing,

not laver as some critics have hastily assumed), because I
believe that this is what baptism does show. Baptism sets
forth not merely Christ’s death, and that I am dead with

Him, but, as we find here, it goes onward to the new
position. It is not only death but more; and not at all death
in sins, but death to sin with Christ. To suppose that it is
but death is another instance of merely taking a particular
part and making it the whole.

What might confirm this to some is Peter’s way of
looking at the matter. He says,

the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also
now save us {1 Pet. 3:21}.

Here again it is not merely what Christianity assumes of all
mankind, but the sign of Christ’s work in grace that is
complete as far as the soul is concerned -- salvation of soul.
We have not yet salvation of body, but we have what is
more important after all than the body could be if the soul
were not saved. Hence it is not the mere outward act of
washing away the filth of the flesh. As we are told, it is the
request of a good conscience by the regeneration of Jesus
Christ. The expression used, complicated by our habit of
reading it as given in the Authorized Version, may make
this a little difficult; but as we are on the point, it had better
be said that it is the thing requested rather than the answer.
It is what a good conscience wants. When the conscience is
dealt with savingly by God, a man will not be satisfied with
anything less than acceptance in Christ. This is really

the request of a good conscience toward God
{1 Pet. 3:21}.

He wants to be as Christ is; to be free from self, free from
sin as well as from condemnation. This is the true meaning:

the request of a good conscience by the resurrection
of Jesus Christ from the dead.

I take the resurrection as connected both with saving and
with this request. Here we must close the long discussion
into which the notice of

the regeneration

has led us. We know it in Christ; Israel will enjoy it
manifestly when the prophets are fulfilled.

The close of the prophecy is a call to rejoice and exult.
The daughter of Zion is summoned to shout for joy.

Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad
and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of
Jerusalem {Zeph. 3:14}.

This confirms what has been said already, that it is the
general place of future blessing, and not a special one.
When we hear of the peculiar position of Judah, as brought
back from captivity and subjected to a fresh test to which
Israel was not, then the rejected Messiah is brought in. Such
is not the case with Zephaniah. We should not know from
Zephaniah but that Messiah would come and bring in His
glory as Jehovah all at once. In fact we do not hear Him
called Messiah as such, but rather the king Jehovah.
Zeph. 3:15-17 explain why they should thus rejoice.

Jehovah hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast
out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even Jehovah, is
in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any
more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. Jehovah thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing {Zeph. 3:15-17}.

What indeed is lacking? There is no finer description in the Bible of His complacent satisfaction when mercy has done all for the people that He loved. But the dark and cold night of oppression is supposed in Zeph. 3:18. God does not disguise that up to the time of deliverance their position will be desolate, as in other respects, so especially in relation to the solemn assemblies.

I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.

Now He appears for their exaltation from the dust as well as putting down their oppressors.

At that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out: and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you for I will make you a name and a praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith Jehovah {Zeph. 3:19, 20}.

Most gracious promise! Jehovah will remember all the sorrows and bring the Jews in for a name and a praise among all lands and tongues of the earth, when He reverses their captivity in their own sight as also before the eyes of all men.
Lectures on the Minor Prophets
Lecture 10
Haggai

The prophet Haggai is the first of those who followed the captivity. There is great simplicity in his testimony. Nevertheless we shall find the Spirit of Christ working as decidedly in him as in any other with peculiar distinctness. He bears witness of the future glory of the Lord Jesus; at the same time none more emphatically deals with the actual state of the remnant which had returned from Babylon.

In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, came the word of Jehovah by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying,

Thus speaketh Jehovah, saying, This people say, the time is not come, the time that Jehovah’s house should be built {Hag. 1:1, 2}.

This is no uncommon excuse -- a want of care for the glory of the Lord, under the pretext that His time is not come. We find exactly the same pretence now, the same misuse of the coming of the Lord Jesus -- the excuse that because the time is not come for glory to set things right by divine power, therefore we may yield lightly to the moral confusion and irregularities and departure from the will of God found at the present moment.

Again it is an inevitable alternative that we must be occupied, either with the Lord’s things, or with our own. The apostle judged it needful to specify this root of evil in writing to an assembly of more than usual vigor and subjection to the word, the church at Philippi. There were those who made manifest -- what alas! is everywhere a too common symptom among Christians -- their want of heart for the things of others, for the things of Jesus Christ. It was so whence he wrote: all were seeking their own things. With this before him, the apostle shows that the day of Christ, rightly understood and applied, has a powerfully counteracting effect in unsparingly dealing with the selfishness of our hearts, the light of that day being thrown directly on what occupies the present day.

Haggai does just the same. There is no one that brings out more emphatically the duty of the Israelite for the present, but no one that puts before us more steadily the light of the coming kingdom of Jehovah. They are not to be set one against another; but, contrariwise, the more we believe that He is coming, the more ought we to be in earnest that there should be nothing now inconsistent with His coming. So when they said, the time is not come, the time that Jehovah’s house should be built, the word of Jehovah comes by the prophet, saying,

Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? {Hag. 1:4}

Certainly there was in this a grievous forgetfulness of the glory of Jehovah; and it was the more painful because they had begun better. It had not been always so with the remnant.

Ezra is strongly connected with our prophet; for his book is a history which has the temple for its center, as Haggai has evidently the very same center -- Jehovah’s house. Nehemiah, as was natural, occupied himself most with the city and general state of the people. We are told in the book of Ezra that, when the remnant returned, the first thing they did was to set the altar upon its bases. In Ezra 3 we read:

And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries {Ezra 3:3}.

This is exceedingly beautiful. The effect of fear upon a godly spirit was not that they attempted to protect themselves by human means, but that their heart turned to Jehovah and the altar of acceptance they enjoyed by His means. Their first thought was Jehovah; they brought Him in between them and their difficulties from the foe.

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And they offered burnt offerings thereon unto Jehovah, even burnt offerings morning and evening. They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; and afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of Jehovah that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto Jehovah. From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto Jehovah {Ezra 3:3-6}.

It was the more remarkable because the foundation of the temple of Jehovah was not yet laid {Ezra 3:6}.

There was a fair pretext therefore for delay, if their heart had not been toward Him. Oh, if they had but gone on so! But it is no uncommon thing to begin in the Spirit and end
in the flesh; and this was precisely what befell the remnant of Israel. Still there was the beginning in the Spirit. Haggai reproaches them with going on at any rate in the flesh. They did not walk according to their bright beginning. Having offered to Jehovah on the altar, they left off their care for the temple of Jehovah -- they occupied themselves with their own things. Accordingly the prophet now points out to them what the result had been. Where was blessing or honor in their affairs? Was it that discouragements came in on account of the difficulties of the way?

Not merely so. This was true; but they were also occupied with settling themselves in the world. These two things constantly go together. As long as they looked to Jehovah, they found blessing and security; but directly Jehovah ceased to fill their eyes, then not merely the adversaries were seen, but plausible reasons for settling themselves down began to be felt. The altar was an admirable testimony to their faith. Before the temple was built, and while it was building, the altar was set on its base as the first thought: it was a beautiful feature among the returned Jews; but spiritual power failed to go on accordingly.

They allowed it to be a substitute, as it were, for the temple. Supposing persons showed a readiness and zeal, for instance, in emerging from mere forms of men to meet together in the name of the Lord, if this were made the whole matter, and there they stopped short without a thought of going on to learn the positive teaching of the Spirit and will of the Lord, or allowing room for God to act according to His own word, it would just answer to this very thing, that is satisfaction with the bare fact that they could meet as disciples together. There has been a constant tendency in many people to settle down into this as a finality, not to the name of the Lord, which would keep the door open for all that is of God, but to their meeting together as Christians, which in itself leaves things loose enough. For it does not raise questions as to condition or as to glorifying the Lord. What does not exercise souls as to Christ is a sorry comfort. Meeting simply as disciples may be a relief as a means of separating from what is positively bad and utterly condemned by God’s word; but anything negative, or short of the glory of God, ought never to satisfy the soul that is renewed by grace. Hence, although the altar was in its place and time excellent, still as being specially connected with an Israelite it was liable to be rested in, and so become a hindrance. It was no doubt the altar of Jehovah, but it was such in relation to themselves, as it met them only in their first wants. It is not denied that this is all quite right; and a happy thing to see souls in earnest, and beginning with their real need. There is nothing more dangerous than straining after something grand when we ought to be feeling the depth of our necessities. At the same time the very same faith which bows to the sense of our true wants as seen of God will never rest there, but will go on attracted and encouraged by the grace of God to think of what is due to His glory. This is what the remnant ought to have done. The fact that God was graciously pleased to allow them the altar, which was the first want of an Israelite, whereon he should offer his burnt offerings, and be accepted of Jehovah, ought to have cheered them on to leave nothing undone, but to labor diligently in the face of all difficulties till the temple of Jehovah was finished. They did not; and the consequence of this lethargy, this contentedness with what just met their earliest wants and no more, and then turning round to provide for themselves and their own houses, was met by the Lord’s permitting the courage of the adversaries to rise, who espied with jealous eyes, interfered with them, and sought to stir their Persian masters effectually against them.

Thus unbelief constantly brings on us the very thing that we dread. It was not unnatural that the Jews should be afraid of their watchful enemies; but they should have looked to Jehovah. Where there is simplicity of confidence in the Lord it is astonishing how the tables are turned, and the adversaries stand in dread of the feeblest folk who have faith in the living God. We see it in the Israelites when they were near the land. Rahab told the truth about the fear of all in Jericho, at any rate, if not about the spies. She confessed that, spite of their high walls, the Canaanites were quaking because of the despised Israelites. So we see here, among the foreigners planted in Samaria and their governors, there was an effort to keep the sharpest watch after a little remnant. This alarmed them; but they need not have been alarmed if they had held Jehovah before their eyes. There was departure in heart; and this both relaxes all zeal for the Lord, and leads us to prefer to take care of ourselves rather than that He should care for us.

Hence to carry forward the house of God could be easily deferred to a more convenient season, though urgent call was for their own wants as men -- their cieled houses.

Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little.

There was diligence for themselves; but there was the result, and what?

Ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm [Hag. 1:4-6].

Thus bitter disappointment, as always, must be in the people of God who live for themselves instead of confiding in Him who specially looks after the faithful. Our business is to care for His things; His gracious work is to care for us in our and indeed in all things.

And he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes [Hag. 1:6].

In every way there was vexation for the selfish heart. In grace there is another call to consider their ways. The first was to reprove them; the second is to encourage and exhort them.

Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build
the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith Jehovah. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? said Jehovah of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house {Hag. 1:7-9}.

I do not know anything of its kind more touching than Jehovah’s sense of neglect on the part of His unworthy people. It certainly was not the grandeur of stones, which suited the present condition of the remnant; nor was it of the inferiority of the house compared with Solomon’s of which Jehovah complained; but He did feel their indifference. We assuredly know, or ought to know, that it was not that He needs anything of man’s hand for His own glory, but He is very sensible of the lack of heart for Himself. The truth is that the glory of the Lord is bound up with the best blessing of His people. You cannot serve a soul better than by filling his heart with the Lord. Other means are at best negative, however valuable.

Undoubtedly the moral application of Haggai to the present day is very striking in many points of view. Their call to care and concern for Jehovah’s name and His house and His glory, not only the whole bearing but the detailed instruction, have a wonderful application to the present hour; but in all there is none more important than the value the Lord attaches to devotedness to Himself and His worship on the part of the saints.

It is then pointed out that the failure was deeper than in mere circumstances. And what made it the more remarkable is that God was no longer maintaining His throne in Israel; but He did not for all that relax His moral government. This is to be weighed. A royal throne in His name as a witness to the nations was no longer the question. It was thrown down. The throne of Jehovah was not in Zion, nor anywhere else on earth for the time, though of course the purpose is not given up; but still He governed morally; and this is the thing that is now made plain.

Therefore
(so He begins with them)

the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands {Hag. 1:10, 11}.

It was Jehovah who blighted their selfish efforts. He was dealing with the unbelief and consequent neglect of the returned remnant. It was not because He loved them not, but because He did.

Whom he loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth {Heb. 12:6}.

When the Lord allows persons to go away without rebuke, it is the evident and sure sign that all practical bond is broken, -- if any bond ever did exist, -- that He now disowns them, at any rate for the time. Hence these very chastenings which fell on the Jews were the proof, though of a sorrowful kind, that His eye was over them, and that He felt their negligence of Him and resented -- in divine faithfulness of course, but still in government -- the failure of His people in care for His glory.

Nevertheless Jehovah blessed the testimony of His prophet Haggai at this time.

Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of Jehovah their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as Jehovah their God had sent him, and the people did fear before Jehovah. Then spake Haggai Jehovah’s messenger in Jehovah’s message to the people {Hag. 1:12, 13}.

It is exceedingly gracious, I think, to see how God provides with special care for a day of weakness. I am not aware that any of the prophets was called Jehovah’s messenger before. Haggai is the least of the post-captivity prophets in extent, and the earliest of them in point of time; but he is the one called to have this peculiar name of honor. Men would never have selected him for it. Mere critics when giving their thoughts of Haggai would speak of him as the tamest in point of style, the most prosaic of all the prophets; but he was Jehovah’s messenger for all that. The wisdom of men is foolishness.

The foolishness of God,
as men think it,
is wiser than man {1 Cor. 1:25}.

The very prophet who is most simply dealing with the commonest things, -- talking about their cieled houses, and their sowing much, and their bags with holes, nothing but the most trite and ordinary appeals, as it might seem, -- was Jehovah’s messenger.

I am persuaded that it is precisely the same principle now. One sees it in our Lord’s provision, already referred to, in Matt. 18, where He warns the disciples of stumbling-blocks. And we know well how truly it has been so -- that what was once fair and vigorous and free in its progress over the waste of waters has been wrecked and broken in pieces. We know well how the united testimony of Christendom has been long gone, and become as a whole the seat of Satan’s power; that now the testimony of truth is most partial; that even what is sound and good is dislocated to serve man’s pride, not the glory of the Lord in separation from the world; that consequently the circumstances are such that it is impossible to defend the present state of the house of God, so as to carry conviction to an unbeliever, who contrariwise gathers his strongest weapons from the gross contrariety of Christendom to the New Testament. No doubt a spiritual mind can see through the confusion, and see in it a confirmation of the divine warnings; but this does not hinder that which has the greatest show and the highest
claims under the cloak of Christ’s name, from being the farthest removed from the truth of God. Consequently there are a great many moral perplexities for simple souls which should lead us, I think, to have great tenderness and concern for them at the present time; but above all there is this comfort, that God gives those who love Christ and the church — His peculiar forethought in providing for a day of difficulty and weakness when people might be more than ever deceived. Thus it is an example of this very care, when there might be literally but two or three gathered {together} to the name of the Lord in some places, that He expressly says beforehand,

there am I in the midst of them {Matt. 18:20}.

What can be lacking where He is? Or is it that the mixed multitude lead those who should know and feel better to loathe that light bread? Is the manna distasteful, and does the old habit of Egypt induce any to pine after its fleshpots and garlic? I know not where we find His presence more expressly and emphatically pledged than when His assembly might consist of only

two or three gathered unto his name {Matt. 18:20}.

We see also a similar principle in the Epistle of Jude. The downfall of the Christian testimony is set forth there in a more stringent and awful manner than in any other part of the New Testament.

Woe unto them,

he says,

for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core {Jude 1:11}.

Yet in this very epistle it is said,

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith {Jude 1:20}.

Here only in the New Testament is our faith called most holy;

and I think that the reason why the Spirit was pleased to use such a term in this connection alone was to guard against the tendency to lower the faith in consequence of the difficulties of the state of things and times. People feel vaguely that Christendom is in confusion. Hence the temptation in such perplexities is always to give up unswerving fidelity to the will of the Lord where it is hard to follow and costs much every way. In a day of laxity we need most of all to hold the truth of God inflexibly. The only thing for which we ought to be uncompromising is the name of Christ. We are not called to fight for our own name, or honor, or any earthly object or connection: still less should we oppose others unless to fight for His name which is theirs as well as ours; but we are called to be unhesitating and unbending where the faith is in question. Therefore, building up themselves in their most holy faith, they are told to

keep themselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life

{Jude 1:21}.

Both the gravity and the comfort of such a word as this, for such a day as ours, seem to me beyond exaggerating. No, we are not to become Laodicean; we are not to say, because the faith has been encroached on in all sorts of ways, that therefore truth, holiness, and love are hopeless. It is not so.

Building up yourselves on your most holy faith, keep yourselves in the love of God, &c.

We are not to sink down with the declension of Christendom; we are rather the more strenuously by the grace of God to rise up, and, if we have nothing else to boast of, at any rate, to cleave to the faith of God’s elect which works by love. We owe it to Christ and the church so much the more because of the danger and the difficulty; not merely for our own souls, but for His sake who died for us and is coming back to receive us to Himself, when we shall taste the sweetness of His approval for whatever of obloquy we may have known for His name. Doubtless all is worthless which is not founded on the person of the Son of God, who is the object of faith; and the only test of maintaining it intact.

Admirable is the manner in which the New Testament provides for a dark day, so that without pretension there should always be a real provision for the church. Let me illustrate my meaning. God took care in apostolic days that the holy apostles should acknowledge that which some men call disorderly, but what is really of the Spirit; and certainly they should beware of going too far when He is concerned. So in writing to the Thessalonians, the apostle called on the saints to know those that were over them in the Lord. Probably they themselves were surprised that the Lord should make so much of them. So here, though of course on higher grounds, Haggai is called Jehovah’s messenger. Isaiah and Ezekiel did not require it so much; Haggai did. The sublimity of Isaiah, the extended scope and deep nature of his prophecies, spoke for them selves with Ezekiel. But it was not so with Haggai, as is too plain from the depreciatory estimate of our critics. There is a quiet homeliness in Haggai’s communications for the most part, which has exposed him to be thought by some merely a good man doing his best under the circumstances. Yet up to this time he and he alone is called Jehovah’s messenger. No one had ever been so carefully supported, and covered over, so to speak, with the shield of the Lord in the midst of adversaries. He was sent forth with a veritable coat of mail round about him. If more exposed, he was more protected. After some such style was the Lord providing, not merely for those early days when He drew attention to the fact that these laborers apt to be despised were over them in the Lord.

But there is more instruction and value still. For assuredly in these days we want no new directory; and if such was the true principle then, it abides no less true now. The Thessalonian saints had no title from the Lord to give these brethren authority, which was the case where the apostle chose elders for the brethren. A truly admirable
method it was to call the saints to recognize what was of God where apostolic choice could not be had. But the apostle makes it a clear duty to own spiritual power in the way of rule without anything more. As we have seen, the inspired word carefully draws attention to their place, and maintains it jealously. Hence when as now we cannot have the regular appointment of elders by apostolic authority, we can thankfully fall back on that which was true before and independently of it. So wisely and graciously does the Lord think of us in this day of weakness and wants and deceits.

What then answers to a messenger of Jehovah now? The man who uses the testimony of God for His glory, -- who unflinchingly holds to it, yet perseveringly seeks the good of God’s people, and who bears allodium and scorn and rejection, yet cheers others as well as his own soul with the bright anticipations of glory and triumph with Christ at His coming. But he who is helping on the delusive hopes of the world, and the vain dream of Christendom’s improvement, is, I think, a very different messenger. Of one thing be assured, no truth avails unless you are prepared to carry it out in every day’s practice. The world will let you hold and even say anything, provided they see that you have no serious thought of being faithful, and so calling them to be the same. He then has not the smallest resemblance to Jehovah’s messenger, who says one thing and does another, who denounces the world yet seeks it for his family, judges rightly, yet never thinks of acting out his convictions. Is this living so as to give effect to a divine testimony? He who is the living spring of the truth is also the Holy Spirit. What can be more calculated to destroy the truth than practical inconsistency with it?

In the New Testament

the man of God {2 Tim. 3:17}
supposes one faithful in the service of souls; but the term is by no means confined to Christianity, being rather in itself a familiar Old Testament expression. By it we may understand a believer who has the moral courage and the spiritual power to identify himself with the Lord’s interests, and to maintain the good fight of faith in the midst of perils and obstacles of every sort. Such a testimony is incompatible with yielding to human principles and the spirit of the age.

We must not suppose however that fidelity in such a day as ours wears an imposing garb. An appearance of strength is not of course when declension has come in and judgment is approaching. God will have a state of ruin felt, and His testimony must be in keeping. When He calls to sackcloth and ashes, He does not give such a character of power as has price in the world’s eyes. Thus one of the truest signs of practical communion with the Lord is that at such a moment one is heartily content to be little. This is reality, but it is only a little strength. It is according to the mind of God. But that which attracts the world must please and pander to the self-importance of man. The world itself is a vain show, and likes its own. Consequently there is nothing which so carries the mass of men along with it as that which flatters the vanity of the human mind. It may assume the lowliest air, but sinful man seeks his own honor and present exaltation. But when a servant of God is thus drawn into the spirit of men, he naturally shrinks back from fairly facing the solemn call of God addressed to His own, loses his bright confidence, and gets either hardened or stands in dread of the judgments of God. When Christians lose the power and reproach of the cross, philanthropy has been taken up, which gives influence among men, and general activity in what men call doing good replaces the life of faith with the vain hope of staving off the evil day in their time at any rate. One need not deny zeal and earnest pursuit of what is good morally; self-denial too one sees in spending for purposes religious or benevolent; but the man of God, now that ruin has entered the field of Christ’s confession, is more urgently than ever called to be true to a crucified Christ. And as surely as He is soon coming to take us on high, He will in due time appear for the judgment of every high thought and the fairest looking enterprises of men which will all be swallowed up in the yawning gulf of the apostasy.

Then spake Haggai Jehovah’s messenger in Jehovah’s message unto the people, saying, I am with you {Hag. 1:13}.

What a remarkable analogy there is in that which has been occupying us!

I am with you is the saving principle for faith in the weakest possible day: and, let me repeat it, what had they better in the brightest day? Nay, what else so good as having the Lord with them? To have the most blessed servants would have been small if they had not the Master Himself. This was the great safeguard and unfailing source of supply and counsel when Israel came out of Egypt. How gracious to have His presence reassured after Babylon, when all was apparently gone and broken!

I am with you, saith Jehovah {Hag. 1:13}.

The words were few, but they implied every succour and blessing; and they sunk deep in pious hearts.

And Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, the governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedeck, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of Jehovah of hosts, their God, in the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king {Hag. 1:14, 15}.

The remarkable fact here is, that they built without waiting to hear that the king sanctioned it. They did the work, because it was Jehovah’s message, not because it had the king’s sign-manual. His sanction was given subsequently, but they had ventured to go on confidently in faith, simply acting on the word of Jehovah, without waiting for anything else. Nor did the Lord fail to work for them. Israel were now Lo-ammli. They had forfeited for the time
their public place in the world; but Jehovah did not fail to try, to guide and to bless the faithful. His righteous government goes on none the less because it is the times of the Gentiles. There is even more scope for faith; and we may always be confident that, if we are within with the Lord, He will work outwardly, whatever hinders. If there is opposition, the Lord knows how to turn the many adversaries so as to further the work; if, on the other hand, His providence controls the outward powers and they cherish a friendly spirit, the Lord will use this for good. All things work together for good to them that love Him. It is impossible for faith to be overcome, however sorely it be tried. It brings in God who cannot fail, and who loves to strengthen the believer when all else fades. He is the God who quickens the dead.

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good {Rom. 12:21}. Christ is the true power of this; and the joy of the Lord is His people’s strength. May our only confidence be in Him!

It appears, however, that the Jews, like ourselves, were apt to get discouraged; consequently every now and then the prophet comes in a way somewhat similar, but with increasing force. As unbelief increases, the testimony of God becomes more energetic as long as He continues to send His words to the people.

In the seventh month, on the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of Jehovah by the prophet Haggai, saying, Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? {Hag. 2:1-3}.

There is no allowance of self-complacent thoughts. God would make us real in our souls and ways. It is a good thing not to have too high imaginations, but the truth, a just weight and measure. At the same time let us leave room for the grace and power of God. Take, for instance, the present moment, as we are looking at this in a practical way. There is no greater danger than forgetting the spirit that becomes those to whom God has shown His mercy in giving true understanding of what suits Him in the actual and broken state of Christendom. Is it not one of the things we need most to look to that the tone in which we use the truth should be becoming? The more we learn of God, the more we should cultivate lowliness of mind. This does not imply that you should have indecision in your convictions, but that along with this you have a just sense of your own weakness, and that you are broken in spirit, remembering how the glory of the Lord has suffered by the failure of His people. It was quite right, therefore, that they should feel the feeble condition of all that bore the name of Jehovah in their midst.

Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory?

We feel how far the church has fallen and whence also, but we ought not to be discouraged. There is no element of Christ in despair or distrust. The Holy Ghost never produces doubt. As there is sometimes a difficulty in minds about what is called the ruin of the church, a few words may be well on the present broken state of things among those who call on the Lord’s name.

We must bear in mind the church in two points of view -- the church or assembly as built by Christ and as built by man, that is, by His servants. The assembly as built by Christ never fails.

The gates of hell shall not prevail against it {Matt. 16:18}.

But that which has been built by the servants of the Lord is always liable to be injured by elements more or less worthless if not worse. It may suffer through worldliness, haste, carelessness, fleshly feeling, a thousand things according to nature allowed to act without being judged, and so leave results to shame and the Lord’s dishonor. Hence we find among the Corinthians there were materials of which the apostle speaks in tones of grave admonition. They have let in what was not unprofitable only but even corrupting:

wood, hay, and stubble {1 Cor. 3:12}.

Yea also there might be a power of defilement with the hand of destruction there. He who built what was worthless might be saved while his work perished, but the man who defiled, or destroyed, the house of God would himself be destroyed by the judgment of God. All this is where men are the builders. Thus we see the two aspects justified. There is that in the assembly of God here below which is built of Christ, and so never fails, the stones of which are living, and in no case dead ones. On the other hand there is the bad workmanship, more or less careless service, as the case may be -- either bad men doing what is according to themselves, or good men who are not in everything guided of God; and consequently there is an accretion of inferior material having no value for God which sullies His temple, and so far incurs the charge of confusion, disorder, and weakness. It is in the last point of view that we see the springs of the ruin which soon overspread the church. These perishable things,

wood, hay, and stubble,

mean, I think, ill-put or light doctrine generating persons akin. It might thus easily mean both; it is in the first instance doctrines palatable to the flesh, and therefore attractive to persons in a fleshly state, perhaps unconverted or natural men.

Some no doubt think it a hard saying to speak of the church in ruins; but why so? There is no impecachment of God but only of man. God called Israel out of Egypt; yet Israel became a ruin. Why then should we wonder that the Gentile has not continued in His goodness? Compare Rom. 11, where we may see how little the apostle could be surprised at such an issue. The principle runs through every
dealing of God with man. The creature always fails, but all turns to God’s glory. No doubt the church, like Israel, exists, but in a ruined state. Does not the Protestant own it when he thinks of Popery? the Romanist when he looks on Protestantism? Upright and spiritual men own it without reserve.

All these are but cases of a still more general truth. The first man fell and is fallen universally. But there is another great fact -- the Second man is risen from the dead, and has begun a new creation which will never perish or even fail. Thus the same principle applies far and wide, as always; as far as we touch on the responsibility of man, we behold ruin and confusion. Everybody feels it; every godly intelligent person owns it, even though he might not be used to the expression, and so feel difficulty, fearing it might compromise the grace and faithfulness of God. Impossible to love Christ and the church without groaning. Doubtless I could easily name a well-known high church leader who as a pious man mourns over the present state of the church. I take him as occupying a zone ecclesiastically far removed from that of most of us here present. Yet as we cannot doubt of real godliness there, so also a heart that loves Christ and those that are Christ’s. Now it is impossible to have these divine affections of the new nature without feeling that the present state of things is contrary to Christ’s glory. I confess that I have incomparably more sympathy with the groaning of such a man than with others who trumpet the onward progress of Christianity in the nineteenth century, and look for the triumphs of the millennium as the fruit of the church’s labors. How can one sympathize with such insensibility to the actual dishonor done to the Lord? It is really, though unconsciously, playing into the hands of Satan.

As to the comforting assurance through the prophet of the Holy Spirit being with the Jews as in the day when they were brought out of Egypt, we must remember that the power of Jehovah is in everything good wrought by the Spirit. He it is who always gave energy in man, whether in Israel or in the church, in man, creation, or anything else. The energy is always of the Spirit, and therefore he says,

Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith Jehovah; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith Jehovah, and work: for I am with you, saith Jehovah of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you {Hag. 2:4, 5}.

It is not the Spirit given in the special power, still less the personal presence, vouchsafed when Christ went up to heaven and the church was being formed on earth; but according to the way in which He had wrought at first in Israel, so would He in grace even after the captivity in Babylon.

This was not merely by Haggai speaking to them, but His gracious operation also in strengthening the remnant who needed the word of Jehovah. He was ready to bless them afresh; but of course only in such a sort as suited the then dealings of God, that is, after a Jewish pattern and measure. The additional thing is not as some suppose the distinction in John 14, where the Lord speaks of the Spirit not only dwelling with them, but being

in them {John 14:17}.

He was to dwell with them, instead of going away like Jesus; and He was to be not merely with but in them, after being given in the new way the Christian knows Him. So intimately does the Spirit of God identify Himself with all our matters according to Christ. Whatever privileges and powers were known of old, His personal presence was not and could not be, as the Lord lets us know, till He returned to heaven after His death and resurrection. Thenceforward it becomes to us a new power of fellowship with the Father and with His Son. There is also more of a heavenly character.

But the Spirit of God was with the Jews suitably to the earthly dispensation they had under the law, and in accordance with their being a nation in the flesh. With us He is and acts suitably to the glory of God in exalting Christ in heaven; and He is in us according to the efficacy of redemption. He could not be in us until all that was of us had been completely annulled before God. There is therefore that which is absolutely new, while a higher character attaches to what abides kindred to what they possessed of old. But as in John 14 there are two main elements of comfort -- the presence of the Spirit and the coming of the Lord Jesus; so here we have the permanence of the action of the Spirit in the feeblest remnant of Israel, and then further the day of Jehovah, when their Savior God reveals Himself to His waiting people.

For thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land.

The analogy is great throughout this prophecy from first to last with what we have now in Christ for heaven.

And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come {Hag. 2:6, 7}.

After mature consideration and research I cannot doubt that this phrase,

the desire of all nations,

points to the Messiah. There are difficulties about it, so much so that a learned person in Convocation the other day denied its reference to anything of the sort. This seems to me more rash than wise. How often we betray the state of our own minds and hearts by our judgments of scripture! When in a low condition spiritually, without having God’s object before us, we are apt to prefer a more human and consequently more incorrect interpretation of God’s word; we shall be satisfied with its lowest application, and use this to deny what is incomparably more important and full.

The truth is that the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, is the constant object of the Holy Ghost where He speaks of any object or office supremely excellent, no matter what its
shape or nature. If it be a great priest, prophet, or king; if it be a Savior, conqueror, or judge, always the One whom the Holy Ghost contemplates from beginning to end is Christ; and it will be the same with our interpretation, where the Holy Ghost identifies our spiritual affections with Christ, and forms our minds according to God’s purposes and ways. Thus in fact the Spirit of Christ is characteristic of the Christian. Surely he of all men ought to be the first to see this running through the written word. So among the apostles we find constantly in Paul -- but indeed it belongs to the New Testament generally -- this quickness of scent in the fear of the Lord, which sees Christ everywhere.

I do not then stand on the ground that

the desire of all nations

is generally accepted as the Messiah. Such has been the ancient and prevalent interpretation, though some, especially in modern times, have labored to throw doubt on it. English followers have caught up the cavils of German critics and repeated them, little knowing that most of these doubts have been expressed by Deists of a former day. Most of the sceptical theories of the land of Luther in the present day are the reproduction of what England cast out as a filthy rag in the seventeenth century. The English would not have it then; it got into Germany; and now it has come back again decorated with a goodly show of erudition after a new pattern, but only the old material after all.

It is a fair enquiry in what sense the Messiah could be the desire of all the nations or Gentiles. Not it seems that He must needs be said to be subjectively their desire; but objectively He is, and will be one day owned as, the precious treasure of all nations; for indeed in the past or present which of them have prized Him as they ought? He is not only the hope of Israel, but will be the means of true riches and blessing to all other nations. There never can be the full happiness of the world till He comes. In itself I see no more difficulty in such a phrase than in the kindred expression said of the Jews in Mal. 3:1:

The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in.

They have both been far from feeling as became them the worth of Jesus. But the day hastens for both, however tremendous the dark hour which comes before it.

As to the grammar, it is a peculiar phrase in the Hebrew, where the subject is a noun feminine singular, the predicate is a plural masculine. Some suppose what is called a *zeugma* with **τὰ ἁπάκεμένα αὐτῆς καὶ αὐτὸς προσδοκέα ἑθνῶν**. “And the desire of all the nations, they shall come,” which may remind us of its strange rendering of Gen. 49:10: **εἶς ἐν ἑλθὴ μᾶς ἀποκέμενα αὐτῆ** καὶ αὐτὸς προσδοκία ἑθνῶν. **117** “till there come the things stored up for him, and he [is the] expectation of nations.” It is nearly answered by Hengstenberg’s “the beauty of all the heathen,” if not by Ewald’s “loveliest of all people.” Some have taken it as “all the Gentiles shall come with their delightful things,” others as “come to,” &c., that is, Jerusalem; but I think we may well dismiss these as possessing little claim on general attention and as proving scarcely more than the difficulty of the construction. And as for the version “costly or precious things,” whether we take it, as would be most natural, for the Jewish temple from the heathen, or as others do as contributions to the church, I am surprised that any Christian should hesitate in judging that such a meaning cannot be the true one. Dr. Davidson is right enough in rejecting Stonard’s “they shall come to the desire of all nations,” and D. Kimchi’s “with the desire of all nations,” or even Henderson’s “the things desired by all the nations shall come,” that is, the blessings of the gospel.

But Dr. D.’s own rendering, as often happens with critics, is not better founded than those he rejects, and results in a sense altogether beneath the requirements of the verse. “The right translation is (says he, iii. 316) the choice of all nations, that is, the noblest or best of them will come. All nations are represented as fearing God; but only the best of them as coming to do Him homage. Perhaps the LXX too meant this.” Now it is true that the substantive is used frequently in a wholly different construction as a qualifying noun, and so as a virtual adjective for the sense. Hence it is often rendered in such instances “pleasant,” “goodly,” &c. But in a construction analogous to the one before us such a meaning as the choice, that is, noblest or best, is to set at nought Hebrew usage, and would give elsewhere, as I am bold to say here also, a sense foreign to and irreconcilable with the context. Thus 1 Sam. 9:20 means all the desire of Israel.

“The choice” of Israel, that is, the noblest or best, is not at all the thought. This was far from being the fact as to Saul and all his father’s house. Again, Dan. 11:37, though of course Dr. D. adopts the notion of its being Astarte, still even so his version of the same construction in Haggai

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117. Augustine wrote better (De Civ. Dei, xviii. 35), though we see in him the usual slipping away from the truth. He applies the prophecy partly to the past, but, strange to say, applies “veniet Desideratus cunctis gentibus” to His second advent only. Still more explicitly he reasons later (48), “Nam prius ejus adventus nondum erat desideratus omnibus gentibus. Non enim quem debenter desiderare, sciebant, in quem non crediderant.” Jerome is equally decided, though noticing the Septuagint, that the Hebrew points to the Messiah, though he sees in the words only His first advent.
The truth is, as it may be well to add, that the Jews used a totally different word when they meant to say the choicest of any objects; and this Dr. D. knew; for immediately after he says, “We have a synonym to the noun desire in דַעְבָּה (Isa. 22:7; Ex. 15:4). In this case also the construct state ceases to be an adjective-description of the latter substantive, and requires another to make sense.” Now it is not correct to call this a synonym; for the true notion is choice, as in the former word it is desire; and these are in no way interchangeable, even where both might apply to the same, which is not always possible. Thus in Gen. 23:6, “in the desire of our sepulchres” would be nonsense or at least not the sense intended, but the choice or best; and so with every other occurrence in the Bible. Dr. D. is therefore as mistaken as he can be in such a case. If the reader compare Isa. 22:7 with Zech. 7:14, he will see that the idiomatic use of the one is the inverse of the other, one being literally

the choice of thy valleys,

the other

the land of desire;

the construct state being, thus reversed in the two phrases. Dr. D. therefore is premature in expecting that “books and sermons” will cease to identify the Messiah with the desire of all nations in this passage: certainly those who make them may be excused till weightier grounds take the place of bad Hebrew and as bad exegesis. On the whole, though the phrase is peculiar and may be vague, it appears to me refuted by his view of Daniel. Surely all this violence done to language is not without instruction, and shows that it is easier to find fault with the current version of a clause, no doubt peculiar, than to suggest a better.

The truth is that there is no security even in the most accurate and comprehensive scholarship without the teaching of the Spirit, if the subject-matter be the scriptures. Christian translators may often fail through ignorance of idiom; but a worldly scholar never can be trusted at all, spite of consummate linguistic skill, because of his necessary lack of still deeper qualifications. He knows not God and His Son, and has not therefore the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the intelligence of the truth. He who singled out Hag. 2:7 is probably the most learned on the bench of English prelates. I do not doubt his abilities, learning, or honesty. Nevertheless the prize at stake and imperilled for mischief. Nor is it that he made any serious attempt to set the truth clear. The doubt, familiar enough in sceptical writings, was thrown out in a speech about the revision of the English Bible. Dr. T. was of course one of those who supported the motion for the revision of the Authorised Version, and this was a particular instance from the Old Testament adduced as an example of the necessity for an amended translation.

It is well known that there are passages printed as scripture which have no real title to be in the Bible, as the three heavenly witnesses, for instance, in 1 John 5:7. This also, I think, was then referred to; where every serious and unbiased student would agree with him, because it is only ignorant prejudice that accepts these verses. Men versed in the diplomatic evidence of the New Testament know that the same grounds which demand our reception of the apostolic
prophetic writings in general compel us to reject those clauses as an interpolation. Besides, I am assured that internally they weaken the truth, and do not help but hinder the effect of the full light on the capital truth of the Trinity. Testimony in heaven (to whom, and for what end?) is a strange doctrine. Again, the phraseology is unexemplified in scripture; there is never such a correlation in it as “The Father and the Word.” When the Father is spoken of, we hear of

The Son,

if named in the same context; never of “The Father and the Word.” For this answers not to “Father” but to

God.

Wherever scripture treats of these terms, the true correlates are

God and the Word,
or

the Father and the Son;

never, as in the spurious insertion, “The Father and the Word.” I am not reasoning now on mere à priori grounds; for if a passage comes with sufficient outward authority, whether understood or not, I hold myself bound to receive it. Where there is evidence that it was originally given and received as an inspired document on God’s authority, I receive it without dispute, question, or reasoning whatever. But in this case the fact is that the only Greek manuscripts known to support this particular portion are proved to be either forgeries or valueless from their want of antiquity. There is not one ancient Greek copy that contains the passage. Hence it was very properly left out in Luther’s translation of the Bible into German, as also in the first translation of the Bible into German, as also in the first Greek Testaments edited by Erasmus. That it was subsequently brought in was mainly due to the clamour of the Latin Vulgate, with some Latin ecclesiastical witnesses, vouches for it; and especially accredited in Greek, because the Latin Vulgate, with some translation of the Bible into German, as also in the first

The modern Jewish version, which is generally that of the Christian one. As I have already explained, there is a peculiarity independent of every version and inherent in all; but I believe that

the desire, or object of desire, of all the Gentiles, is as literal and, what is of more moment, more true, as far better suiting the grandeur of the verse than that which would force on us, “the precious things,” meaning the gold and silver, &c., which are distinctly named afterwards. It must be borne in mind that the most literal version is not necessarily the most faithful or best, especially in such a case as this, where an irregularity occurs in the concord, no doubt for special emphasis. The Chaldee paraphrase, or Targum of Jonathan, takes the sense apparently just as our English Bible. The Syriac is decidedly loose; the Arabic

119. Let me here transcribe a long critical note of Dathe, who was certainly a more careful Hebraist than most, and far too disposed to lower the full sense of scripture. But here his judgment was sound and decidedly against those who oppose the Messianic application. I purposely give the opening words, which are worthy of a rationalist. “Commotionem caeli et terrae, de qua in hac pericopia a versu 6-9. sermo est, ego quidem cum Illustri Michaelis explicandam putem de bellis Alexandri M. cum Persis. Etenim haec sententia cum aliis argumentis, tum inprimis ex versibus 22, 23, 24. plane probatur, ubi prophetæ, idem vaticinium tertio die post primum ejus promulgationem repetit. Cf. Vire Illustriis Paraphrasis Epistolæ ad Hebraeos, pag. 379 seqq. ubi ex instito de hoe vaticinio disserit. Sed de versibus versus 7 à priori

seems to give the sense much as the Septuagint.

This is ever the case where there is an object before us different from the divine one: the true force of scripture is lost. The only way of receiving scripture is to receive simply as a child what God says, and seek to understand it by faith; whereas if we are possessed by a theory, it warps the mind before we begin and we are sure to miss if not to pervert the word of God.

I will shake all nations {Hag. 2:7}.

It is not here, be it observed, the preaching of the gospel to all the nations, nor anything of a church character of any kind. Hence the Lord’s first coming is not in question, but rather the prominent topic of prophecy, namely, the coming of Jehovah Messiah in His kingdom. Then He shakes all the nations, and not these only, but the earth and even the heavens. Nothing can be plainer than the sense and scope. He shakes the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. Now this is the very scripture that is referred to by Paul as unfulfilled in Heb. 12.

Whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain {Heb. 12:26, 27}.

Thus all can understand that Jehovah will fill the house with glory. Herod’s great porticoes in the outer court, and any offerings of gold and silver in his days, utterly fail to reach up to this promise, even if such accessories were not mentioned expressly and apart. That the temple before Christ ever approached that of Solomon in internal splendor, or anything but size, there is no reason to believe. Zerubbabel’s exceeded Solomon’s, and Herod’s was much greater than that of Zerubbabel.

Even the Jews however felt that, not to speak of its sumptuousness,

the former glory of this house {see Hag. 2:9} consisted in its possession of the Urim and Thummim, the ark, the tables written by God’s finger, and the visible glory. To say the Spirit is an oversight corrected by the express declaration of the prophet in the immediate context. Further, Aaron’s rod and the pot of manna disappeared from the ark. When Solomon’s temple was reared, they were not found; they characterize the wilderness state, not the reign of glory. But the law still abode in the ark, the rule of the kingdom as well before as when it came. What then could more than compensate for their actual deficiency in all these respects? All but one sense is excluded. The promise which enfolds all promises of blessing must be intended, whatever be the precise service preferred, or the solution, of the original phrase.

Nothing then can be plainer than the necessary inferences. The Lord is coming, and will then shake the universe, not merely the earthly part of it but the whole of it, including the heavens. This was not the case even in the chaos before Adam was created (Gen. 1:2). But, besides, He will shake all nations. It is not, therefore, what is called the end of the world,

by which is meant the dissolution of all before the judgment of the great white throne. For there are nations recognized as living still on earth, however shaken.

And the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith Jehovah of hosts {Hag. 2:7}.

Clearly therefore it is not the destruction of the universe. It is the dawn of the blessed time for which all creation groans but waits, and all nations then shall have the promised object of desire in whom they were to be blessed and are yet to trust (Gen. 12, Isa. 11). Then they will understand His preciousness. They as well as the Jews have despised Him, but He will then come, the concentration, yea, at once the giver and the attracter, of all that is desirable.

The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith Jehovah of hosts {Hag. 2:8}.

He draws out to God’s glory what people most of all value; but what of all that which is Jehovah’s and will then be felt to be so in comparison with the glory?

Hag. 2:9 seems however to be faultily given in many versions old as well as modern, and by our own among the rest. For the unity of Jehovah’s house 120 is forgotten and

119. (....continued)

coming and kingdom of Christ to be its only complete meaning (as determined by Heb. 12), verse 8, far from presenting a difficulty, only falls in with the character of that age to come (compare Isa. 59:20, 21; 60:1-7) as contrasted with the present call of Christians while the hour is come when it is a question of the future Glory. To say the Spirit is an oversight corrected by the express declaration of the prophet in the immediate context. Further, Aaron’s rod and the pot of manna disappeared

120. I will here show how embarrassed a late pious and learned man was through not observing (or rather the common misunderstanding produced by) the misrendering of Hag. 2:9. About forty years ago Mr. T. P. Platt, the eminent Ethiopic scholar, published “Thoughts on certain Old Testament Prophecies interpreted in the New Testament, and on some General Errors of the Interpreters of Scripture.” In opposition to the mystical school, which reduces minds to the same uncertainty as the rationalistic school, Mr. Platt shows that the Spirit supplies in the New Testament the interpretation of many prophecies contained in the Old, and thus seeks to point out a sure help to the godly enquirer. In examining four passages (Isa. 25:6-9 compared with 1 Cor. 15:54; Isa. 59:20 compared with Rom. 11:25; Jer. 31:34-40 compared with Heb. 8:7-12, and Hag. 2:6-9 compared with Hag. 12:18 to the end), he mentions among other perplexities this, “the mention made of ‘THIS house,’ ‘THIS latter house,’ the house standing in the days of Haggai, into which it certainly does not appear that the riches of all nations [for such he was disposed to think might be the meaning of the contested phrase in Hag. 2:7] were ever brought. This difficulty, I confess, I cannot get rid of.”

But it is evident from the explanation given above, and indeed without this (continued...)
destroyed, and of course the true point of comparison lost -- another state of the same house at a later day when Jehovah should give peace in this place. The Greek version, as it is the oldest, so in this it seems to me the most correct; and the Arabic, as far as I can judge, supports it: so do some of the German critics as De Wette, Hitzig, Maurer, and Ewald. Ezra 3:12 determines nothing as to Hag. 2:9; though it be of great moral importance, there is no connection between the two scriptures. No one doubts the fact of two if not three houses; but the Spirit carefully identifies the house all through, as is plain in Hag. 2:3. Now here would have been no bad instance for those disposed to call for emendation. It is melancholy to think how often the same features reappear in criticism just as in morals: men doing what they ought not, and omitting to do what they ought. In both respects they have erred as much as was possible. They have in fact robbed the passage of its brightest light and true power by denying Christ to Hag. 2:7; and they have failed to remove a blemish which obscures the beauty and connection of the argument in Hag. 2:9. Let them weigh Ezra 5:11-13, where, as Secker long ago observed, the house that was built, destroyed, and rebuilt, is treated as the same house. Compare 2 Thess. 2:4: it is the temple of God right through.

Hence one may learn how precarious are many of the stock arguments addressed to Jews, built on the assumption that Hag. 2:9 teaches the coming of the Messiah before the destruction of the second temple. Dan. 9 goes far more precisely to a similar conclusion; but emphatically as this house is expressed, it is a mistake to lay stress on a second house, where we have seen the object is to carry on the idea of the house till it is filled with the glory of Jehovah after the second appearing of the Lord. Nor is there any force in straining yet a little while to this end: for as is well-known, in the Old Testament as in the New, prophecy shows no real rest short of that day. Two thousand years seem long; but it will not be so when looked back on from the glory of God. And how can any sober-minded man really think that the shaking of the universe, or of all nations, agrees only with the first advent, even if we had not the application of Heb. 12 to fix it to the second? No doubt the Jews themselves are as blameable as any for speaking so much of the second house and missing the point of the divine message; and their way of accounting for its superiority over the first (as e.g. its lasting a few years more; or owing to the visit of Alexander the Great, or because of Gentile gifts during the Asmonean times, or through Herod’s re-edifying) are truly pitiable. So too Abarbanel’s effort to escape by making out, by dint of changed punctuation and assuring emphasis, a third house for the Messiah to fill with a glory which shall exceed not only Zerubbabel’s but Solomon’s. It is evident that this is but a specious ingenuity, exaggerating into a third house the ordinary deduction of a second from Hag. 2:9, and wrestling 122 it thus exaggerated against the use to which Christians generally turn it.

The plain meaning then of Hag. 2:9 is that The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah of hosts.

The house of God has a unity in the mind of the Spirit, and this would be a signal comfort to every thoughtful Jew who might otherwise be dejected. It might be afterwards pulled down and rebuilt, and after that burnt down, or turned to a wholly different use in the hands of the enemy; it will surely revert to the Jews once more, and once more be defiled as ill or worse than ever. But this house it abides in His mind, and He will own it as His house for ever when He dwells in the midst of His people, redeemed and settled there, never more to depart from Him nor to be dispersed more.

To me I confess, the thought of the house viewed as one and the same is not only different, but, as truth always is, a far nobler conception. Besides, it maintains much more the sense of moral responsibility, as well as the stability, among the Jews’ changes, of God’s purpose.

121. (...continued)

of Gog and Magog, about to perish by mutual slaughter, and to leave their treasures to the builders of the temple. No wonder those who follow guides so crude and conflicting fall into error or scepticism.

122. It is curious that C. a Lapide, though as loose first and last as most others in discussing Hag. 2:9, makes some good remarks which correct himself as to this without intending it. “*tò ëròphìsìn pròprìe non referre habbait, id est, domum, sed kebod, id est, gloriain. Unde Septuag. disertè vertunt, δυστι μεγαλὴ ἐστει ἡ δόξα τοῦ οἴκου ἡ ἑσχάτη ὑπὲρ τὴν πρώτην, id est, magna erit gloria dominus istius novissima quasi prima. Loquitor enim de templo Salomonis et Zorobabelis, quasi de una et eadem Dei domo: quia una alteri successit, eodemque loco inadjectata est; ac ei dicit, quod gloria Salomonis. Et hoc ad punctum responder querulis Judæorùm verbis Hebraicis vers 4. Quis est qui vidit, &c., domum istam in gloria sua prima? quasi dicat. Quis vidit gloriam priorem prioris templi Salomonichi? nonne dolet et gemit, quod habet postierior gloria domus posteriores longè illi sit impar? At sumat animos: ego enim promitto me facturam, ut gloria posterior priorem superet. Itaque articulus he hic iteratur, quia propriè non respicit bair, id est, domum, sed kebod, id est gloriam, quae maior futura erat posterior quam prior.” &c.

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The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts {Hag. 2:9}.

The ordinary rendering is not only feebler, but confusing; for it gives the notion that we now have a house, now of two; the true version makes Hag. 2:9 to harmonize completely with Hag. 2:3. The expression, 

this house,

keeps up its oneness; and once we have taken in the connection we feel how incongruous, to say the least, it is to read, “The glory of this latter house.” The balance is forthwith restored when we hear the prophet say,

The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former . . . and in this place will I give peace.

It is the same house in God’s mind, as it is the same place. Let it be defiled, or even razed to its foundations and built again and again, still it preserves the character of unity the inspiring Spirit stamps on it.

And in this place will I give peace.

It will be so in that day. The nations will learn war no more. Every one then left of all the nations will come up to pay Him homage in that house of prayer for all nations, after He shall have shaken not the earth only but also the heavens. He made peace at His first coming, He will give peace at His second. For indeed we know Him meanwhile in heaven, and know that He is our peace. Moreover, as Zechariah says,

He shall speak peace to the heathen and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth {Zech. 9:10}.

There is scarce a more frequent or more delightful aspect of the kingdom than this universal peace which He the King, reigning in righteousness, will establish throughout the world till the end, when He shall deliver up the kingdom to God even the Father. There is an evident connection with Micah 5 which we have already discussed.

This man shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall come {Micah 5:5}, where also we may see how Jehovah Messiah magnifies Himself in Jacob, and makes His people to be both as a lion to put down revolt without hope of escape, and as a dew of blessing and refreshing showers in the midst of many peoples. Truly He will be the desire of all the nations in that day.

Then comes another message (Hag. 2:10-19), but here a moral instruction; and we are best able to judge of what is moral when we have the Lord Himself before us. This has been done as I believe in the preceding verses; another but wholesome admonition follows:

On the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of Jehovah by Haggai the prophet, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? {Hag. 2:10-12}.

Of course the priests answered truly when they said

No.

He that is holy imparts no holiness to aught else.

Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean?

The answer was no less precise in the affirmative. He that is defiled communicates defilement.

And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith Jehovah; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer thereon is unclean {Hag. 2:12-14}.

As with the unclean condition of a man, so the nation of Israel defiled whatever they took up. All works and offerings are unclean. There must be personal cleanness before one can act or offer aright.

Who can fail to see that this is most applicable to the present day? The common notion is that you can cleanse the world by going into it and by associating with it; instead of which you cannot fail to be defiled yourself. The direction to the Christian now is to purge himself from every vessel of dishonor, and to follow after righteousness and peace with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. There is no more salutary word for the Christian in the present confusion of Christendom. There we have every sort of snare and trial -- both the negative and the positive. Negatively we are bound to separate from what is dishonoring to the Lord. Positively we are bound to follow after what is good, according to His will, with those who have His glory and will at heart. Isolation is wrong; but to separate from what is evil in the Lord’s sight is an imperative duty for the Christian -- to separate in order to unite according to God’s word with those that call on Him with a pure heart. The notion of this day that you can benefit or set to rights what is evil by association with it is not only a fallacy which must end in disappointment if not in dragging you where you think not; but in itself the principle really is nothing less than a giving up of God. It is a practical abandonment of His holiness, and of our obligation to walk as Christ walked, under the plea of doing good. What more ruinous?

Along with this the prophet calls on them again to look at the ways of God.

And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of Jehovah: since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the press-fat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labors of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith Jehovah. Consider
now from this day and upward, from the four and
twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day
that the foundation of Jehovah’s temple was laid,
consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet
the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and
the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day
will I bless you {Hag. 2:15-19}.

Now the Lord challenges them to see how faithful He
will be to His own word. And did not the disciples find it
thus of old? There cannot be a more marked fact than this --
the blessing that God has given so far surpassing what their
largest thoughts looked for. Some of us may have proved as
much in God’s dealing with us spiritually. Enough, if we
may refer to our own experience in a matter which after all
is important both for ourselves and for others. The love of
Christ alone gives whatever there may be of holy obedience,
as indeed it alone is its spring and only full standard and
rule in waiting for His return. To many it was simply a
practical question of doing, the will of God, and therefore a
fixed duty of keeping clear of what dishonors the Lord; but
who ever expected, as He has given since, the opening out
of His word, the recovery of forgotten truth, and the
enjoyment of His presence, and the extended, if indirect,
blessing of others far and wide through it? Can we not say
that the Lord has surpassed all the expectations that we ever
had, not only in His grace, but in rejection and reproach
among men? Therefore let us speak well of His name for
both. The blessing has and will come beyond all our
thoughts if by grace we but cleave to the Lord with full
purpose of heart; just as to the returned Jews of old, the
Lord here vouchsafes the promise,

From this day will I bless you.

The last message comprises and amplifies the change of
the heavens in its effect on the earth. It is not the church,
but the kingdom when no longer in patience but in power
and glory.

And again the word of Jehovah came unto Haggai
on the four and twentieth day of the month, saying,
Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I
will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will
overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will
destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen;
and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride
in them; and the horses and their riders shall come
down, every one by the sword of his brother. In that
day, saith Jehovah of hosts, will I take thee, O
Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith
Jehovah, and will make thee as a signet: for I have
chosen thee, saith Jehovah of hosts {Hag. 2:20-23}.

The throne of David should be established by the gracious
power of Jehovah on the judgment of the Gentile kingdoms.
The figure of His special intimacy and choice looks onward to

that day.

Zerubbabel, though but governor, is clearly the type of
Christ as King: as being David’s son and heir in his own
Zechariah was plainly a contemporary of Haggai. Like him he dates his prophecies from the second imperial power of the Gentiles; but he goes a great deal farther than Haggai in giving God’s testimony about these powers. In the former prophet there was no doubt a divine intention in the allusion to the era measured by Darius’s reign: not only is this kept up in Zechariah, but we have the general relation of the powers in a measure analogous to Daniel, but having its own special character and design as with all scripture. Hence it is not merely the sign of subjection in the government of God; but further we have the due relationship for the present, what was to be expected in the future, and then the final overthrow of all those powers which had come in intermediately, not only on Judah’s judgment, but still more widely during the time of Israel’s unfaithfulness. Malachi differs from them in being exclusively occupied with the moral condition of the Jews; hence he takes no notice whatever of the Gentile powers. Thus the prophets of the restoration, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, have each sufficiently distinctive traits.

Zechariah then brings first before us Jehovah’s sore displeasure with the fathers of the Jews. They had slighted the former testimony. When it had been commanded them in the name of Jehovah of hosts to turn unto Him who would turn unto them, they had not done so; and now the children are exhorted not to be as their fathers to whom the former prophets had cried in vain. They did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith Jehovah. Your fathers, where are they? {Zech. 1:4, 5}. The present desolation therefore, and the weakness of the things because of which the children were groaning, ought to be a call to their souls to heed the word of Jehovah now. This however was but prefatory, though of moral importance. The call to them to think of their fathers and their own sins and danger is the clearing of the ground for what should follow. Prophecy supposes sin and the necessary judgment of God; but then, thanks be to God, it also holds out before us a great deal more. It shows how impossible it is that God should be overcome of evil, and that the abuse of a good thing when judged He replaces by a better in His mercy. Certainly if He has called us as Christians to overcome evil with good, He acts upon it Himself: whether in government or in grace, God is supremely above evil; and this is the one resource and unfailing comfort of faith.

The vision first introduced to us the prophet has by night: indeed the same thing applies to the first six chapters where we have a series of visions which the prophet beheld in a single night, and which traverse in that kind of outline the course of God’s ways from their setting aside as His people till their restoration to the land with their city and temple under Messiah.

I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses; speckled, and white. Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will show thee what these be {Zech. 1:8, 9}. Again we find a considerable resemblance to the manner in which some of the visions of the Apocalypse were given. There is the presence of an angelic communicator and interpreter. One sees therefore how the links of divine truth are found throughout scripture, and always, it may be added, with due account taken of the subject, so as to preserve moral suitability. The position of Zechariah in relation to the Jew had many points in common with that of St. John towards the failing Christian body, which was already morally judged, and was about to be spued out, as he said of Laodicea to them all in the Lord’s name. We can understand therefore that the introduction of an angel who speaks, instead of Jehovah in more direct style of address, was by no means without its significance. There was reserve and distance implied, and this it was right to notice, for God meant it to be felt. This does not in the least degree hinder communications rich in compassion and divine goodness, not without present blessing, and pregnant with effect.
in the glorious prospect for the future. In fact, though we may notice profitably this retreating of God and the intervention of angels, there is no prophet of the Old Testament who opens out a finer vista of blessedness on earth than Zechariah.

So we know that the Apocalypse of John is the main prophetic unfolding in the New Testament. Indeed its method is deeper and more complete, while at the same time it is more precise and orderly than any other in the whole Bible. Is it not then a matter of real thankfulness to God that we are not thrown on a mere inferential course of application in having to do with the ruin of Christendom just as Zechariah had with the ruin of the Jews? For a generous mind and a humble one would surely shrink from pronouncing on others unless divine authority interposed and made it simply a duty. The more one desired the glory of the Lord and loved the church, the slower one would be to form a strong judgment on the state of that which bears the name of the Lord. Now God has met this unwillingness which one might otherwise have excused as having really good and becoming elements in it. But there are other considerations of more importance than the feeling of Christians about their brethren in Christendom: we must not overlook but first of all weigh all in the light of the glory of God, and of what is due to Christ. Hence therefore God, who always cares for the name of His Son, and hence watches with tender interest those who have been given Him, -- God has met this reluctance by pronouncing on it with clearness and solemnity, and distinct evidence that what gave Him ground for so strong and decided a judgment was then before His eyes, though of course about to be still more developed. Evil certainly does not grow less but more in course of time, with the continual influences which go to augment its volume and to darken its character. So we know in Christendom the declension then before the eye of the Spirit of God has gone on always increasing; but the apostles were not taken away before God pronounced on its existence, its extent, and its irreparableness, only to be set aside by divine vengeance at the end of this age.

I make these remarks of a general kind to show the value of these later prophets as furnishing the final sentence of God on the state of Israel, even of those comparatively true-hearted Jews who had come back instead of going on content to be with their Gentile captors. There was no excuse therefore for their being deceived; there is less now for us, as God has shown His mind with all fulness about the present state of Christendom and the consequent duty of saints. Not a little manifest before the apostle John became the medium for the Lord Jesus to address the Asiatic churches in Rev. 2, 3. Amply sufficient is the record to give us clear grounds for a moral judgment. No man can slight this without positive loss. We are called to take heed. Let him that has an ear hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Just as the Apocalyptic epistles differ manifestly from the general testimony of apostolic letters, so does Zechariah even from preceding prophets, save in a measure Ezekiel and Daniel, still more from the rest of the Old Testament. The occasion was peculiar. The Persian empire considerably favored the Jews. Consequently there were two things necessary to communicate: one was the Lord owning what was of Himself providentially for the help of His people, and at the same time bringing in the whole course of these powers. These two things are done separately in this chapter.

First of all we are told of the man riding upon a red horse who stood among the myrtle trees; and then further of red horses, speckled, and white, which are explained afterwards.

These are they whom Jehovah hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth. And they answered the angel of Jehovah that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest {Zech. 1:10, 11}.

I think that red is used symbolically: as a sign of devotedness to God, whether in judgment, or in grace as in the rams’ skins dyed red of the tabernacle, but even these founded on judgment. He who was on the red horse had been on the Lord’s behalf the executor of His judgment, and was now using Persia as His instrument for so dealing and thus favoring the Jews. This was the second of the world powers, and two more were to follow as we see here. It would seem that the symbols here are rather of the angels whom Jehovah employs to overrule than of the kingdoms themselves which follow separately; and it is clear moreover that we have the connection of these powers with the history of the ancient people, but that people now in a strikingly abnormal state. We must remember that all through the last three prophets they are never owned as the people of God. This is of much importance. They are destined to be blessed and exalted more than ever as the people of God, but meanwhile they are seen out of national relationship with God.

They shall be my people {Zech. 8:8}, but they are not. Such was and is then their state. Not that God ceased to care for them: the raising up of these post-captivity prophets, and above all the mission of the Messiah, prove the contrary.

But remember that vague ideas prevail as to what is meant by the people of God {Heb. 4:9, 11:25; 1 Pet. 2:10}.

The proper force of that expression in the Old Testament is seen in the public relationships God had with them when He identified His name with them as His nation chosen out from all others. This tie was broken at the time of the Babylonish captivity. The Jews then ceased to be openly and formally the people of God. This in no way whatever interferes with His having persons in the midst who had living faith. There were such who by grace looked for the woman’s Seed before the call of the people of God or their
first father Abraham. In fact we have all been deeply injured by the current phrases of modern religious language, and indeed of ancient theology. Thus when people speak of the people of God, they almost always understand the line of believers. Now this is not the meaning of the people of God in the Bible, manifestly not in the Old Testament. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the saints before them, as Noah, Enoch, Abel, are never called the people of God. It was a new fact that began with the call of Israel, who were put in a national relationship with God, with the law subsequently to regulate their walk, and a sanctuary, ritual, and priesthood. Then a king was demanded on their part, and when they began to fail under the new regime, and when prophets were raised up more and more on the total ruin of the house of David, and the final acceptance of idolatry by that house and the most faithful part of the people that had been raised up as a witness against it, then they lost their title. They were thenceforward to be Lo-ammi (Not-my-people). But this does not at all imply that no more believers were among them. As believers had been before the people of God, so there were afterwards. In short to have believers in the midst is a wholly different thing from being the people of God: else all nations would be so. Whereas at most it can only apply to Christians now while Israel is disowned; and strictly speaking seems only applied in scripture to that portion of the Jews who believe while the rest refuse the Messiah. Compare Rom. 9 and 1 Pet. 2; though of course the principle applies to all baptized in His name.

In these three prophets then we find contemplated this state of things most serious for a Jew when they were no longer the people of God, and there might have risen for those who misunderstood it the danger of fearing that God no longer cared for them, because He took away their honorable title and no longer dwelt in their midst as He had once done. This would have been a fatal error. Hence therefore we find, particularly in Zechariah, the two facts clearly shown -- how far God used or recognized the external powers of the world, and what was the relationship of His people during a time that He could not publicly own them as His. The prophet shows us that everything is caused to work for the good of those that love Him -- a principle just as true in the Old Testament as in the New, but one which requires much delicacy in order to apply it aright, particularly in examining the ancient oracles of God, seeing that there is in this case a relationship different from our own.

But on the face of it we have One who proves Himself especially interested in the returned remnant. It is evident that the light of His word was afresh vouchsafed in the new circumstances when this might have been judged impossible. We hear it from Haggai; we have fresh proofs in the visions of Zechariah. God would regulate everything with a view to this very people after they had been utterly faithless. And these different spirits go forth and do the bidding of God, not in public but in a providential way, which He makes known to the Jew as a sign of His real care for them. He would have them confide in Him. They could no longer be called His people in the formal sense now, but those who had lost the title of it were nevertheless maintained in His gracious consciousness of care, as they will surely have that title given again in a better way by and by. Such is the posture of things in Zechariah, as it was the object of his prophecy to make it known. Thus the preliminary vision was of very great importance, just as much as the moral preface that we have seen.

We have walked to and fro (said they) through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest [Zech. 1:11].

This rest of their foes boded no good to the Jew.

Then the angel of Jehovah answered and said, O Jehovah of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah

-- He does not say “on the people of Jehovah” -- against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And Jehovah answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words. So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very sore displeased with the heathen [Zech. 1:12-15].

Clearly this is the point that now comes forward. He first declares that He was sore displeased with their fathers, and that He had dealt accordingly, sending them into captivity and taking away their great distinctive title for the time with all the singular signs and effects of His presence with them nationally. Then it is shown that, though He had sanctioned Gentile powers in their place of earthly supremacy, He was none the less aggrieved by their pride and cruelty toward the Jews.

I am very sore displeased with the nations that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction. Therefore thus saith Jehovah; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith Jehovah of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem [Zech. 1:15, 16].

This was having then a partial accomplishment on the fall of Babylon, but the fulfilment in the strict sense of the word awaits another day; and we may enquire why, before we close with Zechariah.

For this reason, I suppose, it is that in the opening vision the horse of the man seen to stand among the myrtle trees in the shade (Zech. 1:8), and the first of the horses behind him were of the same color -- red. For a similar reason also there is an absence of a fourth color here; as in fact the Babylonian empire had been already put down by Cyrus the Persian, who in a dim way prefigured Christ as the deliverer of the Jews from their oppressive captivity,
vindicating the true God and His word against idols, restoring them to their land and encouraging them to build the temple of Jehovah. The vision however seems purposely general. There is more precision in the corresponding one of Zech. 6, where also the purpose in hand brought the first empire into view, as we shall see. But it is not here as in Daniel a symbolical sketch of the world-powers, outwardly or inwardly, but rather of the spiritual powers behind the scenes.

Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will show thee what these be. And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom Jehovah hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth {Zech. 1:9, 10}.

It seems plain that the man who stood among the myrtle trees is no other than the angel of Jehovah, familiar to us elsewhere.

And they answered the angel of Jehovah that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest. Then the angel of Jehovah answered and said, O Jehovah of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And Jehovah answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words {Zech. 1:11-13}.

The same who revealed Himself of old to the fathers, to Moses, Joshua, and others; so did He now according to the circumstance and need of the remnant. We must distinguish Him from the angel that talked with the prophet ordinarily.

Again it must not be forgotten that the proper national history of Israel closed with the captivity, and that after their return it was only a provisional state in the mercy of God here and elsewhere guaranteed, while waiting for the Messiah. His rejection brought wrath on them to the uttermost; but in it the hidden purposes of God were accomplished where all seemed most to fail -- in the cross.

Now what gives this its force is that these words were uttered after the return from captivity. Consequently this return could not furnish the complete fulfilment of the divine assurance, though it was no doubt a pledge of it. Therefore the object of these words was not to make them contented with the measure of mercy already shown them, but to use the present as a ground to look for greater blessing which grace has in store:

Jehovah shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

As far as the return from Babylon is concerned, it was already accomplished; and there never has been a return since but another and worse scattering. It is plain and certain therefore that God intimates a fresh return. He shall yet comfort Zion and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

But a fresh sight presents itself.

Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns {Zech. 1:18}.

Here we have the full course of the Gentile powers: clear if an allusion to Dan. 2, 7, but hardly intelligible otherwise.

And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem {Zech. 1:19}.

It is not the providential agencies which God employed to act within and by the empire these were represented by the horses. But here we are in presence of the kingly powers which successively ravaged Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem (Zech. 1:19). Hence horns are the symbols employed, of which the prophet saw four, as we might expect, answering to the four powers from first to last that were successively to reign. It is a general picture grouped prophetically and bringing into one glance both past and future, Babylon and Rome, Israel and Judah.

But vengeance belongs to God, and instruments of it are next seen.

And Jehovah showed me four carpenters. Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them.

They are the instrumentality God will use to overthrow the powers that He was pleased to raise up in His sovereignty for the chastening of Israel. But God will know how to deal with them, especially in the end of the age. He will then cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it {Zech. 1:20, 21}.

Now it is clear that all this has a general character. The opening vision gives no more than a broad panoramic picture or the outline from first to last -- what was even then true but at the same time what would go down to the close when the judgment of these horns should have been finally executed.

Zech. 2 lets us know that, whatever God may tell us about others, His heart is always occupied with Jerusalem.
I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, and said unto him, Run, speak to this young man {Zech. 2:1-4}.

It is the prophet Zechariah, of whom we learn this personal circumstance by the way; though some take it as merely a servant apart from age, which seems to me rather unnatural.

The measuring line is the symbol of taking possession, either in title or in fact, when renewed dealings or restorations would follow. Here it is rather the former, because the proper possession would await the overthrow of the Gentile powers; but the act of measuring was meant to show even then God’s intention to bless after this sort.

Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein; for I, saith Jehovah, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her {Zech. 2:4, 5}.

It is very evident that nothing that has yet been at all meets the terms of the prophecy. We look onward to the day when the multitude of her inhabitants will break all bounds; and, instead of vassalage under Persian or Greek or Roman masters, they will have Jehovah Himself their fortress and wall of defense.

In the next place comes the call to all that remain: the restoration of the Jews will be then complete.

Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith Jehovah: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith Jehovah.

This refers to the previous dispersions of Israel.

Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon. For thus saith Jehovah of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you; for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.

What Jehovah did when He brought them out of Egypt will be accomplished and much more.

I will dwell in the midst of thee.

The statement of His dwelling among His people regularly follows that of their redemption; as we see in Ex. 15, 29 and many other passages. When the redemption was figurative, He dwelt after a visible sort in their midst. When true and eternal redemption shall have been by faith applied to Israel, then will be His true and everlasting dwelling in the midst of His people; but this is after the glory.

And many nations shall be joined to Jehovah in that day {Zech. 2:11}:

There we find clearly the circumstances of the millennial glory. We see how repeated is the testimony to this inestimable privilege of Zion, as indeed it goes out to all mankind. It seems astonishing how any student of scripture could point to the sojourn of the Son of God before redemption in the land of Judea. The similarity of the language to Zech. 9:9 compels to no such conclusion, because this prophecy was fulfilled in the presentation of the King, not at all in His action or the consequences of His advent described immediately afterwards. The rejection of the King postponed the complete fulfilment. His coming will take up the broken thread and perfect the web of divine purposes. The comparison therefore with the latter chapter really compels to the inference that both await the public reign of Christ over the land.

And I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that Jehovah of hosts hath sent me unto thee. And Jehovah shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again. Be silent, O all flesh, before Jehovah: for he is raised up out of his habitation {Zech. 2:11-13}.

The age to come will be characterized not by some believing and others not (Mark 16:16, Acts 28:24), but by universal homage under the kingdom of Jehovah and the Christ, when judgments on the nations after the manifestation of the divine glory have broken the pride of man.
All this part is sufficiently clear. The first chapter in a general way brings in the Gentile powers and their destroyers; the second chapter shows us proof of Jehovah’s peculiar care for this purpose for the earth, of which Jerusalem is the center, the witness of which goes out to all nations when Jehovah shall have made the daughter of Zion His holy habitation. It is to me beyond question that the moment is fixed by the expression after the glory.

That great event will be when the Lord appears in glory.

That day fairly and fully interpreted cannot be short of His manifested kingdom over the earth, when Israel is restored to the land, and the nations, having undergone in one form, and in another continuing to undergo, the solemn judgment of the quick, learn righteousness under His reign, and bow to the holy pleasure which Jehovah takes once more and for ever in His chosen city. The fact that the remnant had already returned from the Babylonish captivity makes it so much the more evident that God here reveals His purpose of effecting a still more complete restoration of the Jews to the land. But all His purposes center in Christ, and will only be displayed when He comes in the clouds of heaven with power and glory, not to destroy but to reign. The judgment of the dead will follow in its season.

But then supposing Jerusalem could be thus blessed according to the sovereign choice of God, who never revokes His gifts or His calling -- supposing all nations could be thus joined not merely to them but to Him with Jerusalem as their center -- would that satisfy God without revokes His gifts or His calling -- supposing all nations according to the sovereign choice of God, who never forgetfulness. We must remember that the high priest had of the people’s lot, the live goat sent into the land of Israel, the sanctuary. This, as is evident, touches relationship with God, and brings in not merely the city but the sanctuary. But most evident is that the remnant had already returned from the Babylonish captivity makes it so much the more evident that God here reveals His purpose of effecting a still more complete restoration of the Jews to the land. But all His purposes center in Christ, and will only be displayed when He comes in the clouds of heaven with power and glory, not to destroy but to reign. The judgment of the dead will follow in its season.

But then supposing Jerusalem could be thus blessed according to the sovereign choice of God, who never revokes His gifts or His calling -- supposing all nations could be thus joined not merely to them but to Him with Jerusalem as their center -- would that satisfy God without putting their hearts and consciences in communion with Him? Impossible. Hence another scene follows to this end in Zechariah 3.

He showed me Joshua the high priest.

This, as is evident, touches relationship with God, and brings in not merely the city but the sanctuary.

He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Jehovah, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And Jehovah said unto Satan, Jehovah rebuke thee, O Satan; even Jehovah that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel [Zech. 3:1-3].

The high priest bears a representative character, not here entering within the vail, but much more like the same personage when he confessed the sins of Israel on the head of the people’s lot, the live goat sent into the land of forgetfulness. We must remember that the high priest had not only an intercessory function but a representative character, the latter outside, the former within the vail when the blood was put before and upon the mercy seat.

Here the scene has clearly a representative design. Hence Joshua is seen not clothed in garments of glory and beauty, nor even in the linen garments of daily service. He is on his trial, so to speak, like one suspected of crime. Notoriously the Easterns are as to this rapid in their thoughts and prompt in action. When a man was suspected of crime, it was the common habit to take for granted that he was guilty till he had cleared himself. They do not resemble the Westerners, who take for granted that a man is innocent till he is proved guilty. Here however all stand on solemn ground. It was not a question of Oriental any more than of Western thoughts, but of God and the adversary, who both knew the guilt of Jerusalem. Properly therefore do we see the strange sight of the high priest clad in filthy garments. It was only to be expected that Satan should be there taking advantage of the guilt and the confessed condition of the representative high priest as a reason why God should cast Jerusalem back into fiery trouble again. Why should He pluck such a brand as that out of the fire? Was it better than other brands? Such was Satan’s reason; but Jehovah had seen all according to His grace, and in sovereign mercy says,

Take away the filthy garments from him.

It was a sentence which had its spring in His own affection. Nevertheless it has a firm ground of righteousness, as we know well, though this be not here brought forward, yet never absent from the eye of God.

And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with costly [not merely change of] raiment [Zech. 3:4].

Such is His good pleasure, which is not more gracious toward the Jew than glorifying to Himself.

He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy [Rom. 9:15], and He has mercy on Joshua as standing for the people. But this is not all.

And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head; for he is not content with acquittal merely, but lavishes signs of honor and full favor.

So they set a fair mitre on his head, and clothed him with the garments. And the angel of Jehovah stood up. And the angel of Jehovah protested unto Joshua, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways [Zech. 3:5-7].

This solemn declaration was a charge conditional on obedience and even then valid and applicable. Although God put before the people His purpose of grace He did not for the present take them out of government proceeding on the ground of their own responsibility. It was not the new covenant -- the Messiah. There was but a sign of the good things coming, but not yet come. The very image could not be beforehand; nor should it be looked for in the past.

The angel of Jehovah means, I think, Jehovah acting by one who represented Him. The angel stood in a relation with respect to Jehovah similar to that which the high priest held towards Israel -- at least to a certain point. The same
The angel of the churches, which last of course were men in their midst.

This then was the ground on which the Jews stood for the present. There was as yet no taking them out from their place of responsibility under law. This could not be till the Messiah came and was received by Israel. But there is more added.

Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy companions that sit before thee: for they are men of a sign or portent [that is, representative men]: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH {Zech. 3:8}.

The effort of Grotius to lower this to Zerubbabel is mischievous; and a grievous thing that Dr. Blayney should acquiesce in an unbelief too strong not only for many a learned Rabbi, but even for such rationalists as Gesenius and Hitzig, who deny not the Messianic reference. From Isaiah the application is unquestionable; and in Luke 1 we see the Septuagintal alternative, ἀντίτολος, as is commonly known.

For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon the one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith Jehovah of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity [or punishment] of that land in one day {Zech. 3:9}.

Why should one think that the stone then in vision before Joshua sets aside the future reference of Zech. 3:9, typified by the foundation stone of the temple then laid? The context is decidedly Messianic. As yet it was the blessed sign only; the shadow and not the substance for the Jews till Jesus come and reign.

In that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree {Zech. 3:10}.

What but the day of Messiah’s glory can remove the punishment of Judea with its cause? Meanwhile we come into the blessing for heaven -- we who believe on Him, our life hid in God. Surely it is not the day when they were still exposed to the evil eye and malicious report of their Samaritan and other envious neighbors; but a day of mercy and power flowing from God’s grace towards the Jews. It is not indeed the deeper calling we know now by the Spirit according to the once hidden counsels of God, who unites us to Christ in heaven and for heaven. This will be a day for the earth. Consequently we hear of each inviting his neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree. We follow Christ unseen through shame and suffering till we go to meet Him on high. Here it is not those whom the Lord is not ashamed to call His brethren, while the world disowns them, whose joy it is to know His Father and our Father, his God and our God {see John 20:17}.

The prophet never intimates such language for the earth any more than the New Testament puts such figures as theirs in our mouth. Although we are on the earth, we stand in a heavenly relationship already, and shall be changed accordingly when Jesus comes (1 Cor. 15). They at His coming shall enjoy all that God promised Israel of old and down through the line of prophets.

But there is more still.

And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, and said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold {Zech. 4:1, 2}.

It is not only the future justification of Israel: it is not only that there is a foundation stone of the perfect government of God exhibited; but further we find now the manner in which Jehovah will give a suitable display of the Spirit’s power in the day that is coming. This is so represented by a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof {Zech. 4:2, 3};

with evident allusion to Joshua and Zerubbabel, though looking on to a far greater One of manifold office and deeper glory than any type could express. Joshua represented the high priestly function, Zerubbabel in a measure bore witness to the kingly one. As we know, this will center in Christ, and then will perfection be seen, and not before. He only will supply, dispense, and keep up, as the true Priest and King, the light of the Spirit in Israel to the glory of Jehovah. Before this shall be established in the kingdom, we see a pledge of it in the two witnesses of Rev. 11, after the translation of the saints to heaven, when God begins to work anew in the Jewish remnant. But here it is the full divine order of Messiah. It is a state of things obviously distinct from the church. Both the high priest and the governor might be feeble shadows indeed; still they brought before the mind of God, and drew out for the remnant the sure sign of what should be when the Messiah fulfills both. So we find this assuredly is to be brought into being, not by human resources, not by a mere amelioration of the Jew,

but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts {Zech. 4:6}.

It is not by might nor by power; that is, in no way through external resources, nor even the mental or moral power of man, although there will be a suitable condition of man by grace; but all will be distinctively by the Holy Ghost. On the other hand there is no reference to the operation of the Spirit in the conversion of sinners or the new birth, which is ever set forth under the figure of water. Anointing is a question of power in those already washed and set apart to God.
Obstacles are nothing to God.

Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it {Zech. 4:7}.

David's son is here again the plain type of Him whom Jehovah shall bring forth as the chief Stone with acclamations of Grace, grace, to it. From Gen. 49, Isa. 28 and Dan. 2 the reference is obvious.

And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that Jehovah of hosts hath sent me unto you {Zech. 4:8, 9}.

It was but a day of small things now, but the man that despised it would not be in unison with Jehovah of hosts when the accomplishment came. The same spirit which owns God's complacency in what is little will have honor from God in the great day, and none others. But the day when God is morally testing souls is always a day of small things open to the scorn of him whose heart is not content to serve God. Those whose delight is in God's will and work in the day of small things are in communion with Himself. What a thought that Jehovah can and does rejoice in the little efforts of those who are guided by His word in seeking His glory!

Then I answered, and said to him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? {Zech. 4:11, 12}

And we are told here,

These are the two anointed ones, that stand by Jehovah of the whole earth {Zech. 4:14}.

That I have already explained in few words to mean Joshua and Zerubbabel, as the heads of the religious and civil power then known in Jerusalem, but looking onward to Christ who will unite both, as we see in Zech. 6.

But now come two other and very different signs of warning.

Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll. And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits {Zech. 5:1, 2}.

The Jews must not mistake, nor turn the grace of God toward their present condition into a license. It was well to have already had the bright side; we have just seen in the flying roll the solemn testimony of God, that the evil which was then among the Jews would work out its worst results. Its source and doom are here pronounced.

Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth {Zech. 5:3}, or rather land. The same word in Hebrew as in Greek means "earth" and "land." We are dependent on contextual reasons to decide which is meant. But here I should suppose it is the whole land only, while unwilling to speak dogmatically. It is entirely a question of the context. The word meaning either, there is nothing to decide us in itself. The real question here, in view of what is treated, is which best suits Jehovah's object in the warning. Now the design here is not to lower the estimate of evil in the Jewish people, but rather to prepare the prophet and believer for hopes deferred; to explain how it is that with such glorious predictions there was to be a postponement in their accomplishment. Hence the occasion, actual or at hand, is shown to be frightful in God's eyes. The captivity, humiliating as it was, had not at all stamped it out of the people.

We shall see presently that the sin of the Gentiles against which Israel was raised up to be witnesses, was, or at least will be, at work, and no prospect for the present of its extirpation; and so far was Babylon from being its grave, the Spirit of God points to Shinar as its nurse and proper sphere. Babylon's doom therefore would belong to Babylon's sins; and none the less if done in Israel. It might not appear all at once, but it was there, not purged out.

And what is the wickedness here in view? Two things are noticed more particularly.

Every one that stealeth shall be cut off; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it {Zech. 5:3}.

These are taken as a sample, not as the whole: one from the second table of the law which deals with man; the other from the first, which deals with direct offences against God. Stealing is the evidence of utter disregard to the rights of one's neighbor in his goods. Swearing is the sign of equal disregard to the majesty and truth of God. In short both man and God were thoroughly despised and rebelled against, so that the curse which took notice of these two flagrant sins comes before us.

I will bring it forth, saith Jehovah of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name.
This evidently suits much more than "the whole earth." And it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof [Zech. 5:4].

But then comes the second part of this chapter. We have had the double curse; but there is a figure appended which shows that God traced the iniquity to its source; and a very important principle this is in God's judgment.

Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what this is that goeth forth. And I said, What is it? And he said, This is an ephah that goeth forth. He said moreover, This is their resemblance through all the earth. And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah. And he said, This is wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof. Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven. Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah? And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base [Zech. 5:5-11].

The ephah was a well-known Hebrew dry or corn measure, equal nearly to an English bushel. This is their eye (דֵּלֶל) in all the land. This some take to indicate the intent of the heart set on evil; and others derive from it the sense of sight, and hence appearance or resemblance. It is again (Zech. 5:8) said to be wickedness, after the woman was shown sitting in the ephah. The meaning of the sign I take to be that idolatrous wickedness is here seen caught and shut up as it were by the ledain weight, and presently afterwards (Zech. 5:9-11) transported rapidly to the mother source of idols -- the land of Shinar -- that it might be set there in its congenial haunt: why should it pollute the land of Jehovah?

From Shinar religious corruption came, and thither it must go, forcibly and swiftly carried off: such is the measure meted by Jehovah. This again seems to confirm the idea that it is the idolatrous evil of the Jew derived from and sent back to Babylon. This was particularly emphatic. The judgment of God which had transported the Jews to Babylon had not destroyed the iniquity for which they were carried there. The post-captivity prophet lets us know that, when God has traced the evil to its source, it has to be taken out of His land, and set upon its own base, where it really is at home, even in the land of Shinar, the plain on which Babylon was built. He does not speak of Babylon now, but simply the scene of it. It is all no doubt a symbolical prophecy. One may not agree with D. Kimchi and others of the Rabbinal commentators that the woman means the ten tribes, and the ephah Jeroboam's calves and the worship of Israel; but I am farther still from believing that the vision is God's sentence on modern commerce, borne on stork's wings from the east to the west. This seems to be the most unfounded and grotesque of all interpretations, though I do not deny the corrupting influence of commercial principles and effects.

But the vision before us carries us on to the iniquity in the land which God must judge; and I will add too in the last days, confident as some are that idolatry can never be among the Jews again. But the Lord warned them of the contrary (Matt. 13:43-45; 24:15), for the last state of that Christ-rejecting generation; and so do the prophets when speaking of the end of the age (Dan. 11:38; Rev. 13:15; 18:4). The truth is that Babel was not only the beginning of earthly monarchy, but also, from the beginning of that power (by the man who sought self-exaltation here below in despite of God), accompanied by idolatry. Babel was thus the fountain-head of idols. Now idolatry is the evil that has afflicted the Jews, particularly as is known from all their ancient history, because of which they were at length sent to Babylon, which was no fortuitous scene of exile but retributively chosen of God.

The future should not be overlooked. The Jews have long and completely laid aside idolatry. They always boast themselves that it was unheard of since their return from captivity. But our Lord let them know in His own day, though they were so self-complacent on this head, that as surely as there then was a swept and garnished state, the unclean spirit would in the end return, and this with seven spirits worse than himself, and thus the last state should be worse than the first. This seems to link itself with the comparatively enigmatical vision seen here. The iniquity was but suppressed and shifted for the time. It is only held down, not destroyed or extirpated. Traced up to its own proper source on the plain of Shinar, it will be judged of God in that day, when not only moral offences against God and man shall be avenged speedily, but man shall consign every idol to the moles and to the bats. Idolatry will surely reappear, and this not only among the Christianized Gentiles, but among the Jews, little as they may suspect such an issue. It is an invariable truth of scripture that the mere absence of evil is never a deliverance from its power. An empty, swept, or even garnished condition in itself implies no final escape. It may go on if God soplease to hinder the inroads of the enemy; but in fact an empty state always exposes to the return of the old evil. There must be possession taken by the positive power of God in order to keep mischief out. Unless the Holy Spirit seize and fill the scene, there never can be an effectual barrier against the
return of the evil which we least of all look for, especially
of that from which we count ourselves radically delivered.
So far indeed from this it is the old evil that ever tends to
come up again when conscience relaxes and faith wanes,
and religious habits or traditions grow up instead. There
may be other and worse evil: as we have seen, the unclean
spirit will come with seven other spirits worse than himself.
Thus there will be at the end of the age, and especially in
Jerusalem, a combination of these two things, as we learn
from our Lord’s clear and full and solemn warning. There
will be a special power of Satan let loose at the close of this
age, as well as the recurrence of the old idolatrous evil
which afflicted the Jews in times past.

Plainly then this vision traces the evil to its Babylonish
source, and shows us that there will be undoubtedly an
idolatrous issue in the land once again, but then to be
judged in connection with that which really represents its
birthplace. The ephah with the woman within and held
down by the lump of lead, next carried from the land back
to the plain of Shinar, appears to be the instructive but
symbolical form of expressing the true character and source
of the idolatry then to be judged. If it should reappear in
connection with the Jews, just before the Lord returns in
power and glory, they will feel the more ashamed of their
folly when it is seen thus transferred to its own place to be
disposed of and finally judged there. I should take the vision
as a symbolical picture, as simply showing when and how
the Lord detects this iniquity at the end. The great flying
roll deals with the moral transgressions of the Jew; the
vision of the ephah shows that religious iniquity will be
taken clean away. This, it seems, is the idea of the measure
borne off by the women, with their stork-like wings filled
by the wind, and bound for Shinar. They thus take all
bodily away where the hidden evil will not be hindered only
from working but be finally judged, and this as divinely
traced to Babylon, for it had no better source than that
compared with Zech. 1 where the second empire is so characterized. But we
must not forget that abstractions alone meet symbols. And Babylon in its day
had been an instrument of God’s judgment, as Persia afterwards became to
Babylon itself. Hence Persia might be seen of such a color among the three,
as Babylon had been when the first of the four.

The main point to observe is that of the red 124 we hear no
more than the fact; that the black horses (which were quite
absent from Zech. 1) seem connected with those who
followed the empire of Babylon (v. 8); that the white are
shown to have pursued their way to the north country in the
eastern world; and that the fourth or Roman chariot has a
twofold description, an earlier and a later. The grisled are
seen to push their way southward, which may indicate the
full establishment of the empire by the battle of Actium,
which decided the fate of the world in that day. But it is the
bay or strong horses which sought to go, that they might
walk to and from through the earth. To these especially the
word is (Zech. 6:7), Get you hence, walk to and fro through the
earth. The early powers had the title, and aspired after
universal dominion; the third won it by conquest of
unexampled rapacity and success; the fourth alone made it
good with anything, approaching to permanence of power.
The context here (I may say in contrast with Zech. 6:8)
seems plainly to show that we should understand earth and
not land in Zech. 6:7. How completely all were but carrying
out in result the will of God, whatever their own ways, is
shown for the comfort of the Jew even now in the close of
the vision: much more will it be clear when He takes the
kingdom whose right it is.

Hence the chapter furnishes then another picture, yet
connected with what goes before.

Take from the captivity, from Heldai, from Tobijah
and from Jedaiah, who are come from Babylon, and
go thou on that day, yea, go into the house of Josiah
the son of Zephaniah; and take silver and gold, and
make crowns, and set them on the head of Joshua
the son of Josedech, the high priest, and speak unto

Zech. 6 closes these preliminary visions.

And I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked,
and, behold, there came four chariots out from
between two mountains; and the mountains were
mountains of brass [or copper] [Zech. 6:1].

Thus we find that God fully maintains His witness of
Gentile imperial authority. Israel had ceased to be the place
of His direct rule on earth; but He sanctions fully the
Gentiles in the government providentially given to them,
which the Jew was bound to own, humiliating as it must be
to him. The four chariots are an unmistakable reference
(mutatis mutandis) to the course of earthly power as already
made known in detail by Daniel. There is no more real
difficulty here than in the statue or the four beasts seen to
emerge together when the winds strove on the great waters
there.

These are the four spirits of the heavens which go
forth {Zech. 6:5}.

They are looked at not so much as powers, but in virtue of
their unseen animating agents in providence: and this is the
reason why we hear of spirits in this place. The horns in
Zech. 1, as was said before, show them as kingly powers
strictly; the chariots and horses seem to be more intimate
and to exhibit God’s purpose, rather than simply to set them
out as the powers themselves.

In the first chariot were red horses; and in the
second chariot black horses; and in the third chariot
white horses; and in the fourth chariot grisled and
bay horses [Zech. 6:2, 3].

124 “The red” in this connection here presents a difficulty at first sight when
compared with Zech. 1 where the second empire is so characterized. But we
must not forget that abstractions alone meet symbols. And Babylon in its day
had been an instrument of God’s judgment, as Persia afterwards became to
Babylon itself. Hence Persia might be seen of such a color among the three,
as Babylon had been when the first of the four.
him, saying.

It is a further prophecy of the Branch, the Messiah, and thus confirms thoroughly what we have seen before.

Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of Jehovah: even he shall build the temple of Jehovah; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne (Zech. 6:10-13).

The building of Zerubbabel was precious in Jehovah’s eyes, but most of all as bringing before His eyes a greater Son of David and abiding glory when He sits a priest upon His throne. In no sense was it true that Zerubbabel was a priest; in no sense was Joshua a king. The Messiah alone can build the glory and will display it to the glory of God here below. He is now the rejected King, a priest, the great high priest undoubtably, but on His Father’s throne, not yet on His own, as He Himself expressly declares and distinguishes in Rev. 3:21. He is now a priest after the order of Melchisedec; He will then exercise it in all its fulness of meaning (not as now Aaronically in the holiest, but) coming forth with refreshment for the conquerors over the hostile powers of the earth, blessing the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth (manifestly so then), and blessing man, Himself the channel and security of all blessing for ever.

Even he shall build the temple of Jehovah; and he shall bear the glory.

It is only prejudice which compels any one to bring in here the church; for the theme is clearly the kingdom, and embraces the Jews as His people on earth, as the temple is clearly that described in Ezekiel, not the New Testament habitation of God in the Spirit.

And the counsel of peace shall be between them both [Zech. 6:13].

Anything short of the Messiah is altogether inapt. Further, it seems far-fetched and, if intelligible, rather strange doctrine that the priesthood and royalty should be personified, and the last phrase mean that the counsel of peace is between them both.

The notion of Jew and Gentile is also intolerable. The only two persons named previously are Jehovah and the Branch.

The crowns then were to be for Helem and his companions (Zech. 6:14) not as their property but in memorial of the crowning of Joshua as the symbolic representative here of the Messiah; just as Zerubbabel was before, and as both together, sons of oil, were in Zech. 4. What strikingly confirmed the provisional character of the then state of things and the symbol of Messiah’s kingdom and the temple of Jehovah in the future is given in Zech. 6:15.

And those from afar off shall come and build in the temple of Jehovah; and ye shall know that Jehovah hath sent me to you. And it shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of Jehovah your God.

So the passage abruptly terminates. Gentiles should come and help toward the temple of Jehovah which Messiah is to build (which could not be the one then in course of building, nor surely Herod’s); and the Jews are left in this inexpressible solemnity on that hinge of personal responsibility, just indeed but ever fatal to the first man.

In the fourth year of king Darius we find a strain of prophecy, but broken up like the former into various sections. As to the idea that there was any different writer, it need scarce be said that it is a dream, and quite unworthy of serious consideration for a Christian. One may in grace notice it for the sake of others, and seek the removal of the diligently gathered difficulties; but there is no sufficient internal ground whatever for such a thought. There is, it is true, the remarkable fact that Matthew, in quoting words in the eleventh chapter of Zechariah, gives us the name of Jeremiah. But this is merely a difficulty, not a ground for denying Zechariah’s title to the latter half or the last quarter of his prophecy. It is quite possible that Jeremiah may have predicted the same thing, and that Zechariah may have written what Jeremiah predicted, without affirming that this is the solution of the difficulty. Again, it appears that it was customary among the Jews in quoting from the prophets to take the great characteristic prophet, and to class others under his name. Thus there is a choice of solutions of the particular difficulty in question, which the late Dean of Canterbury was not justified in branding a “means of evading,” any more than he is to be followed in the frightful alternative of imputing an inaccurate memory to the evangelist and so compromising the Gospel. But in no way does the point fairly touch Zechariah, though some no doubt would like thereby to lower both the Old Testament and the New. It is enough to notice these facts by the way, in order not to be detained by such external points, while aiding any who may be perplexed by such an objection.

But it is plain that in the latter half of Zechariah the first two chapters are on the surface distinct from what follows. The occasion of Zech. 7, 8 was the fact that certain feasts had been instituted by the Jews in consequence of the captivity. They were naturally much distressed that the hand of God should be stretched out against them, as proved by the humiliation to which they were reduced before the whole world. Hence they had recourse to fasts instituted for the purpose of bewailing their sins and imploring mercy before God. Some of these Jews felt now that Jehovah had appeared for the remnant and brought them back into the land; and, the temple approaching its completion, the
continuance of these fasts was hardly suitable. This gives occasion accordingly to the prophet for a new communication from God.

Then came the word of Jehovah of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for your selves? Should ye not hear the words which Jehovah hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity {Zech. 7:4-7}.

Execute true judgment (adds he), and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother {Zech. 7:9}.

Ordinances, whatever they may do, never take the place of practical righteousness, and still less of faith, in the sight of God. There may be, there is often, the utmost zeal for an external institution where the heart is far from Him. Need it be said how perfectly this falls in both with Isaiah before the captivity, and with the Savior’s application of Isaiah to the state of things then in Israel? But while the prophet shows how Jehovah had scattered the people, spite of the ritual observances, and that consequently having recourse to them was in no way the true remedy for a low or evil condition, although they might have their place along with the weightier matters, he fully predicts the blessing in store for Jerusalem.

Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury. Thus saith Jehovah; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.

He does not say that He was, but that He would be.

And Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of Jehovah of hosts the holy mountain.

Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age {Zech. 8:2-4}.

Mark,

every man:
he is looking onward to the day when death should not be, as we are told in Isaiah.

Every man with his staff in his hand for very age -- not that there should not be the young, but that the old should not vanish away. It is the reversal of all past history --

and he died,
and he died.

Under Messiah men will go on living and last out the whole millennial reign.

And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; If it be marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvelous in mine eyes? saith Jehovah of hosts {Zech. 8:5, 6}.

Not so; God is always waiting for that day.

Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people.

Thus the sentence will be taken off from them.

They shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness {Zech. 8:7, 8}.

Then all the degradation to which they had been so righteousness condemned would be completely effaced in the day of renewed and better and enduring glory for Israel.

This accordingly is turned to present practical profit in what follows. The chapter ends with showing that fasts should be changed into feasts, and sorrow into gladness. (Compare the inverse in Matt. 9 in answer to the complaining disciples of John.) And not only should this blessedness be for Israel, but in those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you {Zech. 8:23}.

Such will be the complete change of the day of Jehovah.

Then we enter on two great burdens: the first of them running on from Zech. 9 to the end of Zech. 11; and the next taking up some special features of Zech. 11, which are expanded in the last burden to the end of the book.

As to the first, beginning with Zech. 9, it is said,

The burden of the word of Jehovah in the land of Hadrach, and Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward Jehovah {Zech. 9:1}.

We find accordingly the judgment of the nations which were near at hand. But further, while there should be the overthrow of Tyre and Sidon -- while there should be sorrow therefore for Ashkelon and Gaza -- it is written that there should be a state of confusion in Judah. But Jehovah would undertake the cause of the people.

And I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes {Zech. 9:8}.

This brings in the Messiah.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly,
and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of
an ass {Zech. 9:9}.

We know how this is applied by the evangelists, just so far
as was true then, and no farther, leaving for future
fulfilment what did not then apply. It would be hard to wish
for a finer instance of scripture exactitude where all is
perfect. The mode of citation clearly shows the admirable
manner in which the Holy Ghost is pleased to employ the
Old Testament. There is first of all His title, and then His
character, but not the consequences for others, of which
unbelief deferred the accomplishment.

As to the early verses of the chapter there seems no
reason to question that they distinctly apply to the march of
Alexander’s army and the heavy blows struck north and
south of Judea after the battle of Issus (as well as certain
successes of Jews long afterwards over Greeks), and above
all to Jehovah’s then protection of His house when the
conqueror of the east passed by on his return westward to
secure the coasts of the Mediterranean before pushing into
the interior of Asia (Zech. 9:8). Even rationalists admit the
exact parallel between the list of his captures and the places
which gave him especial trouble in besieging them, as Tyre
and Gaza; as well as the long subsequent Maccabean
victories. But plain as this is and in its measure important,
how much more so is it to see that as a whole the prophecy
like others is of no isolated interpretation? It joins all the
rest in converging on the great events of the last days when
the King shall make good the sure mercies of David, now
established in His resurrection, by coming to them, not as
the King shall make good the sure mercies of David, now
rest in converging on the great events of the last days when
the glory of Jehovah shall be manifested in this world.

This clearly marks when the accomplishment must be, even
when the glory of Jehovah shall be manifested in this world.

And Jehovah shall be seen over them, and his arrow
shall go forth as the lightning: and Jehovah God
shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds
of the south {Zech. 9:14}.

It is really no small absurdity to apply all this to anything
that has ever been since here below.

We see that Greece does not merge in the beast when it
rises from the abyss according to the energetic symbolical
language of the Revelation. We must leave scope for all the
actors in the final crisis, for the eastern as well as the
western powers, and others of less moment who move
rather independently. The last resuscitated empire will
represent the previous universal empires as to their
principles, -- that is Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece, --
but will not have their dominions.

The principle is one thing, their territorial possessions
another. It seems plain from Dan. 2 that there will be a
representative of all in that day when the blow falls on the
feet of iron-clay and breaks them to pieces. Then we find
the gold and silver and the brass and iron not all changed
into iron, but each with a representative, not excepting even
Babylon, although the Roman only retain among them
imperial power. Thus there will be a representative of
Persia, and so it exists now. There will be a representative
of Greece, as we know it has begun to be represented
afresh, but it will assume, I suppose, a more definite form
and greater importance. Assyria, as we have frequently
seen, will be represented by the king of the north where the
Ottoman Porte is now -- I do not say properly or formally
Russian, but certainly a power in league with Russia,
subservient to its policy and maintained by its influence.
The remoter power will be its suzerain, which seems to me
implied in Daniel’s description (Dan. 8:24). It will be an
energetic power, which is far from being true now any more
than of Greece. As we know, neither can keep head against
eventual foes or maintain order in their own dominions:
such is their state of prostration or disorganisation. But
there will be a vast development, and with it may be great
rapidity. It would appear that much of it will be brought
about by Russian power, no doubt to further their
aggressive policy. I believe that this lies before Greece; but,
coming into collision later with Judah, its total overthrow is
shown here in a general way.

Jehovah of hosts shall defend them; and they shall
devour, and subdue with sling stones; and they shall
drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they
shall be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the
altar. And Jehovah their God shall save them in that
day as the flock of his people {Zech. 9:15, 16}.

Thus we see the union of future power and glory on earth
with the statement that He should come having salvation.

For how great is his goodness, and how great is his
beauty! {Zech. 9:17}.

The general beneficence of His reign follows.

In Zech. 10 it is shown how God will make use of
Judah and Ephraim in that day. He will fight not merely for
them, but in and by them. It is a great mistake to suppose
that all will be accomplished by Jehovah single-handed.
There is a judgment which He will execute on His appearing
from heaven, in which the Jews can have no part whatever,
namely, the destruction of the beast and the false prophet,
with the flower of the rank and power of the revived Roman
empire. Thus the western powers will be completely
crushed by the Lord coming in judgment from heaven.
After that He will use both Judah and Ephraim, as we see
here, to deal with other refractory Gentiles.

When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with
Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion {Zech. 9:13};
and so He further says:

Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail,
out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor
together {Zech. 10:4}.
That clearly shows the meaning:

And they shall be as mighty men, which tread down
their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle:
and they shall fight {Zech. 10:5}. 126

But this judgment is not a description of the empire and
its doom, with that of its adherents. The western powers
will have gone deeper in evil, and must fare accordingly.
Having, enjoyed unexampled privileges, they will finally
turn them to the boldest impiety and lawlessness, coupled
with the highest pride; and so the Lord reserves the blow to
Himself. When the last Assyrian comes up against the land,
he will find the two tribes there; and perhaps on the last
occasion (for there are two attacks on the city of Jerusalem
in the future) Israel may be there too, as we shall find
further on in this prophecy. The same thing, I think,
appears in Isa. 28, 29. We can easily understand the
flocking thither of Ephraim between the two assaults. This
is the main question that might be raised. The Lord here
promises to strengthen the house of Judah, and save the
house of Joseph. Most evidently, therefore, it is the future
ingathering of the whole nation, the

all Israel {Rom. 11:26}

that is to be saved.

I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have
redeemed them: and they shall increase as they have
increased. And I will sow them among the people:
and they shall remember me in far countries; and
they shall live with their children, and turn again. I
will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt,
and gather them out of Assyria {Zech. 10:8-10}.

It is not a mere remnant returning from Babylon, but a
complete ingathering of the people from every quarter,
taking the north and the south more particularly into
account, and specifying them here. Then Jehovah
summarily puts down the pride and power of all their
enemies.

And I will strengthen them in Jehovah; and they
shall walk up and down in his name, saith Jehovah
{Zech. 10:12}.

But Zech. 11 is still more solemn, and brings other and
deeper elements into the final scene.
Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may
devour thy cedars. Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is
fallen; because the mighty are spoiled: howl, O ye
oaks of Bashan; for the forest of the vintage is come
down {Zech. 11:1, 2}.

They are vivid figures of judgment on the outward strength
and the dignity of the Jews. The rulers are in grief and
dismay at their spoliation when their hopes once more beat
high. Their river, even then as ever figuring national
resource and power, suffered no less.

There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds; for
their glory is spoiled: a voice of the roaring of
young lions; for the pride of Jordan is spoiled
{Zech. 11:3}.

The nations are gathering against Jerusalem.

Thus saith Jehovah my God; Feed the flock of the
slaughter {Zech. 11:4}.

Flock of the slaughter
means those of Israel that men devoted to persecution, to
whom the Lord’s heart specially turned:

Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves
not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed be
Jehovah; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity
them not {Zech. 11:5}.

These godly Jews are in peculiar distress and danger. While
the Jews themselves as a whole are hated by the nations, the
true-hearted ones are hateful to their own brethren. Thus
their state is outwardly deplorable.

For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land,
saith Jehovah: but lo, I will deliver the men every
one into his neighbor’s hand, and into the hand of
his king: and they shall smite the land, and out of
their hand I will not deliver them {Zech. 11:6}.

It is the final trouble of Jerusalem.

And I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O

126. The attempt of some freethinking Germans and others to make out two
authors, if not more, by a comparison of Zech. 9, 10 with 14 seems quite as
futile as usual. If Messiah speak peace not to Israel only, but to the Gentiles
– if His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the
earth, what more consistent with the reign of Jehovah over all the earth? The
return of the captive and dispersed Israelites is in no way compromised by the
fact that half the city goes into captivity just before their final deliverance; still
less is there difficulty in seeing two parts cut off, and the third going through the
fire in the land, while Jerusalem has half taken and the rest not. Jehovah
acts mightily for His people in Zech. 9, and not to their exclusion in
Zech. 14. What, lastly, is to hinder Jehovah’s cutting off the war-horse from
Jerusalem, while the horses employed in peace bear the stamp that their
masters are wholly devoted to His name? We shall see that no chapter in the
prophecy deserves less than the last to be taxed with “a misty indistinctness.”
The haze must be in the reader who says so.
The crisis brings to light a remarkable under-current. What lay at the bottom? and how can one account for such a state of things? The prophet accordingly in a symbolical method, which shows us the same hand and mind as the earlier part of the book where it abounds, proceeds to explain how it came to pass.

And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock {Zech. 11:7}.

As we saw with Joshua and Zerubbabel before, so now the prophet personates first of all the Messiah, and then the Anti-Messiah. From Zech. 11:7-14 he personates the Christ; from Zech. 11:15-17 he personates Antichrist, as he was directed.

I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock.

These staves represent the authority that properly belongs to the Messiah. The first staff he breaks in Zech. 11:10. This is in view of the awful condition of the Jews.

Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me {Zech. 11:8}.

There was no sympathy between Christ and those who led or misled the people -- the shepherds, as they are called, who do not answer to Christian ministers, as the ignorant or misled the people -- the shepherds, as they are called, who do not answer to Christian ministers, as the ignorant or misled the people -- the shepherds, as they are called, who do not answer to Christian ministers, as the ignorant or misled the people -- the shepherds, as they are called, who do not answer to Christian ministers, as the ignorant or misled the people -- the shepherds, as they are called, who do not answer to Christian ministers, as the ignorant or misled the people. Thus the unreadiness morally of the Jews for the Messiah made it impossible to gather the peoples. Their sight was abhorrent to Him, and in point of fact He was not tolerable to them. There was no groundwork therefore for gathering the peoples. It could not be then and must be postponed, but not abandoned save only for the present. So the staff Beauty was broken, the image of the authority of God to carry out this end now. But He will surely put it in force on behalf of all the peoples whom He will gather around Israel when they bow and bless their Messiah. For the time it disappears. The staff was broken in that day; and so the poor of the flock who waited upon Him knew that it was the word of Jehovah. His secret is with those that fear Him.

Then comes another development far more awful and of endless moment.

And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver {Zech. 11:12}.

It was not only that the purpose of gathering the nations was postponed, but Christ also was sold unto death by His own! and at what a price?

He came unto his own, and his own received him not {John 1:11}.

The consequence was the other staff had to be broken.

Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands.

This went far beyond interfering with the gathering of the peoples; its effect was to break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel {Zech. 11:14}.

God would not even gather Israel now. Not only would He not gather the nations round the Messiah according to His earthly purpose of blessing; but He would not even assemble the Jewish people. Thus the rejection of Jesus during His life made it impossible to gather the Gentiles, the rejection of Jesus in His death broke for the time all hopes of gathering Israel. The Jews must be scattered instead of Israel being gathered. All such plans were shattered for the time.

This introduces at once the final struggle. The whole of the wonderful dealings of God with Christianity are passed over. They are not, and could not be, the proper theme of Old Testament prophecy, though words here and there leave room for and illustrate most important points and prove that all was known from the beginning. The immense system of the church, the mystery of Christ, fills up the gap between verses Zech. 11:14 and 15, which last at once plunges us into the dismal circumstances at the end of the age.

And Jehovah said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd {Zech. 11:15}.

Having brought in Christ up to His death, now he brings in the Antichrist as it were straight upon Him. Obviously there is a moral link and a real allusive contrast between the two. So He Himself tells the Jews in John 5 that if they would not have Him who came in the Father’s name, they would
receive the one who comes in his own name. If in the evangelist the two are brought together, we need not wonder that Zechariah does the same after his manner.

Take unto thee the instruments of a foolish shepherd. For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still [Zech. 11:15, 16].

The exact contrary Christ did;

but he [the Antichrist -- sad contrast!] shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces. Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened [Zech. 11:16, 17].

The judgment of God shall be upon him. It is described here in terms suitable to a shepherd; but we know how it will be accomplished in the Antichrist.

Then comes the last burden of the prophet, which sets out the consummation in great prominence: only instead of confining us to an account of this alone, he interweaves the consummation in great prominence: only instead of accomplishing in the Antichrist.

The judgment of God shall be upon him. It is described here in terms suitable to a shepherd; but we know how it will be accomplished in the Antichrist.

Let it be marked here, that the whole people are before Him now. It is not merely Judah.

The burden of the word of Jehovah for Israel, saith Jehovah.

Let it be marked here, that the whole people are before Him now. It is not merely Judah.

The burden of the word of Jehovah for Israel, saith Jehovah, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him. Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, [it is the peoples again, not of course the Jews,] when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all peoples: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it. In that day, saith Jehovah, I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness: and I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah, and will smite every horse of the people with blindness. And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in Jehovah of hosts their God. In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an heathen of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem [Zech. 12:1-6].

This, of course the end of the age, is to bring in the full time of blessing for Jerusalem, out of that furnace of affliction, when all nations hang around with open mouth to devour, but in vain. They will not only be disappointed, but themselves be devoured of Him who in that day reverses the long penalty, and protects Jerusalem for evermore.

But it would involve prophecy in miserable confusion to assume that these mean the western powers, which at this time will have been totally overthrown by the Lord’s judgment, as already explained (Rev. 19). All nations must mean here the hostile Gentiles who take up arms against Israel, after the destruction of the beast, and his vassal king of the west, with their false prophet ally in Jerusalem. They are the nations in league with the king of the north, and quite opposed to the beast, though openly the antagonist of Israel. In fact all nations in the prophets never mean the western powers, but all that remain after the ruin of the beast and the horns. This may be to some an important help in interpreting these scriptures. The western powers are only a part of the nations, a particularly favored and responsible part, with a defined relation to the Jew and even Christ, both in the past and in the future. Their position is peculiar and their responsibility; so their guilt is apart, and their judgment also. The western powers compose a special parenthesis; their connection is exclusively with the Jews, never with Israel. If this is apprehended, it may serve to make distinctions plain, which are all-important to him who would understand the divine chart of unfulfilled as well as fulfilled prophecy.

Every horse here has been frequently referred to as a great array of western cavalry: why it should be “western” does not appear. I am sorry to differ from any who say so; but the inference completely fails. There is no doubt about the cavalry: whence it comes depends on no theory, but on the accurate and full examination of scripture as to that time. I think that all who so take it mistake the true bearing, not of this passage only, but of the then situation. Besides, easterns are more remarkable for cavalry than westerns in general. Infantry was always the right hand of Roman armies; and so it has continued in the west, and will, I doubt not, spite of modern inventions, to the last. But the easterns are described as very particularly notorious for their abundance of fine and showy cavalry. Other evidence may appear as we go on, which I trust will commend itself to all unprejudiced minds; for the point is not without importance. It is a difference found among prophetic students generally, growing out of the confirmed habits of thought which tended to make everything of the beast and his satellites the ten kings.

Indeed the reason lies further back still; for it clearly is an off- shoot of the old system which loved to see the Pope in every evil one whom scripture denounces as the enemy of God’s people. It was really therefore the narrowness of mind which shut the vast field of prophecy up to the limits of the circumstances which we Christians or rather Protestants were connected with. In truth, properly speaking, this is not the scheme of prophecy at all. As the
rule, it embraces for its subject-matter the earth and all the nations of which the Assyrian will be the head. The imperial course of the four beasts is an exceptional intermediate system, of which Daniel treats, and Zechariah in a measure, but only touched incidentally by the general stream of the prophets greater or lesser. It is no doubt of deep interest, but still a very small part of the prophetic vista.

We must then distinguish between the Lord appearing in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God, &c., and the earthly judgments He will after a certain interval execute, as in Zech. 12. This is not His appearing to destroy the beast and the false prophet. It is afterwards that He makes Jerusalem a cup of trembling to the nations. His first judgment is on the apostates, whether Jews or Gentiles. Jerusalem will tremble for her own sins and punishment. Instead of its being as yet a cup of trembling to Gentiles. Jerusalem will tremble for her own sins and His first judgment is on the apostates, whether Jews or Gentiles. Jerusalem will tremble for her own sins and punishment. Instead of its being as yet a cup of trembling to others, the city must bow under the Lord’s righteous dealing. Instead of its being as yet a cup of trembling to Gentiles.

In that day shall Jehovah defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem [Zech. 12:8].

When Antichrist was suddenly overwhelmed, the Jews took no part whatever in that most solemn act. Long before, according to His warning (Matt. 24:15), the godly ones had fled from Jerusalem. They were not inhabitants of Jerusalem from the day the abomination of desolation was set up in the sanctuary, but had fled here and there through horror at their sin, and for refuge from the predicted tribulation.

And the house of David shall be as God, -- as the angel of Jehovah before them. And it shall come to pass in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem [Zech. 12:8, 9].

Here again the difference of time and circumstance is as plain as can well be conceived.

And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me 127 whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart {Zech. 12:10-14}.

Thus our prophet gives the general account of Jehovah’s gracious action, when He espouses the cause of the remnant already delivered from the inward evil, and exposed to the attacks of the nations who believe not that Messiah is with His people. And now that this mighty overthrow of the gathered Gentiles has been wrought, an immensely deepened spiritual work goes on in their souls. The word of God enters profoundly into their conscience, the effect of which is that each retires alone as it were before God. For indeed their grief of heart is such that they feel the need of having to do with Him alone: if they could bear another’s presence than His against whom they had so variously and long sinned, what could any other avail at such an hour? No; they must go to the Lord with it all -- to the very One who is not more surely their Jehovah-Elohim than their pierced Messiah! It is not despairing remorse, but a gracious sorrow. It is self-judgment that takes to heart their own sin, that looks back at all without excusing any, that takes God’s side against every evil way, and above the rest their

127. The reading of the Keri יִגָּנִים “on him” instead of the textual יִגָּנִים “on me,” seems evidently to bear the stamp of a correction designed to remove an apparent anomaly from the construction as well as to get rid of the plain truth, as the text stands that the pierced One is Jehovah. Hence the correction has even crept into the text of not a few MSS. of both Kennicott and of De Rossi. The truth is that these tamperings with the reading and the efforts of others to enfeeble the translation only show the deep moment of what is here written by the Holy Spirit. It was to escape from this text in particular that some of the Rabbis invented the absurdity of two Messiahs, Ben-Joseph and Ben-David, but even so with singular inconsistency as Mr. Caul has well shown. One may lament but need not be surprised at such a version as Mr. Leeser’s who uses the transition from the first to the third person as a reason for interpolating as well as changing the natural import of the clause. He gives it thus: “They will look up towards me (for every one) whom they have thrust through.” Even Abarbanel and other Rabbis condemned D. Kimchi’s “because they pierced,” depriving the verb of its object which is invariably expressed. What would even they have thought of introducing an imaginary one to get rid of the true one? And where is the propriety either of such rapt looking to Jehovah for “every one” so thrust through, or for the grief beyond measure that follows in the passage? The prophet could only compare the bitter yet gracious lamentation to that for Josiah: are the Jews to wait for every one they slay of their Gentile assailants? And is the Spirit to be poured out for an end so strange and unworthy? Were it for some One incomparably glorious whom they woke up to find that they had blindly pierced, who after all appeared to save them in their last trouble, one could understand the striking force of the whole context, and especially if somehow He could unite in His person one nature entitled Him to be called Jehovah, and another which might leave Him open to be pierced.

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shameless rejection of His Messiah. All, no matter how far back; own it as their own sin. So they mourn as for their only son -- a mourning in love, but with the deepest pain and shame that they had so treated Him who loved them perfectly. This is what they most feel now -- it was against Him.

Thus too, we find certain families mentioned with a very peculiar choice and beauty. The family, we are told, of the house of David, beginning with the very highest or royal line.

They mourn,
as it is said,
the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart {Zech. 12:10-12}.

But the family of the reproving prophet is also there: the descendants of Nathan are mourning too. Instead of now reproving David, they unsparingly judge themselves, and confess each his own sin. Grace no doubt can identify itself with others' sins; but this cannot rightly be unless one walks with God in pure conscience. Here it is the thorough repentance of those who are the first to own their long and guilty blindness. Hence it will be no question of David exposed before Nathan, or of Nathan dealing with David: each will find his own sin, and all will deplore their common sin against the Messiah.

But further still, this might be said to be when the nation was grown up into a maturity of greatness. The work, however, will go farther back; it will mount right up to the beginning. For as we read,

The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart {Zech. 12:13}.

Notoriously Levi and Simeon, 128 or Shimei, were the very heads who conspired in revenge for their sister Dinah, and caused the names of the sons of Jacob to stink in the earliest days; and now the posterity of the two who were together in their cruel wickedness are named together in bending alone to confess each his guilt before Jehovah. There is no more beautiful description of the power of divine grace in searching the heart, fully trusting in the Lord, yet condemning one's sins to the uttermost. There is nothing finer in its way than the view it gives of the operation of the Spirit on the conscience, which so isolates the soul that we hear of the husbands apart, and their wives apart. The closest relationship is as nothing in presence of sin and God as its judge. Each must be alone: the husband apart and the wife apart, shut out from every influence and thought save of what He is spite of what each had been to Him whom they pierced, yet who died for them. The whole work must be done -- the work not of deliverance only, but of restoration in conscience before God.

It is not that they were not quickened before, nor that they only now first knew real compunction of conscience by the Spirit of God. But the dealing of the soul with God and under His truth is far more profound when the sense of danger is gone and the power of God has wrought unmistakable deliverance. In this case, as we have seen, not only was the beast destroyed who rose up against the Lamb, but now the open and earthly enemies of Israel. The rich and manifest mercy opens the heart, and conscience unburdens itself before God.

It seems to be after the destruction of the king of the north. Till then the Jews will be harassed and threatened. They will be in circumstances of danger and difficulty until the Lord has won the final victory for them. Not till then will there be the full work in their souls. He can then use them freely, as they can enjoy Him without a question. They will have been converted before; but this brings them by self-judgment in all that dishonored and grieved Him into the communion of His mind and love. So true is the distinction between the two things for the Israelite as well as the Christian.

In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness {Zech. 13:1}.

It is not merely that they will look on him whom they have pierced {Zech. 12:10},

but besides there is the washing of water by the word. There is no such thing in scripture as a fountain of blood, spite of our own poet Cowper. To be cleansed with blood is not enough. We need to be bathed in water and to wash our feet also day by day. And all this we have in our Lord Jesus.

This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood {1 John 5:6}.

He cleanses His people morally as well as atones for them.

But in Zech. 13 it is the water, not the blood. Here the Spirit uses the word as the moral power of the death of Christ doubtless; but still it is the word. Along with expiation, before God we need communion with the truth practically. Then appears the result for others.

And it shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered:

and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land {Zech. 13:2}.

Everything now is weighed that was offensive to God's character.

And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of Jehovah {Zech. 13:3}.

How many and grave had been the defilements, uncleannesses, and false prophesyings in the days of Antichrist! False Christs and false prophets had abounded

128. So the LXX., the Syriac and the Arabic versions.
then. All this will now be completely purged out.

And his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth {Zech. 13:3}.

They will play the part of Phinehas now in indignation at what dishonors the Lord.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive {Zech. 13:4}.

Most seem disposed to take the two next verses as a continuation of the deceiver, who now repudiates any such claim, professes nothing but a mean condition, and either pretends that the idolatrous marks in his hands were the effects of maiming in grief for friends, or alleges that he was already punished for life, though not put to death for his fault.

This may be a simple enough meaning; but it certainly presents a poor sense of Zech. 13:6. Others accordingly apply it to Christ thus:

But he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man acquired me as a slave from my youth {Zech. 13:5}.

This last is a difficult passage, because it brings in Christ in so abrupt a manner; if I mistake not, contrasted with the false prophets, as we saw similarly with the shepherds. Just as in Zech. 11 so in this, He is heard so suddenly that it is not easy to decide where Christ begins; but I suppose it to be from Zech. 13:5, which shows that the Lord was not in any way connected with the schools of men. He accepted the place of a Nazarene which God in His wisdom gave Him according to the record. For man had acquired Him as a slave from His youth. Compare the Hebrew servant in Ex. 21. He was the bondman of all, so much the more because He was the perfect servant of God. It is a figurative expression as applied to Christ; for I am now assuming this to be the true meaning.

And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends {Zech. 13:6}.

It can hardly be doubted save by an unbeliever that Zech. 13:7 applies to Christ. There may be a question about the preceding verses, but it is better in my opinion to take in all.

Then is heard a voice still more solemn. It is not wolves now, but God.

Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith Jehovah of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones {Zech. 13:7}.

There is no more difficulty in the sword here than in Zech. 11:17, where it is spoken of for the judgment of the worthless shepherd: it is used figuratively as to both for a violent end of life; but O how deep the contrast! No longer do we hear of deceivers, or idolaters, or other wicked persons, who are outwardly and ostensibly in the house of the Messiah’s friends; but Jehovah Himself gives Him up to complete humiliation and rejection. A most solemn consideration; and how true! For we must remember that whatever the mischievous and miserable hatred of the Jews against the Messiah, it could have availed nothing unless Jehovah had allowed it for His own mighty purposes; and this He did. Consequently here it is applied to Him.

Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones {Zech. 13:7}.

Out of the rejection of Christ comes all blessing to those that are His -- out of that which was His unexampted shame and His unutterable sorrow in the cross; and this, in every point of view, not only for the counsels of grace, but also in the government of God. There is nothing holy in God which is not vindicated by it; there is nothing gracious toward man for which it has not laid a righteous ground.

At the same time the discerning government of God will have its way, for it is said here,

And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried.

The dross must perish, and what is precious be refined and tried. His people must go through trouble.

They shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, Jehovah is my God {Zech. 13:9}.

It is humiliating to read the comments even of such a man as Calvin, starting with the erroneous confusion of the church with the Jews in such a passage as this:

For when three hundred shall profess to worship God, one hundred only, says Zechariah, shall be saved {See Zech. 13:8}.

Not so; it is only a mistaken expositor who says so, applying to the church in general what is really said of the Jews in their last crisis.

Finally, Zechariah 14 shows us how all this is brought out.

Behold, the day of Jehovah cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city {Zech. 14:1, 2}.

It is a truly singular state of things. The siege has taken place, with the king of the north at the head of all these nations. It is clearly not the beast who, instead of besieging Jerusalem, supports the false prophet with all his might, and the latter is
the king
who reigns in Jerusalem, whom
the many
accept as the Messiah and Jehovah of Israel. The king of the
north is an outside enemy who at the head of all the nations
of the east attacks Jerusalem. We must always remember
that the man of sin, or the Antichrist, is inside Jerusalem; he
is nowhere said to besiege it, for it is too submissive to him as
the king.
With him the beast and his ten kings make common cause. The Assyrian or
king of the north
is at the head of all the opposed external nations.

This is an important point to bear in mind, and contributes to make the general outline plain. The man of
sin, the Antichrist, is accepted by the Jews as the Messiah, and He will reign over the land with the highest pretensions. But he none the less hates and is hated by the king of the north, who will seek his ruin and the capture of Jerusalem. Two bad princes may bitterly hate one another, because they are each striving to get the mastery. So the man of sin is not only the lawless enemy of God, but also obnoxious to the ambitious leader of the eastern powers, namely, the Assyrian, who will stand forward the then representative of what may be called the old heathen policy, as well as of modern Russian feeling. Russia will indeed oppose to the last the powers of the west; as it will also be destroyed by the coalition.

Let it be observed that siege is laid by the Assyrian with all the nations who own him as leader against Jerusalem, and that the siege is partially successful, for half the city is taken. Nothing like this has ever been since Zechariah’s day: still less does anything in history resemble what follows, as we shall see presently. It was not so when Ptolemy Soter took the city about B.C. 320, nor when Antiochus the Great took it B.C. 203, nor again B.C. 199, when Scopus the Egyptian general took it once more, nor the following year when it yielded to Antiochus, nor even when it was pillaged B.C. 170 by Antiochus Epiphanes, nor two years later under the frightful efforts of his army under Apollonius to destroy the city and the people, nor after that when his emissary Athenaeus profaned the sanctuary, and set up heathenism, with the utmost scorn to the law, which was followed by the exploits of the Maccabees, the issue being under Simon that the foreigner was expelled B.C. 142, and Acra demolished, as is commonly known. Under John Hyrcanus, the Syrian king Antiochus Sidetes was obliged to abandon the siege. Passing over internal or family disputes which have no possible resemblance, and the intervention of Aretas, it is impossible to identify with the prophecy Pompey’s capture of the temple B.C. 63, nor Crassus’ plunder of the city B.C. 54, nor the Parthian surprise B.C. 40. Herod’s siege was more similar perhaps, but essentially distinct, as we shall see by and by. Neither its final destruction by Titus, nor the move of Bar-Cochba under Hadrian, calls for lengthened remarks, as they are obviously different. Nothing since bears the smallest likeness to the prophecy.

How any sensible persons can venture to say, as many have done, that the opening verses describe the past destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans is a real wonder. Waiving the day of Jehovah [Zech. 14:1]
which may no doubt apply providentially as an earnest of the great fulfilment, was that a gathering of all the nations? Is it true then that half the people went forth into captivity, and that the rest were not cut off from the city? It is in vain

129. Unless Gog be identified with the Assyrian, there is no intimation that the former is thrown alive into Tophet, as the latter is.
also to smooth over Zechariah 14:3 with such words as “the Roman power was doomed in its turn to destruction.” For what the prophet intimates is a speedy and awful overthrow, not in the course of ages and elsewhere, but as part of the same suite of events and in the neighborhood by a special display of divine power and glory on behalf of the Jews when at the last extremity: and this attested by the splitting of the mount of Olives toward the east and toward the west into a very great valley, half receding toward the north and half toward the south. To resolve such a carefully put geographical statement into a poetical figure, and to extract from it no more than the disciples fleeing to Pella, as Eusebius tells us, in the breaking out of the Jewish war with Rome, is to run the risk of reducing the prophets to the rank of bombastic dreamers. But the sober fact is, that the application of this chapter in the Dem. Evang. vi. 18 is as dismal a specimen of forcing scripture as anything forged by the mind of a rationalist. There is this only difference between the two, that Eusebius meant well by the Bible, which is not the case with those who plume themselves on “the higher criticism.” But as an unfolding of the divine word they are alike misleading and I must say contemptible.

For it would seem that the alarm is compared to a flight that occurred during a well-known earthquake in Uzziah’s days. We can understand such a phenomenon adding to the terror of successful enemies till they know that it is the hand of God on their behalf.

After this the new section begins.

And Jehovah my God shall come, and all the saints with thee [Zechariah 14:5].

For it would be harsh to suppose that He comes afresh after His going forth and fighting against the congregated nations, as already described in Zechariah 14:3. I think therefore that the context proves it must be taken as another paragraph, presenting His coming in another point of view and for other ends.

There is a peculiarity in the construction of the last clause of Zechariah 14:5:

And Jehovah my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.

The MSS. differ too; for near forty, and all the versions, give “with him;” and some again follow the Rabbis in understanding “with thee” of Jerusalem. But the difficulty is cleared up as the text stands by seeing that the prophet turns to Jehovah who is thus to be seen interfering for the Jew, and for the greater force exclaims

Jehovah my God shall come,

following up this sudden change by describing in such a scene the presence of others foreseen in his vision, and all the saints with thee.

Zechariah supposes himself addressing Jehovah in these words.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark [or possibly “and dark”] (Zechariah 14:6). 130

130 One can hardly regard as certain the reading at the end of this verse, that of the Keri being apparently the best and well supported, especially if we give weight to the ancient versions. Translators and commentators differ widely. According to the Ketiv, the sense would run, “there shall not be the light of precious things, they shall withdraw themselves,” or be withdrawn; according to the Keri, it might be “and density” or “but density,” that is, darkness. Dathe, Maurer, &c. contend for the rendering “lux non erit sed frigus et gelu;” and so the LXX. Sym. Syr. Vulg. But the process of extracting such a result seems as precariously as the result when extracted. And is it not pitiful the comment of such a man as Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus near the Euphrates early in the fifth century, and one of the most learned and moderate of the (continued…)
To take this as the prediction of a period of unmitigated calamity, which may be regarded as comprehending the long centuries of Jewish suffering since Titus took the city, is an idea natural to such as can interpret the preceding verses of that famous siege. The phraseology in the close of the verse is hard. The text would mean that the precious lights should withdraw themselves; others with the Keri take it as “shall not be, but condensed darkness,” or thick fog.

But the incalculably great event of the day is plain enough, having its effect not only on the earth, but even in the heavens. This was reserved for the new section. The earthly fact and the destruction of foes were mentioned in the former part; another and higher fact with its consequences falls under the latter. Now the prophet looks at Jehovah coming with His holy ones -- not so much here to fight a battle, but His saints coming with Him. This has an evidently deeper purpose. Hence the marked outward change which introduces that day, in order that in every way it may stand out distinctly from all before. It is absurdly wrong to dislocate Zech. 14:7 from Zech. 14:6, as if a time wholly different were intended. Not so; it is the continuation of the same unique circumstances. Hence there will be no such changes as men have known through light and darkness following each other, but it shall be one day which shall be known to Jehovah -- not day succeeding night,

but it shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light {Zech. 14:7}.

God thus marks the new era as significantly by a revolution in the heavens as He had by His intervention and the rent of mount Olivet on the earth. Thus evidently is there another paragraph introducing another order of events, with their accompaniments and effects.

But what follows is not dreadful like the yawning mountain, but most encouraging. At the evening time, instead of the darkness of night coming on, the brightness of the day continues. If the rending of Olivet was in keeping with the hopeless confusion from which they had to emerge, when all things must be shaken the dawn of a new and brighter day shines on all from above.

And it shall be in that day that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be {Zech. 14:8}.

Unlike the torrents of the desert which dry up in time of heat, this should be ever flowing. It is a literal fact, I suppose, but highly significant of spiritual blessing at the same time. From the holy city go forth westward and eastward the waters which are destined to heal the long miseries of a world groaning under Satan’s thraldom, themselves the effect and the symbol of the rich blessing which Jehovah then diffuses far and wide, and this above all the changes ordinary in nature: in summer and in winter it shall be. Drought and frost will not affect them; neither will the obstruction of the hilly ground toward the west: the waters shall flow as steadily to the great sea on the west as to the Dead Sea on the east.

In this connection the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea are specially named. For it may be well to explain that in Hebrew the east is reckoned the point at which one looks, and the west is thus behind the spectator. Hence Arabia is called the land of the right hand, as the north would be the left. Of course therefore to one with Palestine as his standpoint and thus facing, the Dead Sea would be in front and the Mediterranean in the rear.

But there are better blessings still.

In that day there shall be one Jehovah, and his name one {Zech. 14:9}.

Idols fall; the King of kings reigns without rival or dispute. This is explicit, as if to cut off all possibility of evasion on the plea of previous figurative language. Who can pretend that it is so here?

A chart minutely distinct is appended, which refutes all pretense of heavenly glory being meant, or the spiritual blessing we have now in Christ:

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All the land shall be turned as into a plain from Geba [in Benjamin on the northern frontier of the kingdom of Judah] to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; and it shall be lifted up and inhabited in its place [the city on its old site] from Benjamin’s gate unto the place of the first gate up to the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananeel unto the king’s wine-presses. And they shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more curse; and Jerusalem shall dwell in safety {Zech. 14:10, 11}.
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Then in Zech. 14:12-15 we learn the provision for the due maintenance of order and honor in the earth. The awful judgment of the nations which fought against Jerusalem is set forth. We see the last sample of this stroke in Ezek. 38, 39 before peace flows like a river. It is really painful to see how Catholics like C. à. Lapide and Protestants like Venema pare down the glorious hopes of Israel to the circumstances of the Maccabean times.

From Zech. 14:16 we have the regulation of the homage imposed on the residue of those hostile nations during the kingdom. Its proper theocratic character is unquestionable, and too distinct from the nature of Christianity to call for argument.

And it shall come to pass that every one that is left of all the nations which come against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, Jehovah of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoseo will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, Jehovah of hosts,
even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the the plague, wherewith Jehovah will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles {Zech. 14:16-18}.

I do not pretend to say how, or how far, all the nations will attend the final feast of ingathering, the type of glory: the fact is certain, and God will see to its fulfilment. Jerusalem thus, as the city of the great King, is the religious metropolis of the earth; and there all must be at least represented year by year. We are not warranted in concluding that absence of the Passover here implies that it will not then be celebrated; for we know from the end of Ezekiel (which clearly speaks of the same time and circumstances) that it will be observed as well as the feast of Tabernacles, but not Pentecost, the characteristic feast which finds its full meaning exhausted in the church that now is, and therefore appears in God’s wisdom to lapse. To refer the close of Ezekiel to the post-captivity state is to despise unwittingly both scripture and the facts, in order to avoid the divine testimony to the total change of dispensation at the end of this age. 131 As Egypt might be thought unaffected by the penal want of rain in case of failure to come up, the punishment is expressly said to fall there.

But so thorough and complete would be the change, that holiness pervades things the most common. The very pots, the humblest utensils in Jehovah’s house,

shall be like the bowls before the altar {Ezek. 14:20} – those that were most holy.

Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto Jehovah: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of Jehovah of hosts {Ezek. 14:21}.

I admit the curse of a mercenary caste of religious teachers, and we see what a stumbling-block the covetousness of the Jewish priesthood proved in Israel; but I see no reason to abandon the simple force of Canaanite here, while allowing broad and deep principles as well as facts. He was in the land, when Abram entered it; he was not banished from the land by the victories of Joshua. The enemy, never fully expelled before, should vanish then. All is to be according to God, as far as this can be in the earth till God in the most absolute way make all things new. Who can wonder when Jehovah takes the kingdom?

131. The statement in Hebrews, that where remission of sins is, there is no more offering for sin, applies to the Christian simply, and in no way forbids other facts which the prophets clearly predict of an age wholly different and not yet arrived.

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Lectures on the Minor Prophets
Lecture 12
Malachi

The Lord has not been pleased to give us much express information of the prophets in general, with the exception of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, and in a measure of Ezekiel and Jonah. Of the rest we know but little, and of none less than of Malachi. So much so that some have indulged in no small imagination about him, yea, have doubted, as learned men will doubt (none more probably), of his proper existence, some of course making him out to be anybody else than himself. I do not see what is the object or the profit gained by such speculations; or why people should suppose that he was not a man at all but an angel. It may be well briefly to allude to these dreams if it were only to show the exceeding want of good sense, to say no more, of such as indulge in them, and to caution souls against the trashy way in which they occupy themselves and their readers.

It is clear that God has an object where He does not speak as truly as where He does, and the essential difference of the prophet from others lies in his giving us not man's mind but God's revelations, though surely for the good of man. If then the person of the prophet be hidden, we may gather that it is best to leave it so. The design is only met by what God had to say. It seems plain however both by position in the canon and by internal character that the last of the prophets is to be classed with the last of the sacred historians, Malachi with Nehemiah, as Haggai and Zechariah are expressly with Ezra.

The burden of the word of Jehovah to Israel by Malachi {Mal. 1:1}.

Let him be a person but little known, at least we should know the burden of the word of Jehovah by him. These were the last prophetic words. The nature of the case shows that, if we had no kind of tradition, a spiritual mind ought to say that Malachi is necessarily the latest of the prophets. As Moses himself has a place, naturally the earliest in the Old Testament, so Malachi just as simply is the last. The whole strain of Malachi falls in with this. There does not therefore seem the slightest reason to question the soundness of the arrangement by which he is put at the end of the prophets in the Jewish canon. One ought never lightly to disturb facts of an external nature generally received, though one may not make them a matter of faith. But it is not good to call everything in question. There is no small difference between not doubting and believing. We are not called to believe except where God speaks. On the other hand, where is the wisdom or the modesty of doubting what is without evidence for us, yet generally accredited. The best way is to let such parts alone?

But here there are moral considerations: The book consists largely of various moral appeals; and they are of such a nature as to indicate that they are the last words of the Old Testament. They leave nothing before or between the Messiah Himself except His messenger. From Him they pass by our calling altogether and go on to what follows Christianity -- the mission of Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Jehovah. For we must remember that Christianity is no prolongation or improvement of Judaism. It is a thing of its own kind. If it follows, and could not but follow Judaism, it is none the less completely a thing of another clime and character, like the sheet that was let down from heaven and went up again in the vision of the Roman centurion.

The book opens with words just as suitable as those with which it closes.

I have loved you, saith Jehovah.

It is the expression of sorrow, but certainly of affection.

I have loved you, saith Jehovah. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? {Mal. 1:2}.

I was going to call it a disappointed affection; and in one sense this is true. But we must bear in mind that in another sense there is nothing that fails with God. He steadily carries out what is wisest and best, though it may be ever so humiliating for man. He does not force His purposes, nor anticipate in His ways what is suitable to the present state of His people and testimony. But in a most real sense we may say that, if there be continual disappointment on the surface, there is always the onward accomplishment of what is for His own glory, and this is nowhere more verified than where all seems confusion on the outside. It is necessary that the creature should be put to shame, being now in a fallen state and its very condition one great lie against God - nay, a great lie against itself, false to its own nature, false to the law of its being as created of God or called of God, as the case may be.

In this case how unbecoming the language of Israel:

Wherein hast thou loved us?

What was it for Israel to ask such a question of Jehovah? Yet He deigns to answer in grace:

I have loved you, saith Jehovah; yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?

Jehovah, as usual, rises up to the source of things.
Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? saith Jehovah: yet I loved Jacob.

Then He adds,

and I hated Esau {Mal. 1:2, 3}.

I do not think it would be true to draw this inference at the beginning of their history. But it is just an instance of what the best of men do in their haste. God withholds the sentence of hatred till it is evidently justified by the conduct and ways of Esau, more particularly towards Jacob, but indeed towards Himself. In short, it would be quite true to say that God loved Jacob from the first, but that He never pronounces hatred until that be manifest which utterly repels and rejects Himself with contempt, deliberately going on in pursuit of its own way and will in despisal of God. Then only does He say,

I hated Esau.

Along with this He draws attention to the fact that He laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness {Mal. 1:3}.

Thus, apart from such profanity, if God despiseth not any {Job 36:5},

we may be perfectly sure He hates not any. Such an idea could not enter a mind which was nurtured in the word of God, apart from the reasonings of men. I say not this because of the smallest affinity with what is commonly called Arminianism; for I have just as little affinity with Calvinism. I believe the one to be as derogatory to God’s glory as the other, though in very different ways -- the one by exalting man most unduly, and the other by prescribing for God, and consequently not saying the thing that is right of Him.

Abstract reasoning is like that of Job’s friends, who were not bad Calvinists before Calvin, but they certainly did not say the thing that was right of Jehovah as Job did. The reason was this -- that Job did not indulge in theories about God and His government as they did. Job held to what he knew. Not that he had not his faults; for he showed himself at length naughty and disputed against God’s ways, as we know. But he was right in rejecting their effort to carry their point by human reasonings, which, ignorant of God’s grace as much as of His government, insinuated that the tried saint was only a hypocrite after all. He was really farther from it than any of them; and justly cleaved to the Lord, no matter what they might urge: cockles might grow instead of barley before he would give up his integrity. He would not forswear God’s grace nor his own faith. Things must lose their nature and the creatures of God change their being before Job would yield to man in what touched his relationship with God. No doubt there was too much vindication of himself, and there he was wrong; but he was right about God. He was quite sure that God was Himself, and would not deny Job, and held to both firmly. He was quite sure that none of his inquisitors loved God better, and this too was true. The book is a fine unfolding of man with God and God with man: nothing is finer in all Old Testament scripture in this way. Such is the value of a real knowledge of God; it may be imperfect and it may require to be corrected, but there is a real knowledge of God, and this too in the face of human reasonings which may come from pious men, but are none the better for that. I see little difference between the reasonings of the pious and of others when they judge by appearances and speak outside the revealed truth of God. Nobody can answer or feel for God. No one can by searching find Him out; still less can any by reasoning anticipate His ways. And there is seen the blessedness of the pursuit. For knowledge of God is open to the simplest, yet withal is it the only joy and strength of the greatest saint or servant whom God ever formed. There is no difference as to this in principle: the most mature is as much beholden to the word of God as the least; and what lifts up the least is the only thing that gives real truth or solidity to the strongest.

This is a grave practical lesson, and Malachi, I think, is deeply interesting in this way. At the beginning of the history of Jacob and Esau we find the purpose of God before the children were born. Indeed to make election a question of the deserts in the two parties is simply to destroy its nature, if allowed in word. Election is necessarily from God entirely apart from those that are the objects of it, as it means the exercise of His sovereign choice. If there is the smallest ground in the party chosen because of which God chooses, it is not His choice, but rather a moral discernment, which, far from being sovereign, is only an appraisal whether the person deserves or not. One may hold then as strongly as the stoutest Calvinist the free sovereign choice of God, but the reprobation of the wicked which the Calvinist draws from it, as an equally sovereign decree, is in my judgment a grave error. I do not therefore scruple to say a word upon it now, inasmuch as it is an important thing in both doctrine and practice. The idea that, if God chooses one, He must reprobate another whom He does not choose, is a fallacy and without, yea against, scripture. This is exactly where human influence comes in; that is, the petty self-confidence of man’s mind. Now I do not see why we as believers should be petty; there is every reason why we should gather what is great for God. To be simple is all well; but this too is a very different thing from being petty, and no reason why we should limit ourselves to ourselves; for what does God reveal His mind for? Surely that we should know Him, and be imitators of Him.

To my own mind then it is full of the deepest interest, that while God chose before the children were born, and decided what was to be the lot of the one relatively to the other, He never made any man to be a sinner. No doubt the children of Adam are conceived in sin and shaped in iniquity; mankind are born in that condition. Their whole being is lost in it. It is no question therefore of making man a sinner, because since the fall he departed from God and the race is evil without exception. Man belongs to a stock now wholly depraved -- evil the sad and universal heirloom. God’s election is entirely independent of what He finds, and
spite of all evil. He elects angels no doubt that never fell: even so they had nothing to do with determining the rest who were not so kept. In every case it is simply a question of God’s choice. But the fallen condition of man gives to God’s election, where sinners are the only possible objects, an exceeding beauty and very deep moment. He chooses entirely apart from anything that deserves it, in the face of all that is out of harmony with Himself. It is not so where He judges and rejects.

When He says

Esau have I hated {Rom. 9:13},

He waits to the last moment, till Esau has shown what he is. The first book of the Bible lets us see His choice of Jacob. Only the last book {of the Old Testament} tells us of His hatred of Esau. I do not say that we do not find His moral condemnation of Esau’s spirit long before this, but He is patient in the execution of judgment. Long-suffering belongs to God, and is inseparable from His moral nature, while He delays to execute judgment on evil. All-powerful and good, He is nevertheless for that very reason perfect in patience. Now the sentence comes forth from His lips, and may well be felt to be a serious matter.

Yet Esau’s ill-conduct to Jacob was not the only or the worst element of evil which comes into judgment. He was profane Godward, despising everything done on God’s part, the worst element of evil which comes into judgment. He was save that which brought sensibly before him the greater belongs to God, and is inseparable from His moral nature, while He delays to execute judgment on evil. All-powerful and good, He is nevertheless for that very reason perfect in patience. Now the sentence comes forth from His lips, and may well be felt to be a serious matter.

Thus we see the strength of will to the last: he would fight it out even with God.

If I be a master, where is my fear? saith Jehovah of hosts. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? {Mal. 1:6}.

The higher the relation, the greater the danger where God is not before the soul. It is not only that sin in such is more serious, but also there is greater exposure to it. A priest has to walk not merely as becomes a man outside the sanctuary, but as one who goes into it. There was a more perfect consecration in the case of a priest than with an Israelite; and familiarity with the presence of God, unless it be kept up in His fear, borders on contempt.

If I be a master, where is my fear? saith Jehovah of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?

Hardness of conscience goes where there is habitual carelessness as to God, while at the same time keeping up appearances. Men thus become insensible to all.

Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places. Thus we see the strength of will to the last: he would fight it out even with God.

Thou shalt build, but I will return and build the desolate places. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom Jehovah hath indignation for ever. And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, Jehovah will be magnified from the border of Israel {Mal. 1:4, 5}.

Then the prophet comes to closer quarters.

A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith Jehovah of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? {Mal. 1:6}.

Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of Jehovah is contemptible {Mal. 1:7}.

It had a voice of deep insult to God, however they might seek to excuse it. This is a serious thing practically for the Christian now. A man will endure in worship what he would not suffer anywhere else. Many who are critical
enough about the preaching make very light of the prayers, have no sympathy with much, and would alter or throw it overboard. They bear with the general service often for the sake of the sermon. Now it is surely a serious thing when we remember what worship should be; and I am not speaking of an imaginary case. There is nothing which more betrays the state of people than their prayers, unless it be their hymns or, in general, their worship. Therefore the ordinary form of prayer and hymns, being wholly beneath true worshipers adoring in Spirit and in truth, is a fatal sign and shows how low they are sunk. For certainly worship ought to be the highest expression of spiritual devotedness toward God. If real, it ostensibly rises up as the outgoing of the power of the Holy Spirit to God Himself. A sermon is quite a different thing; it has its place and value of course, but its direction is toward men, the hearers. Without being hypercritical about terms, let the discourse be addressed to the unconverted to show them the way to be saved, or to the converted to instruct them in the truth of God more perfectly, it clearly has man for its object, converted or unconverted, or both, but assuredly man.

But evidently what has God for its object ought not to be polluted -- ought not to be what people know is beneath His grace and truth, or unsuited even supposing it were true, and not according to the height of the faith of those that present it. There is scarce anything which has a more lowering effect than habitual contentedness in worship with what is not the character of praise our hearts feel to be due to God; and yet I suppose there is nothing in which even children of God put up with more shortcomings than here. Thousands of Christians know that what they acquiesce in as worship is not according to God’s mind. They bear with it for reasons of their own, certainly not for God’s honor. This is sometimes the case where there is not an outward or fixed form. We have known, among such as externally are free enough, how there may be an order formed by traditional habits and ways which is inconsistent with God’s will. Do not be deceived by appearances: unwritten prayers may offend as really as written ones. Its being an extempore prayer does not make it spiritual: and if it be a bad one, it is the worse because unwritten. For he who prays by that very fact is free, and yet the prayer is low and bad. Of course nothing heterodox is supposed or anything morally injurious: I mean simply what is unsuitable to one who stands in conscious redemption, and has the Holy Ghost indwelling and making him the temple of God. Now I say that this is the position of every Christian, and that worship is founded on the place in which Christ has set him, -- the revelation of Christ as He is risen and in heaven.

Take, for instance, the common habit of getting on the ground of the Almightyness of God or the name of Jehovah. How could a Christian who knows what he is saying fall back on either out of the place of a child with his Father or of a member of Christ? I can understand a person bringing both in by a slip; but there would be always the correction at hand -- perhaps the person having a consciousness more or less that it was so, or the Spirit of God would give him something altogether better. On the other hand, it seems wrong above all in prayer or worship to be too critical about what is said by others. It is a miserable thing to be sifting prayers or worship where we ought to be praising God with simplicity. But it may be a necessary duty where there is that which falsifies what ought to go up to God acceptably.

This may show the great analogy between what is going on now in Christendom with the state described in Malachi; and I am perfectly persuaded that Christendom has taken a serious stride of late years into a farther departure from God, and that the Jewish spirit (and Gentile too) of love for outward forms and splendor of building and music and appearance in general has developed immensely: in short there is a kind of race of rivalry in Christendom generally as to this. Those who not many years since used to be remarkable for their simplicity, and in fact were wont to indulge in rather opprobrious comments on national bodies for it, are now really seeking to out-do them in the same taste. All this appears to be a very deplorable thing for the children of God. I do not say a word about men of the world. These people of course cannot be debarred from having temples if they please: God will judge them by and by. But our business surely, as children of God, is with the interests of Christ. We have the interests of His love and of His glory, and to me it is serious that the state of Christians should be so singularly like that which is supposed in the very verses of Malachi we have been looking at.

Now much of the negligence is due to the assumption that God has left nothing definite in His word as to a great deal which they consider outward and nonessential. Willing to bear all that in mind, still I say, how comes it that they should be false to their own position, and allow themselves to sink below their communion with God, and their own knowledge of the gospel in worship -- the very place where we ought most to be at the height of what we know? The truth is that the scriptural idea of worship has never had its place in their souls. Hence they get into the habit of speaking of the preaching of the gospel as worship. The united praise of God, in contradistinction to teaching or preaching, is almost lost sight of. Then again men go on in their usual routine in that exercise of conscience as to pleasing God in it.

There is a large class with whom one occasionally meets who have some thought of worship, and who know what is not worship; but unfortunately these may be obscure about the gospel. One dislikes referring to names; but those commonly called “high churchmen” have notions of worship though extremely wanting in sense of liberty: I am speaking now of godly persons -- for there are such among them. They in general have stricter thoughts of worship, such as it is, than many who are before them in point of knowledge. Their standard may be low; but still, in their measure, they understand worship to be the outpouring of the heart to God. Consequently they all tend in their zeal for the expression of worship to slight preaching. Now it is very evident that Christian wisdom is to slight neither the one nor the other in its place. The true course here, as
everywhere, is to leave scope for all the word and will of God, whatever the thing may be, without confounding them together. It is impossible for a soul that has not liberty to worship in the power of the Spirit.

But there are curious inconsistencies among real Christians. Often persons are kept back by the difficulties that seem so vast and insurmountable; and in this way frequently godly men are kept back by the idea of doing good. I do not know a greater hindrance, nor anything more evil, in fact, than allowing the desire to do good -- more particularly in what people consider a large sphere -- to embarrass their action for the Lord, and their faithfulness to what they know. In this way godly men are held in fetters, contrary to what they know. The state of the soul in the presence of God, independent altogether of position, has much to do with the spirit of worship.

In the case of such men as Samuel Rutherford, devout and God-fearing in tone and spirit, I should think there was much of the outgoing of heart which responded to the grace of Christ whose personal glory was dear to them. This mingled itself with their conversation and service of every kind, though they did not know the Christian’s death to law, and were in the greatest bondage as regards the true expression of worship. It is thus we see now and then godly souls, where a burning sense of who and what Christ is imparts the tone of the soul which goes out in worship, and so we recognize it largely in Rutherford of old, though in controversy his severity was something tremendous. Like many mild men we may have known, he startled his opponents by the extremely hard blows he dealt out to his adversaries. When one turns from his keen and trenchant defense of Presbyterianism or legality, it is difficult to realize that the same man wrote the letters which charm all who love the Savior. But when we look in a little more closely, we see that doctrinally he was as cold as Calvin, the secret of his difference from his fellows being his power of telling out the joy of his heart in Christ’s love.

This spiritual tone is ever attractive, and justly so; but much more is needed to set a soul on the solid ground of Christian worship. For this is required another thing besides the living faith working by love, which is kindled by such a knowledge of Christ as the Holy Ghost gives. We need the sense of complete freedom through Christ our Lord -- deliverance from flesh, world, law, everything that can come in between the soul and God. I speak now not of the power which here as everywhere is in the Holy Spirit, but of the condition antecedently requisite. That this is a matter of great moment will not be contested by those who love the saints of God for Christ’s sake, and desire His honor in and by them. It is what we have most of all to seek with our brethren wherever they may be. For it ought never to be assumed. Many a Christian knows the prophetic word fairly and the truth in general, who is far from being consciously dead and so serving God. We must not then too hastily take this for granted that real believers are in this respect thoroughly clear as to their own souls. The same principle applies of course to knowledge about ecclesiastical position and government. It does not follow in this case any more; though church truth, while distinct, is connected more closely than prophecy with that which clears the soul. But we ought to set the full delivering grace of the gospel before every one that has been converted to God. Even if those we come in contact with have been ever so long following the Lord, we should seek to learn whether they are consciously clear before God, and thus brought out of all bondage of spirit; for without this there must soon be not a few hitches and difficulties, by which in the day of trial unestablished persons break down, cause trouble, and certainly suffer in their own souls.

However we shall see what Jehovah thinks of the neglect of His name, and the slight put on His worship.

And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil?

It soon took the shape of what was really profane in Israel.

And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith Jehovah of hosts. And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us; this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith Jehovah of hosts. Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? [Mal. 1:8-10]

And is not the love of mammon the known and confessed bane of Christendom?

Then we come to the next root of evil -- intense selfishness, which God brings out by the prophet.

Neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith Jehovah of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. But this very thing, the judgment of their evil morally, brings in, as in prophecy always, what God will do in His own gracious power;

for,

says He,

from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles {Mal. 1:10, 11}.

For Israel were profaning His name and insulting His worship. Then Jehovah undertakes the care of it Himself, and declares that He will make His name great among the Gentiles whom the Jews despised, and this everywhere, from places at hand to the remoter isles which will await His law. I understand this to be a promise not yet accomplished. Many may apply it (and this may be allowable in the way of principle) to what is going on now under the gospel. But it is evident on a closer inspection that the passage looks onward to the millennial day.

And in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering [Mal. 1:11].

This is an instructive and interesting prophecy, proving as it does that, while the temple at Jerusalem is to be the
metropolitan temple for the worship of all nations, it will not be to the exclusion of means and places of worship among the Gentiles.

It follows that there will be a universal testimony to the true God among all the nations; and one can see how right this will be, and suitable to the new age. For although I do not doubt that God will then provide better means of going to Jerusalem than man’s wit or skill has yet devised, still there would be a void indeed if there were no maintenance of God’s worship anywhere save in that one center. Grace has now under the gospel gone out to the nations; and God, though He may display new ways for His own glory, will never go back from this at least. Under Christianity Jewish exclusiveness is unknown, because grace puts the believer even now in relation with heaven. In the future kingdom the Lord will take the earth as well as the heavens under His manifest sway, and the Jews and the Gentiles will be owned and blessed in their respective place on the earth, Israel having the position of special nearness but the nations rejoicing and worshipping everywhere; for Jehovah shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Jehovah, and His name one. Thus it will not be the Jew superseded or superseding in any way, but Jehovah going out in His goodness to all the Gentiles, while the mountain of His house is established in the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills, and the nations flow to it. Of that day, not of the present, Malachi speaks.

In every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering,

— in contrast with the polluted one which the priests of Israel presented then. I see no reason to conclude that the sacrificial terms are transferred from their original ceremonial objects and acts to such as are strictly spiritual, as we know now (Heb. 13, 1 Pet. 2). The later chapters of Ezekiel (40-48), which clearly bear on the future, not on our time and position, are too explicit to be thus explained away, if indeed we prefer scripture authority to the thoughts and wishes of men. There is the strongest possible proof that the offerings will then be material, though no doubt used with intelligence and as memorials of the great sacrifice, when the blessing of the Gentiles will not be as now a reproach to Israel, but these will be as life from the dead to all the world. We must leave room for both these things, which are distinctly revealed and contrasted by the Holy Ghost in Rom. 11. It is not therefore a question merely of interpreting the Old Testament, but of believing the interpretation authoritatively supplied to us by the great apostle of the Gentiles.

Doubtless the Romanist use of the passage is to the last degree puerile, and the more as they pretend the mass to be a witness of Christ’s sacrifice where bloodshedding is essential. But the painful thought to my mind is the poverty of Protestant teachers, who apply the passage equally with Roman Catholics to the church now, instead of confessing worship in spirit and truth for the Christian, but the resumption of incense and offering by Jews and Gentiles by and by in the new age. Thus it appears to me certain that, beside the great center of earthly worship for all in Jerusalem, literal offerings (and from Ezekiel we can add more) are here predicated of all the Gentiles in every place. Compare also Zeph. 2:11 for the latter truth, and Isa. 56:6-8 for the former. But both are for the future exclusively in the world or age to come: and the more we reflect upon it, the less need we wonder, and the more its importance will be felt by unprejudiced minds which tremble at God’s word. Universal profession of Jehovah’s name, not testimony only, will be the specific character of the millennial age. There may be gradation in the results; as it is plain there will be the highest manifestation as far as earth is concerned in Jerusalem. Israel will compose the inner circle for the earth, but not to the exclusion of divine and acceptable worship everywhere among the Gentiles;

for my name,
says He,

shall be great among the heathen, saith Jehovah of hosts [Mal. 1:11].

With the new heart given then to the Jew, he will rejoice in the flow of God’s mercy to the Gentiles, and will call on all lands to shout joyfully to Jehovah — will invite their old enemies to enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; as even before the blessing is fully established they will pray that God’s grace may shine on them, so that upon earth men may know His way, among all nations His salvation. How deep the change when old narrowness shall thus yield to grace, and the Jews will delight in all nations as such flocking up to Jerusalem! We have not forgotten how they heard Paul till the word from the Lord that he should be sent far from Jerusalem to the Gentiles. This was intolerable to their pride and jealousy: it was not fit, they cried, that such a fellow should live; but in that day they too will be Sauls no longer but Pauls. Many of the Psalms breathe the new spirit which will animate the generation to come, in vain now because of their blindness and hardness of unbelief, but to be full of life and power then.

The real source of the difficulty then is not the ambiguity of scripture, for contrariwise its language is clear and precise. It is due entirely to the habits of what is called spiritualising, so ingrained in Christendom since the days of Origen among the Greeks and Jerome among the Latins, though at work subtly from earliest days, when it came into constant collision with the apostle Paul. Not to maintain the distinctively earthly glory to Israel, as their future hope under Messiah and the new covenant, invariably undermines Christianity and the church, which flourish only in proportion to firmly holding Christ and union with Him in heavenly places. The danger of the Gentiles thus becoming wise in their own conceit, and forgetting that the natural branches are only broken off in part for a season from their own olive tree, is strongly laid down in Rom. 11. Hold fast the new and heavenly glory for us with Christ dead, risen, and glorified, and you keep the promised earthly supremacy.
for Israel, who, will (not reign with Him on high, but) be reigned over by Him when He appears again in glory, the undisputed Head of all things, heavenly and earthly.

For the heavenly people (who by the Holy Ghost sent down are one with Christ at the right hand of God, the great high priest, gone in through the rent vail) earthly sacrifices and incense, priesthood and sanctuary, are all passed and inconsistent with their standing and relationship. But it will not be so with the earthly people or the Gentiles who shall be blessed under His visible glory in the day which hastens. Theologians may dogmatize in an abstract manner; and their disciples may scorn to receive what will not mix with their traditions or their inferences; but the word of God is so explicit that a reverent and lowly man, if his knowledge were ever so scanty, should hesitate before he rejects that which is to be the distinctly revealed condition of this earth when the days of heaven shine on it, simply because he cannot make it fit into his religious system -- the principle of rationalism, even though it largely obtain among those who flatter themselves that they are most opposed to that system.

As to the reappearance of a vast central temple on earth, a human priesthood, sacrifices, and every other peculiarity of a ritual religion, it appears to my mind indisputable in the end of Ezekiel [40-48]. I am aware that the great mass of Dissenters are as opposed to such an idea as the less intelligent portion of the high and low church parties. None seem more horrified at it than the members of the Society of Friends. I may be allowed to say that I once glanced at a review of a book of mine in one of their organs, in which the writer gave me quite enough credit in other respects, but seemed to suspect a craze on the subject of a restored theocracy of Israel, converted yet with priests and sacrifices once more. Nor is it a question of a single, however considerable, portion of scripture. The Psalms and Prophets abound in anticipations of the new age, when the temple and its services and priesthood should be to Jehovah’s praise, on a new ground indeed, but otherwise substantially similar. And as to Ezek. 40-48 the evidence is so strong that even Dr. Henderson, trained in the most hostile school of Nonconformists, the Congregationalists, was forced to concede that, as far as the temple and its ordinances are concerned, the vision is to be interpreted literally, though he tries to take other parts symbolically. But it is plain that this is the inconsistency of a hard-pressed interpreter, and that the vision is homogeneous. The city, the distribution of the tribes, the healing waters, the return of the cherubic glory, all go together and point, not to an imperfect copy of certain points of the temple in the post-captivity state, but to the glorious renovation, the times of restitution of all things, spoken of by all the holy prophets since the world began.

Here, as is known, the so-called Fathers fell into the most serious error, even such as looked for the return of the Lord and His future kingdom over the earth. But not one of them, as far as I remember (and my friend Dr. D. Brown has proved the point well), bore witness to the future national restoration of Israel to the promised land. They on the contrary embraced the further error of supposing that the risen saints would be in the earthly Jerusalem: thus ignorantly were the best of them agreeing to blot out the distinctive hopes of both Israel and the church; and so rapid was the departure of the early Christians even from plain prophetic facts. Still earlier had they lost sight of our heavenly relations to Christ, and of the capital truth of the Spirit’s presence and action in the assembly here below. The consequence was that then was consummated the fatal scheme of treating the church systematically as Israel improved. Maintain simply and firmly the literal restoration of Israel as wholly distinct from Christianity, and you have a bulwark against pseudo-spiritualism, and a groundwork, if rightly used, for seeing our special and heavenly privileges. The Fathers thought that Jerusalem during the millennium would be the city of the heavenly saints, that the Jews would be Christians, and that all would be together, risen and unrisen, reigning in glory. Can one wonder that men such as Dr. B. should set themselves against so incongruous a mixture of things heavenly and earthly? Nevertheless there is no good reason to deny, as he does, that Christ’s advent precedes the millennium, any more than to explain away the restoration of Israel to their land according to prophecy and Rom. 11, as his friend Dr. Fairbairn does.

Scripture reveals both headed up under Christ (Eph. 1:10), the heavenly part distinct from the earthly, the glorified saints in the one, the Jews and Gentiles in the other, and all under the Lord Jesus, the risen Bridegroom of the church. It is a serious error to mix them up; is it less serious, because of the confusion of ignorant men, to deny the revealed truth as to either one or other? Let it be noticed further that in Ezekiel we see a temple as well as a city for the earthly people. It is remarkable, on the contrary, that in what is expressly said to be the bride, the Lamb’s wife (that is, the church or heavenly city of which John speaks), no temple is seen. Thus the distinction is maintained even in glory. Where a temple is on earth, a priesthood accompanies it; and if there be a priesthood, it is hard to see the use of it without sacrifices. With us spiritual priesthood and spiritual sacrifices go together. (Compare Heb. 10–13; and 1 Pet. 2:5.) Nor does scripture leave it to inferential reasoning whether there be Aaronic priests, offerings, and sacrifices or not; for this is affirmed and even minutely described. (Compare Psa. 96:8; 115:10; 118:26, 27; 132:13-18; 135:19-21; Isa. 60:6, 7, 13; 66:21; Jer. 33:18; Ezek. 43-46; Zech. 14:16-21.)

The chief source of difficulty and hindrance is the system which assumes that Christianity is a final condition for the earth, and that the testimony will be as now until all the earth is converted, the Jews being at length brought in among the rest. It is another thing with those who believe that there is another age to follow the present, characterized by the salvation of all Israel as such, with the Gentiles largely blessed also, but not brought into the one body as we know now, but the Jews in their own land with the temple and its ritual and all the nations not only coming up
there year by year, but having worship each in his own place also by the will of God. When the national restoration of the ancient people is seen, it is hard after this to deny their priests and sanctuary, their incense, and sacrifices. Further we learn that just as certain changes came in with the temple of Solomon, so will it be yet more conspicuously in the future day. Absolute silence as to Pentecost; but we see Tabernacles observed with special prominence, when the nations go up to worship Jehovah. Nobody need be afraid that all this will interfere with the value due to the sacrifice of Christ: we may trust God and His word that no dishonor shall be done to that only efficacious atonement. I presume that the sacrifices will be of a purely memorial character and nothing more. In that day no Israelite will ever again use the form to slight the substance. All will know that there is nothing efficacious in such sacrifices, any more than we acknowledge in baptism or the Lord’s Supper. So with the Israel of that day. That they are to have sacrifices is a revealed fact; so they are to have priests over again on earth. It is well to see that this will not for them interfere with their resting on Christ; but, understanding it or not, we should believe, and not seek to explain it away. The saints since redemption will be above, as also the Old Testament saints, then risen from the dead; but on the earth will be the converted Israel of that day in their unchanged bodies, and the spared Gentiles, not possessed of exactly the same privileges, for Israel will then have the better place, but all blessed richly under Jehovah Messiah. As it is quite a different state of things from Christianity, so there will then be two distinct positions, heavenly and earthly, instead of one and the same as now.

As to the details of the future sacrifices of Israel, one could not expect them given everywhere. It is enough that God has been pleased to give the particulars in one clearly defined prediction. And whatever maybe thought of obscurity elsewhere, it is impossible to say that Ezek. 43:18; 44:15; 45:15-25; 46 leave any question as to shedding blood sacrificially and offering victims on the altar of Jehovah. The Popish application of Mal. 1:10, I may remark in addition to what has been already said, is a striking proof of the evil of the so-called “spiritualizing” of scripture. They draw the mass from it, as is well known, construing the pure offering of the wafer changed into Christ’s body. This would be without force, but for the error prevalent among Protestants that it is here a question of the church, an error derived from the Fathers. In this as in other things the Papists simply took up the mistakes of the early writers, and worked them into a still more fatal system; while Protestants have but partially cleared themselves from that general and early declension, and in no way serve as a testimony to the authority of the word or the power of the Spirit.

But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of Jehovah is polluted [Mal. 1:12].

Thus Jehovah resumes His expostulation, after having brought in the bright promise of millennial worship among the Gentiles.

Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith Jehovah of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith Jehovah. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto Jehovah a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith Jehovah of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen {Mal. 1:13, 14}.

This leads to further appeals, and still with the priests more particularly in view. “Like people, like priests”: if the people were bad, the priests were worse, as must usually be the case.

And now, O ye priests, lay it to heart {Mal. 2:1}.

It was not only that they acted wrongly, but where was their conscience?

Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.

Jehovah proceeds to speak with the greatest contempt of the state to which He would reduce them as a chastening on their unfaithfulness.

And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith Jehovah of hosts {Mal. 2:3, 4}.

Levi is purposely introduced, because of his faithfulness at the crisis of the golden calf, in striking contrast with the conduct of him who ought to have been the most careful of Jehovah’s glory, even Aaron the high priest.

My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name {Mal. 2:5}.

Jehovah looks back to the time when Levi consecrated his service at the cost of every human consideration, in not less striking contrast with once bitter revenge for his outraged sister. Here again we see how habitually the Lord goes, as in Mal. 1, to the source of things. So He took up Esau and Jacob at the beginning, and judges at the end. He pronounces on Levi and the priests.

The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of Jehovah of hosts {Mal. 2:6, 7}.

Then comes His solemn estimate:

But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith Jehovah of hosts. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law {Mal. 2:8, 9}.
As thus the sanctuary was polluted, and its ministers, and the offerings, so further we shall see the social life of Israel suffered no less. There is the deepest connection between a false religion, or a non-religion, and the practical ways of the people.

Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers? Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of Jehovah which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god {Mal. 2:10, 11}.

Thus, though not idolaters, they had contracted the nearest relationship in life with the heathen.

Jehovah will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto Jehovah of hosts. And this have ye ye done again, covering the altar of Jehovah with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand {Mal. 2:12, 13}.

The prophet describes the weeping of the Jewish wives, now repudiated for the sake of the heathen they chose. It is the same state of things in Ezra, and especially Nehemiah. The heart of the people was sick as truly, yea, much more sick than in the earlier days when Isaiah laid it to their charge.

Nor was the moral insensibility less now but more.

Yet ye say, Wherefore?

They could not see wherein they were to blame.

Because Jehovah hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant {Mal. 2:14}.

They were both placed on a common footing with God.

And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For Jehovah, the God of Israel, saith he hatheth putting away.

What alienation from God’s mind and ways! They were given up to self. Their light spirit in divorce was now reaching its head among the Jews -- in the remnant.

For one covereth violence with his garment, saith Jehovah of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously {Mal. 2:15, 16}.

Thus, as the first chapter looks more at their religious life, the second, at least the latter part of it, takes in their social life; and in both we see total ruin and hardness of heart before God. Nevertheless it is well to observe how He connects together both elements, the social and religious.

He begins with the root of it. If the soul is wrong towards God, there is not much hope for man, even in the closest relationships of this life.

Then we come to Mal. 3 which runs on really to the end, the third and fourth forming one strain of which the fourth is more a division than a separate chapter; and so it stands in the Hebrew. We find now the introduction of that which introduces the day of Jehovah in Mal. 2:17, the last verse of ch. 2, which, it seems, should rather be the first of Mal. 3.

Ye have wearied Jehovah with your words; yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of Jehovah, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment? {Mal. 2:17}.

Did any thus complain that evil prospered? The answer follows:

Behold, I send my messenger.

It is rather the introduction that we see here.

And he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple.

There is more than a messenger now; it is Messiah Himself, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith Jehovah of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi

(beginning with what most needed it, and what was nearest to the Lord),

and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer them unto Jehovah an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto Jehovah, as in the days of old, and as in former years. And I will come near to you to judgment {Mal. 3:1-5}.

Here is the challenge of Mal. 2:17 taken up by the God of judgment. The blessing of Jehovah is bound up with the judgment of Jehovah. It is a totally different thing from the gospel. Christianity shows us Christ bearing our judgment, and consequently brings in perfect grace towards the believer, except only that, being thus received on the ground of grace, he becomes a subject of the government of God in his earthly life of every day. Hence arises the need for patience on God’s part, and growth on man’s part, with watchfulness, prayer, self-judgment and the Father’s chastening, as well as above all the priesthood of Christ. But this supposes a soul resting on righteousness: Christ is made unto him righteousness. Then he has to walk accordingly; and this is carried on under the moral government of God. But it is a different thing from what we have here, where public power accompanies righteousness.
John the Baptist, as we know, was an accomplishment of the messenger in the past; Elijah the prophet seems to be the one who will make it good in the day that is coming. Why should we reason on these things? Let us receive the word of God with simplicity. We are fertile in difficulties. Our minds easily find hindrances in the way, and plenty of reasons not to believe what is revealed. Yet I think it plain that Elijah as a prophet is to be sent, but not before the Lord comes for us. Man makes a great mistake in confusing grace and judgment, the present with the future. Here it is in view of coming to judgment. Now the Lord has brought in grace, and He will finish its testimony and its dealings before He brings in judgment. The coming of the Lord in grace is the complement of the work of grace. He will fulfil His new work with its eternal consequences. Then will come another age.

I should think Mal. 3 was fulfilled at that time, but that, being so very like what Elijah will do by and by, it is put in this general way. Then the Spirit of Jehovah by Malachi would still present to Israel the Lord’s coming to them. One fully allows a partial accomplishment of Malachi both in John the Baptist and in Christ’s coming to the temple (Mal. 3); while it is evident when we come to Mal. 4 that it is exclusively the future. The third chapter touches partially John the Baptist and in Christ’s coming to the temple would still present to Israel the Lord’s coming to them. One this general way. Then the Spirit of Jehovah by Malachi being so very like what Elijah will do by and by, it is put in

And then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto Jehovah as in the days of old and as in former years {Mal. 3:4}.

It is well known how far this was from fact. Consequently what follows far exceeds anything then realized in the judging of all wickedness among them.

And I will come near to you to judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith Jehovah of hosts. For I am Jehovah, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from my ordinances, and have not kept them {Mal. 3:5-7}.

Then the call to return met with an unreasonable and rebellious reply:

Wherein shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings {Mal. 3:7}.

Jehovah takes them on the lowest possible ground.

Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith Jehovah of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed {Mal. 3:9-12}.

Such will be the case in the millennium: they will prove the Lord thus. They will humble themselves; they will trust Him; and all nations shall call them blessed.

For ye shall be a delightsome land {Mal. 3:12} – which they have never been since this was written. On the contrary,

Your words have been stout against me, saith Jehovah. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before Jehovah of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered {Mal. 3:13-15}.

But then the wickedness of the people in general was used of God for rousing the conscience of some in their midst. Among the returned remnant there was a godly portion.

Then 132 they that feared Jehovah spake often one to another: and Jehovah hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written {Mal. 3:16}.

It is plain that we have the spirit of this verified when Christ came. We see the Annas, the Simeons, and the shepherds, who show us exactly this state of spiritual feeling. They could and did communicate with all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And what was known then will be true again in a still more manifest way before the Lord comes and brings in the great and dreadful day of Jehovah.

And they shall be mine, saith Jehovah of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not {Mal. 3:17, 18}.

The Jews themselves will no longer take the ground of being mere Jews. They will see the vanity of an outward place; they will value what is of God; they will abhor the more those who are wicked because they are Jews. The transgressors are to be made an abhorring to all flesh by the judgment of God in Jerusalem, as we find in the end of Isa. 66; but here we find the discerning of it even before that judgment is accomplished. The heart of the righteous

132. Venema takes Mal. 3:16 in contrast with the preceding verse; as the pious of old set thus off against the evil ways of the present generation. Hence the particles of time are taken in opposition. This, I confess, is to me more than doubtful; for the sense conveyed in the English Bible, which is that of other versions I have examined, seems preferable.
will be brought to feel the nature of what Jehovah will do when judgment comes.

For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble {Mal. 4:1}.

What matters where pride and wickedness may be? It is everywhere hateful to God, whether among Jews or Gentiles. It is even, if possible, more heinous among the Jews.

And the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith Jehovah of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings {Mal. 4:1, 2}.

This is not the morning star, which is rather the way in which we know Jesus, and look for Him. The morning star is as decidedly for those who during the night look up into the heavens, as the Sun of righteousness causes His force to be felt in calling man to be occupied with his work here below. It is the sun that rules the day. Be it that the day of Jehovah is come; the Sun of righteousness rules it. You cannot avoid seeing sunlight unless you shut your eyes, and even then may have an instinctive sense of it. But with the morning star it is not so: you must look for it when others sleep. This is the way therefore in which the Spirit of God shows us our watching for Jesus. It is exclusively heavenly, and supposes faith, love, and hope in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us beware of making the same fatal mistake, and rather examine whether we are walking in the light of the past, and in that of the future. It always therefore requires faith to judge according to God. Hence Malachi brings in morally the giver of the law and the restorer of the law, the two great pillars of the Jewish nation, heralding the way before Jehovah who alone can bestow and sustain the blessing.

And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse {Mal. 4:6}.

Such in the warning note given here by Him who is the best blessing He can bestow. Heaven and earth and all things shall be shaken, but Jehovah abides; and blessed are all they that put their trust in Him. We know that the restoring of all things morally will be wrought in the hearts of fathers and sons in Israel, and that God will make them as life from the dead to the world, and thus spread His saving health among all nations who shall be blessed, not cursed, in the Seed of promise.

In the spirit and power of Elijah came Jehovah’s messenger, John the Baptist, and many of the sons of Israel did be turn to Jehovah their God. The language seems expressly to guard against the error of supposing that it was the predicted mission of Elijah the prophet. If ye will receive it, said our Lord Himself, this is Elijah who should come. It was a testimony to faith, not the fulfilment of the terms of Malachi’s last intimation (Mal. 4). Even in our Lord’s own case all that was bright and manifest blessing for Israel was arrested by the unbelief of the people, and thus the door was opened on His rejection to heavenly blessings for all believers indiscriminately. Hence for the time the moral restitution of the Jews was partial; and (the mass being impenitent, and family bonds utterly relaxed and broken) the land was smitten with a curse from that day to this. But it will not be always thus. For grace will work in a remnant once more in the last days when the full accomplishment of Elijah’s mission shall be realized (Matt. 17:11), and, the apostates perishing under divine judgment, all Israel shall be saved to the joy and blessing of the earth and of all its families. And such is the common voice of the holy prophets since the world began.

We have now in the goodness of God followed the course of the lesser prophets from beginning to end. We have glanced at themselves and briefly compared them with each other. How solemn for the believer to see the same ominous sign of sure coming judgment in Christendom as we may have discerned throughout the course of Israel! The possession of much truth no more guarantees now than then that we are true witnesses for God in our own day; still less the assumption that we have a position according to God because we are in a certain historical line of succession. So thought those who broke the law, rejected the prophets, slew the Messiah, and refused the fresh testimony of the Holy Spirit. Let us beware of making the same fatal mistake, and rather examine whether we are walking in the distinctive truth God has revealed to us for His own glory in Christ, not merely in truths, however momentous, which do not so much put conscience to the proof. The unity of the
Godhead was perverted by the Jews to the dishonor of the Son; the Son as He was on earth under law is now abused in Christendom to ignore redemption, union with Him on high, the presence of the Spirit in the assembly of God here below, and the constant hope of Christ’s coming. These are the truths which try the ground of the heart in the Christian. May we be found faithful and strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus!
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