WRITINGS OF GRIFFITH

by Griffith

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Griffith, compiled for study and devotional reading.

124 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 000.0.1. Christianity Is Christ
2. 000.0.2. Note
3. 000.01. Chapter 1. The Fact of Christ
4. 000.02. Chapter 2. The Character of Christ
5. 000.03. Chapter 3. The Claim of Christ
6. 000.04. Chapter 4. The Teaching of Christ
7. 000.05. Chapter 5. The Miracles of Christ
8. 000.06. Chapter 6. The Death of Christ
9. 000.07. Chapter 7. The Resurrection of Christ
10. 000.08. Chapter 8. The Gospels of Christ
11. 000.09. Chapter 9. The Church of Christ
12. 000.10. Chapter 10. The Grace of Christ
13. 000.11. Chapter 11. The Influence of Christ
14. 000.12. Chapter 12. The Virgin-Birth of Christ
15. 000.13. Chapter 13. The Meaning of Christ
16. 000.14. Chapter 14. The Verification of Christ
17. 000.15. Bibliography
18. 00A.00.1 Genesis, A Devotional Commentary
19. 00A.01 Introduction
20. 00A.02 The Creation Gen_1:1-31
21. 00A.03 The Foundations of Human Life Gen_2:1-25
22. 00A.04 The Fall Gen_3:1-24
23. 00A.05 Cain and Abel Gen_4:1-15
24. 00A.06 Human Progress Gen_4:18-26; Gen_5:1-32; Gen_6:1-8
25. 00A.07 Before the Flood Gen_6:9-22
26. 00A.08 At the Flood Gen_7:1-24
27. 00A.09 After the Flood Gen_8:1-22
28. 00A.10 The New Era Gen_9:1-17
29. 00A.11 A Believer's Fall Gen_9:18-29.
30. 00A.12 A Wide Outlook Gen_10:1-32
31. 00A.13 The Tower of Babel Gen_11:1-9
32. 00A.14 The Call of Abraham Gen_11:10-32; Gen_12:1-9.
33. 00A.15 The Testing Gen_12:10-20; Gen_13:1-4.
34. 00A.16 The Separation Gen_13:5-18
35. 00A.17 A New Emergency Gen_14:1-16
36. 00A.18 The Test of Victory Gen_14:17-24.
37. 00A.19 The Great Encouragement Gen_15:1-6
38. 00A.20 The Confirmation of Faith Gen_15:7-21
39. 00A.21 A False Step Gen_16:1-16

40. 00A.22 The Covenant Renewed Gen_17:1-27
41. 00A.23 Fellowship with God Gen_18:1-21
42. 00A.24 The Ministry of Intercession Gen_18:22-33; Gen_19:27-29
43. 00A.25 The Story of Lot Gen_19:1-38
44. 00A.26 An Old Sin Repeated Gen_20:1-18
45. 00A.27 Joy and Sorrow- Gen_21:1-21
46. 00A.28 The Daily Round Gen_21:22-34
47. 00A.29 The Supreme Crisis Gen_22:1-19
48. 00A.30 Death in the Home Gen_23:1-20
49. 00A.31 The Evening of Life Gen_24:1-9; Gen_25:1-10.
50. 00A.32 The Model Servant Gen_24:10-67
51. 00A.33 The Father of the Faithful
52. 00A.34 The Birth of Jacob Gen_25:11-28
53. 00A.35 The Birthright Gen_25:29-34
54. 00A.36 Isaac Gen_26:1-33
55. 00A.37 The Blessing Gen_27:1-40
56. 00A.38 Interlude Gen_27:41-46; Gen_28:1-9
57. 00A.39 Bethel Gen_28:10-22
58. 00A.40 The New Life Gen_29:1-30
59. 00A.41 In the Shadows Gen_29:31-35; Gen_30:1-43
60. 00A.42 Turning Homewards Gen_31:1-55
61. 00A.43 God's Host for Man's Help Gen_32:1-23
62. 00A.44 Peniel: The Face of God Gen_32:24-32
63. 00A.45 After Peniel Gen_33:1-20
64. 00A.46 Results of Unfaithfulness Gen_34:1-31
65. 00A.47 Bethel at Last Gen_35:1-15
66. 00A.48 The School of Sorrow Gen_35:8; Gen_35:16-29
67. 00A.49 A Profane Person Gen_36:1-8
68. 00A.50 Joseph's Early Life Gen_37:1-36
69. 00A.51 A Family Shame Gen_38:1-30
70. 00A.52 In Egypt Gen_39:1-23
71. 00A.53 In Prison Gen_40:1-23
72. 00A.54 Exaltation Gen_41:1-40
73. 00A.55 The Prime Minister Gen_41:41-52
74. 00A.56 The Awakening of Conscience Gen_42:1-38
75. 00A.57 Divine Discipline Gen_43:1-34; Gen_44:1-34
76. 00A.58 Reconciliation Gen_45:1-28
77. 00A.59 Into Egypt Gen_46:1-30
78. 00A.60 The New Home Gen_46:31-34; Gen_47:1-12
79. 00A.61 A Wise Ruler Gen_47:13-26
80. 00A.62 A Life's Sunset Gen_47:27-31; Gen_48:1-22
81. 00A.63 Father and Sons Gen_49:1-27

82. 00A.64 Light at Eventide Gen_49:28-33; Gen_50:1-14
83. 00A.65 Joseph's Later Life Gen_50:15-26
84. 00A.66 Thou Worm Jacob
85. 00A.67 A Fruitful Bough
86. 00A.68 Joseph a Type of Christ
87. 00A.69 Review
88. 01.00. How We Got Our Bible
89. 01.01. Structure and History of the Bible
90. 01.02. Canonicity of the Bible
91. 01.03. Authority of the Bible
92. 01.04. Authority of the Bible, Continued
93. 01.05. Trustwothiness of the Old Testament
94. 01.06. Trustwothiness of the New Testament
95. 01.07. Unity of the Bible
96. 01.08. Progressiveness of the Bible
97. 01.09. Inspiration of the Bible
98. 01.10. Inspiration of the Bible, Continued
99. 01.11. Interpretation of the Bible
100. 01.12. Purpose of the Bible
101. 02.00. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ
102. 02.01. First Proof: The Life of Jesus:
103. 02.02. Second Proof: The Empty Grave:
104. 02.03. Third Proof: Transformation of the Disciples:
105. 02.04. Fourth Proof: Existence of the Primitive Church:
106. 02.05. Fifth Proof: The Witness of Paul:
107. 02.06. Sixth Proof: The Gospel Record:
108. 02.07. Summary and Conclusion:
109. 02.08. Theology of the Resurrection:
110. 03.0.1 The Prayers of St. Paul
111. 03.00.3 CURRENT COPYRIGHT STATUS
112. 03.00.4 ABOUT THE SHORT COURSE SERIES
113. 03.00.5 TABLE OF CONTENTS
114. 03.00.6 INTRODUCTION
115. 03.01-I. GRACE AND HOLINESS.
116. 03.02-II. CONSECRATION AND PRESERVATION.
117. 03.03-III. APPROBATION AND BLESSING.
118. 03.04-IV. LOVE AND PEACE.
119. 03.05-V. KNOWLEDGE AND OBEDIENCE.
120. 03.06-VI. CONFLICT AND COMFORT.
121. 03.07-VII. WISDOM AND REVELATION.
122. 03.08-VIII. STRENGTH AND INDWELLING.
123. 03.09-IX. LOVE AND DISCERNMENT.

124. 03.10 APPENDIX.

000.0.1. Christianity Is Christ

Christianity Is Christ

BY:

W. H. Griffith Thomas, D. D.

PROFESSOR OF OLD TESTAMENT LITERATURE, WHYCLIFFE COLLEGE, TORONTO; AND FORMERLY PRINCIPAL OF WYCLIFFE HALL, OXFORD Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ;

Thou art the Everlasting Son of the Father, FIFTH IMPRESSION LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH STREET, NEW YORK BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS

1916.

000.0.2. Note

Note The aim of this handbook is to present in a short, popular form the substance of what has been written in recent years on the central subject of Christianity—the Person and Work of Christ. It is intended to provide materials for answering a question which has often been raised of late, What is Christianity? For some time past there have been clear indications that the question of the Personality of Jesus Christ is being re-examined and re-considered, and that once again it has become in a very definite way, the center of opposition to Christianity. It is hoped that this summary of the Christian position as stated by its leading modern exponents will prove of service to theological students and younger clergy, as well as to the men and women in our churches who are brought face to face with various attacks on the Christian faith. A bibliography of the best works is appended, and the present manual is little more than the substance of these in outline for general use.

000.01. Chapter 1. The Fact of Christ

Chapter 1.

The Fact of Christ

Christianity is the only religion in the world which rests on the Person of its Founder. A man can be a faithful Mohammedan without in the least concerning himself with the person of Mohammed. So also a man can be a true and faithful Buddhist without knowing anything whatever about Buddha. It is quite different with Christianity. Christianity is so inextricably bound up with Christ that our view of the Person of Christ involves and determines our view of Christianity. The relation of Jesus Christ to Christianity differs entirely from that of all other founders towards the religions of philosophies which bear their names Platonism, for example, may be defined as a method of philosophic thought from Plato; Mohammedanism as the belief in the revelation vouchsafed to Mohammed; Buddhism as the following of principles enunciated by Buddha. But Christianity is in essence adherence to the Person of Jesus Christ. [1] [1] F. J. Foakes-Jackson, in Cambridge Theological Essays, p. 474.

It has also been pointed out that Christianity alone of the great religions of the world calls itself by the name of its Founder, and that while we call other religions by the names of their founders, the adherents of these religions do not call themselves by these names.[1] This fact is full of very deep meaning. Does it not inevitably suggest that the connection between Christianity and Christ is so close as to be inseparable? Christianity is nothing less and can be nothing more than relationship to Christ.

[1] R. E. Speer, The Deity of Christ, p. 1. The fundamental and ultimate idea and fact of Christianity is the Person of Christ. "What think ye of Christ?" is the crucial problem today, as it has been all through the centuries. It is a test of Christianity and of man’s relation to Christianity. For nearly nineteen centuries attention has been concentrated on the Person of Christ both by His friends and by His foes. With a sure instinct both followers and opponents have realized the supreme importance of the Person of the Founder of Christianity. On the one hand, Jesus Christ has been the center of opposition in almost every age; on the other hand, He has been the Object of worship and of the heart’s devotion of all Christians. We cannot get away from this central fact; it influences our thinking; it controls our action; and it tests our entire attitude to the religion of Christ. This question of the Person of Christ is predominant at the present time. For the last sixty years special and ever-increasing attention has been given to Jesus Christ. The various Lives of Christ written in Germany, France and England bear their unmistakable testimony to the perennial interest of the subject. The concentration of criticism on the Gospels today with an acute-ness never before paralleled is proof that men of all schools realize the central and fundamental nature of the problem. History is being studied in order to discover what it has to say about Jesus Christ. The records of the primitive Church are being re-examined with minute care for their testimony to Him, and the comparison of what history and the Church have to say about Christ is once again being made with a view of discovering whether the two agree, or, if not, whether they can be

properly related. The historic Personality of Jesus has risen upon the consciousness of the Church with the force almost of a new revelation, the ultimate results of which still lie far in the future. It is literally true that this century is face to face with that Great Figure as no century has been since the first.[1] [1] D. S. Cairns, Christianity in the Modern World, p. 14.

It is thus no mere question of belief in this or that doctrine of the faith; nor simply an inquiry into the authenticity of this or that book of the Bible. It is the fundamental issue; is Jesus Christ God? Christians believe and are convinced that there is no real alternative between the acceptance of this view and the removal of Jesus Christ from the supreme place which He has occupied in the Christian Church through the centuries. Either He has been given a place to which He is entitled, or else He has been so entirely overrated that His spiritual value cannot be regarded as anything more than that of an example. Jesus Christ must either be the Object of men's faith, or else merely its Model. The Christian Church has held firmly to the former belief, and is convinced that it is the only tenable position. It is not too much to say that at this point Christianity, as it has been known through the ages, stands or falls. Carlyle recognized this when he said, "Had this doctrine of the Divinity of Christ been lost, Christianity would have vanished like a dream." So also Lecky truly remarks, "Christianity is not a system of morals; it is the worship of a Person." A special reason for giving prominence to this subject at the present time arises through the study of comparative religion. Christianity is now being compared with other religions in ways that were not possible even a few years ago, and this comparison inevitably leads up to the question of the Person of Christ. Men are asking some very pointed questions. Wherein lies the uniqueness of Christianity? What was new in it? What did Christianity bring into the world that had not appeared before? The Christian answer is Christ, the Person of Christ, the uniqueness of Christ and His work. The controversy is therefore about facts. Christianity is a historical religion, and as it claims to rest on Christ, it necessarily follows that consideration of Christ is vital to the reality and continuance of Christianity as a historical religion. For the same reason it is impossible for it to avoid criticism and comparison with other faiths, nor are Christians in the least degree afraid of any such examination. The Person and Work of Christ can and must be tried at the bar of Reason and of History, and no Christian can do other than welcome the fullest, and most searching examination of the Person of the Founder of our religion. A word seems necessary about the method to be adopted in the present inquiry. There are two ways of approaching the subject. We can commence with an examination of the credibility of the Gospels as sources of our knowledge of Christ, or we can start by giving attention to the picture of Christ as enshrined in the Gospels, and then proceed to draw our conclusions as the result of the impressions thereby formed. The latter of these methods has been chosen. We deliberately avoid attempting to establish the credibility of the Gospels before studying the portrait of Christ contained in them. We prefer to reverse the process, because we wish to appeal first of all to those who are unwilling and perhaps unable to enter upon the intricacies of historical criticism. At the same time place will be found for the consideration of the criticism of the Gospels (ch. viii.) and the problems raised at the present day. But the method now deliberately adopted is to call attention to the picture of Christ, to obtain a definite impression of it as it stands, and then to draw conclusions as to the record in which it is found. We therefore take the Gospels as they are, and, assuming nothing as to their inspiration, we simply regard them as documents which are accepted today all over the world as the primary sources of our knowledge of Christ, and which have been so regarded by all men since at least a.d. 200. We thus start with the fewest possible presuppositions and assumptions, and endeavor to derive our doctrine of

Christ from the record of the Gospels. To the consideration, then, of the Person of Christ we address ourselves. That it is the most prominent feature of the Gospels is obvious to the most casual reader; that it was the substance of Christ's own teaching, the main theme of the Apostolic preaching and teaching, and the very life of all Church history, will be admitted by all, whatever may be their own view of Christ. We must endeavor to find out the reason of all this concentration of attention on Christ, and to see whether the Christian Church has been justified in giving this undoubted prominence and unique position to the Person of its Founder.

000.02. Chapter 2. The Character of Christ

Chapter 2.

The Character of Christ

Personality is the highest thing in life. It is also the most interesting, attractive, fascinating. The study of personality surpasses almost everything in practical value. If this is so in general, it is essentially so with regard to the personality of Jesus Christ.

We therefore commence by a consideration of the picture of Jesus Christ as He is brought before us in the Gospels. Taking the Gospels just as they are, as documents intended to be regarded as records of the appearance of Jesus Christ on earth, we will endeavor to discover the impression formed of Him by His earliest disciples. What they thought of Christ may help us to right thoughts about Him. We will test Him just as we would any other human character.

One of His closest disciples has summed up his own impression of Jesus Christ in the following words: "We beheld His glory... full of grace and truth." These two words, "grace" and "truth," describe His personal character. By "grace" we are to understand His graciousness of soul, manner, attitude, speech and action. We can see this very plainly in His influence on the daily life of those disciples who were His constant companions. It is writ large on every page of the Gospels that He was attractive to people generally, and not least to little children. It is a fine test of personal power to observe how little children regard a man, and Jesus Christ answers this test to perfection. Grace was manifest in everything that He was and did. There never was such a life of graciousness to those around.

"Truth" is also another marked characteristic of the life of Jesus Christ. Reality was stamped on everything about Him. His life was holy, His word was true, His whole character was the embodiment of truth. There never has been a more real or genuine man than Jesus of Nazareth.

It is not only the presence but the combination of these two elements of grace and truth in Jesus Christ that calls for attention. We cannot help noticing their perfect blend and their equally perfect proportion. Grace by itself might easily lead to weakness and mere sentimentality. Truth by itself might easily be expressed in rigour, sternness, severity. But when grace is strengthened by truth, and truth is mellowed by grace, we have the perfect character and the true life of man. It is the union of these opposites in Jesus Christ in perfect balance and consistency that demands our attention. Other men are only fragmentary onesided, biassed. He is complete, balanced, perfect. Ordinary men often manifest unequally one or other of these two elements; Jesus Christ manifested them both in beautiful harmony and exquisite proportion. He embraces all the good elements which mark other men, and it is not too much to say that there is no element missing which men think desirable in the human character. Not only so, He possesses all these elements in a higher degree than any one else, and with perfect balance and proportion. There is no weakness, no exaggeration or strain, no strong and weak points, as is the case with the rest of mankind. Still more, there are certain elements and traits of character which are not found

elsewhere, such as absolute humility, entire unselfishness, whole-hearted willingness to forgive, and the most beautiful and perfect holiness. Nor must we overlook the wonderful blending of contrasts which are to be seen in Jesus Christ; the combination of keenness and integrity, of caution and courage, of tenderness and severity, of sociability and aloofness. Or we may think of the elements of sorrow without moroseness, of joy without lightness, of spirituality without asceticism, of conscientiousness without morbidness, of freedom without license, of earnestness without fanaticism.[1] [1] See Dudden, In Christ's Name, p. 9.

Yet again, the prominence given to passive virtues side by side with the evident presence and power of manliness is quite unlike what we find elsewhere; the elements of meekness, tenderness, patience, and kindness have a place in His character and attracted women to Him as well as men. Have we ever thought of the peculiar position occupied by Jesus with respect to the ideals of the sexes? No man has ever dared to call Jesus, in any opprobrious sense, sexless: yet in character He stands above, and, if one may use the term, midway between the sexes—His comprehensive humanity a veritable storehouse of the ideals we associate with both the sexes. No woman has ever had any more difficulty than men have had in finding in Him the realized ideal. Whatever there is in men of strength, justice, and wisdom, whatever there is in woman of sensibility, purity, and insight, is in Christ without the conditions which hinder among us the development of contrasted virtues in one person.[1] [1] Johnston Ross, The Universality of Jesus, p. 23. In particular, one feature of the character of Christ as portrayed in the Gospels has often been pointed out—the picture of His perfect youth. When this is contrasted with what is found in the Apocryphal Gospels the essential difference is at once seen. The beautiful sketch of Christ's boyhood and youth, with its perfect innocence, though without any weakness, is a fact to be pondered and explained. How, then, are we to account for this perfect blending and exquisite harmony? There is no doubt or question as to the environment of Jesus Christ; it was essentially and solely Jewish. His nation, place, home, work, were Jewish. And yet the picture of Jesus Christ in the Gospels is not a Jewish picture. There is nothing in Judaism to explain it. The records of Jewish history, whether of Christ's own day or of earlier times, to say nothing of later centuries, will be searched in vain for any Jewish picture corresponding to that of Jesus of Nazareth. We can see something of typical Jewish character in our Lord's day from a study of John the Baptist and St. Paul. Although, therefore, Jesus Christ is historical and Jewish, it is abundantly evident that He transcends the limits of Judaism. Nor is it a Gentile picture. There is nothing in Greece or Rome to account for it. The greatest and highest personages of these countries have never revealed anything approaching the grace and truth manifested in Jesus Christ. Nor can we account for this portrait by means of a blending of Jew and Gentile. There is nothing whatever in history to show that this would be the outcome of such a union of racial and personal characteristics. The typical blend of Jew and Gentile was seen in Alexandria in such a man as Philo.

We do not wonder, therefore, that the question asked by His contemporaries, "Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works?" should be asked concerning His character by men of all ages, for there is nothing in history to account for Him.

This, then, is the first point upon which attention should be concentrated, the personal character of Jesus Christ. If it be said that such a character is accounted for by evolution, we naturally ask to be shown the factors which could produce such a result. Evolution necessarily presupposes a prior involution. You cannot evolve what is not there to evolve; and, bearing in mind that evolution, as

generally understood, is the outcome of heredity and environment, we ask to be shown what there was in the heredity or in the environment of Jesus Christ to account for this "glory, full of grace and truth." His heredity and environment are known to mankind. Life in Palestine, together with the various racial and political influences that were at work, are all pretty familiar to those who have made themselves acquainted with the history of the time; and Christians can fairly demand the production of proof that Jesus Christ can be accounted for along the lines of natural evolution. As a well-known scientific authority has rightly said—When evidence for a natural evolution of Christ, i.e. as He is portrayed to us in the Gospels, is looked for, none is forthcoming.[1] [1] Henslow, Christ no Product of Evolution, p. 4.

Besides, if Jesus Christ was a product of evolution, how is it that no better man has since appeared, after nineteen centuries? Why should not evolution lead to a still higher type? Yet Jesus Christ continues to tower high above humanity. The acutest examination only confirms the truth of John Stuart Mill's well-known statement that Christ is "A unique Figure, not more unlike all His predecessors than all His followers." This impression of the personal character of Jesus Christ is the first and earliest derived from a reading of the Gospels. But it is not the complete impression, and we must now take a further step. The perfect blending of grace and truth, although unique, is not absolutely conclusive proof of anything more than exceptional Manhood; but as we continue to read the story of Jesus Christ in the Gospels we are soon brought face to face with a truly unique element. He is seen to be entirely without sin. This, if true, means that there has been one Man in whom the entail of sin was broken, one Man utterly different in this respect from every other human being of whom we have any historical or actual knowledge. This is a gigantic fact if it be true, and it calls for the severest scrutiny. We have a threefold witness to the sinlessness of Jesus Christ.

There is the witness of His foes. The Jews followed Him from place to place, watched Him with keen-eyed endeavor to entrap Him in word or deed. Pilate and Herod, who were incarnations of cleverness and cruelty, could find no fault in Him, and He was only condemned at last by the production of false witnesses. He Himself challenged His opponents to convict Him of sin; "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" a challenge which was never met, although He was surrounded by ruthless hostility almost all through the period of His earthly Manhood.

Still more, there is the evidence of His friends. The cynical Frenchman said that "No man is a hero to his own valet," but this dictum is entirely set at nought by the story of Jesus Christ. One after another of His disciples bears the same testimony to Him. One of His earliest followers said of Him that He "did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." Another of them said, "We beheld His glory." They lived with Him intimately for nearly three years, occupying the same house, traveling at times in the same little boat, sharing common needs, enduring common ostracism, and yet not one of them could ever point to the faintest shadow upon His character. This testimony is all the more remarkable because of its indirectness. It was only gradually that in looking back the disciples realized their Master was sinless, but they lay no stress on the fact. Perhaps this is because it seemed so perfectly in harmony with all they knew of Him.

Above all, there is the testimony of Christ's own life. We have the record of His intimate communion with His heavenly Father, with prayers and some of His holiest and most intimate utterances. There is no trace of any defect ever being confessed by Him to God. He was ever

preaching repentance to others, but never repented of sins of His own. Not a trace of repentance is found in Him, though human piety always begins at this point. He was always denouncing sin, but never confessed to any sin in Himself. The best reason we have for believing in the sinlessness of Jesus is the fact that He allowed His dearest friends to think that He was. There is in all His talk no trace of regret or hint of compunction, or suggestion of sorrow for shortcoming, or slightest vestige of remorse. He taught other men to think of themselves as sinners, He asserted plainly that the human heart is evil, He told His disciples that every time they prayed they were to pray to be forgiven, but He never speaks or acts as though He Himself has the faintest consciousness of having ever done anything other than what was pleasing to God.[1] [1] C. E. Jefferson, The Character of Jesus, p. 225.

Still more, we have in Jesus Christ a fact that is unique in the history of human life and character—a perfectly holy Man declaring His own holiness. The universal history of the highest and noblest saints shows that the nearer they approached the infinite holiness of God the more conscious they became of their own lack of holiness, and yet in the case of Jesus Christ there is not only the absence of sin, but from time to time declarations of His own holiness and meekness. There was not a trace of that self-depreciation which in others is always associated with the highest character. This is all the more remarkable if we observe the instances in the life of Jesus Christ when He expressed indignation against His own enemies. Yet there is nothing in His life for which He was sorry afterwards; no remembrance of evil ever impaired the consciousness of His fellowship with God. With every other man the expression of indignation tends to a subsequent feeling of compunction, or, at any rate, to a close examination whether there may not have been some elements of personal animosity or injustice in the expression of anger. But with Jesus Christ there was nothing of the kind. Not for a single instant did the faintest shadow come between Him and His heavenly Father. He was without sin.[1] [1] Forrest, The Authority of Christ, pp. 10-25. And that which we find so evident in the record of the Gospels has been acknowledged on every hand even by those who have not accepted Jesus Christ in the Christian sense of the term. David Strauss could say that Jesus Christ had "a conscience unclouded by the memory of any sins." And John Stuart Mill wrote that "Religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this Man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity."

If it be asked why the Christian Church has made so much of the sinlessness of Christ, the answer is, because of its close and essential relation to human sin. Christianity as a religion is unique in its claim to deliver from sin, and this claim is based on the sinlessness of Christ. If Christ’s own life had not been sinless, it is obvious that He could not be the Redeemer of mankind from sin. "Physician, heal thyself," would have a very definite personal application to Christ Himself.

Now this unique element of sinlessness in Christ has to be accounted for. It is a moral miracle. Only one Man out of the millions of human beings is proved to have been without sin. Deny the sinlessness of Christ, and His inner life becomes an insoluble enigma, and His claim to be the Saviour utterly falls; accept it, and at once we are met with the simple fact that there is nothing like it in nature, and that it must be a moral miracle. Now a moral miracle is just as real as a physical miracle, and it is for this reason that Christians call attention to the sinlessness of Jesus Christ. While sinlessness alone may not prove Deity, it assuredly argues for the credibility of the record and leads to the consideration of Christ’s personal claims.

This, then, is the first point to be considered in regard to Christ. His perfect life of grace and truth and His unique life of sinlessness call for attention and demand an adequate answer. The alternatives are Incarnation and Evolution. Reject Incarnation, and then Evolution is utterly unable to account for Christ.

If He was man only, we ask in the name of that holiness which is the life of the intelligent universe, and in the name of God with whom the interests of holiness are paramount, how it has come to pass, that of all men He alone has risen to spiritual perfection? What God did for piety and virtue on the earth at one time and in one case, God certainly could have done at other times and in other cases. If Jesus was man only, God could have raised up, in successive ages, many such living examples of sanctified humanity as He was, to correct, instruct, and quicken the world. But He did not; and the guilty of the moral condition of mankind is thus charged at once upon Him; and the real cause of the continuance of moral evil, and of the limited success of holiness and truth in the earth, is thus declared to be in God—that cause is the withholding of His merciful influences.[1]
[1] J. Young, The Christ of History, p. 243. Are we not right in saying with Bushnell that "The character of Jesus Christ forbids His possible classification with men"?

000.03. Chapter 3. The Claim of Christ

Chapter 3.

The Claim of Christ

Just as a diamond has several facets, each one contributing to the beauty and attractiveness of the complete stone, so Jesus Christ can be considered in various ways, and to the question, "What think ye of Christ?" different answers can be given. Looking again at the Gospel story of His life, we are conscious of one remarkable fact that stands out on almost every page from the beginning to the close of His ministry. This is the claim that He made for Himself. It was a fivefold claim of a very far-reaching nature.

He claimed to be the Messiah of the Jews. It is well known that the Old Testament is a book of expectation, and that it closes with the expectation very largely unrealized. The Jews as a nation were ever looking forward to the coming of a great personage whom they called the Messiah. He would fulfil all their prophecies, realize all their hopes, and accomplish all their designs for themselves and for the world. Jesus Christ of Nazareth claimed to be this Messiah. During His ministry He referred to many a passage in the Old Testament, and pointed to Himself as the explanation and application of it. He took the Jewish law and claimed not only to fulfil it, but to give it a wider, fuller, and deeper meaning. "I came not to destroy, but to fulfil." It was this definite claim to be the Messiah that led in great part to the opposition shown to Him by the Jews.

He claimed to be in some way the Redeemer of Mankind. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost"; "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." This description of men as "lost," i.e. helpless, useless, and in danger of future condemnation, and this statement about Himself as having come to "save" them, constitute a claim that implies uniqueness of relation to humanity.

He claimed to be the Master of Mankind. He said that He was the Lord of the Sabbath. He called for obedience from men by His definite, all-embracing command, "Follow me." The earliest influence of Christ over His disciples was exercised quite naturally and simply, and yet the claim He made on them was absolute. But the narrative nowhere suggests that they felt it to be unwarranted. It is recorded without any explanation or justification, as though He had a natural and perfect right to make it. The words are so familiar that we are apt to fail to realize their astounding and far-reaching character. Think of what they mean. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." This remarkable claim to control lives and to be the supreme motive in life is surely more than human. He preached the kingdom of God, and announced Himself as the King. He claimed to alter the law in spite of the sanction of its hoary authority.

Still more, He claimed to be the Judge of Mankind. He said that His words should judge mankind at the last day, and more than once He depicted Himself as the Judge before whom all men should be gathered to receive their reward or punishment. He claimed to sum up all the past and

to decide all the future.

Above all, He claimed nothing less than the prerogatives of God. He claimed to be able to forgive sins, eliciting from His enemies a charge of blasphemy, since "Who can forgive sins but God only?" He associated Himself with God and God's work when He said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." He told the Jews that all things had been delivered to Him by His Father, and because of this He invited all that labored and were heavy laden to come to Him for rest. The words of St. Matthew xi call for the closest possible study. "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father: neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The fair and obvious interpretation of this statement is that Jesus Christ was conscious of a unique relation to God and a unique relation to man based thereon. Is not this the New Testament picture of Jesus Christ? Can any one doubt as they read the four Gospels, or even the first three Gospels, that this, and nothing short of it, is the claim that Jesus Christ made for Himself as Messiah, Redeemer, Master, Judge and God? But we cannot stop with a general consideration of these remarkable claims; we must get behind them and endeavor to discover whether they are warranted by our Lord's personal consciousness. To claim is one thing; to justify and vindicate the claim is quite another. Character and deeds must bear the strain of this stupendous claim to be unique in relation to God and man. Now it is worthy of note that during recent years the minds of the greatest thinkers have been turning as never before to the consideration of the consciousness of Christ. "The Inner Life of Jesus" is the theme of modern books of great value issued in Germany and in England. The one aim that runs through them is the inquiry whether the consciousness of Jesus Christ can bear the weight of the tremendous claim which the Gospels show He made for Himself. The writers realize that the consciousness of Christ is the foundation of these claims, and that if that is wanting, the claims themselves are baseless. It is, therefore, with a sure instinct and insight that men have been giving attention to the consciousness of Christ examining it, testing it, and proving it to the utmost. The more it is studied the better, for the more fully it is examined the more thoroughly will it be found to stand the test.

Now there is one way in particular in which this consciousness may be tested. It may be studied by dwelling on the distinctive titles He used and allowed to be used for Himself. As Dr. Sanday rightly says, "The problem still turns round the use of those old names, Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah."[1] [1] Sanday, Life of Christ in Recent Research, p. 123.

"Son of Man" is a title found eighty times in the Gospels, sixty-nine in the Synoptics, and eleven in the fourth Gospel. It is found in every document into which criticism divides our present Gospels.[1] While its origin is variously explained, its meaning on our Lord's lips is not difficult of apprehension. It is employed by Ezekiel as a designation of himself, some ninety times; it is used occasionally in the Psalms of man in general (e.g. Psalms 8:4; Psalms 80:17) and it is found in a well-known passage in Daniel (Daniel 8:13) with an eschatological reference to the Messiah. It is also in Enoch and second Esdras, if the passages are pre-Christian. But it does not seem to have been used by the Jews for the Messiah before Christ came, and in the New Testament, with two exceptions, it is only found on the lips of Christ Himself. The Evangelists never use it to describe their Master. It was His own designation of Himself as Messiah, and was probably derived partly from the Old Testament and partly from His own consciousness. There is ample material in the Old Testament for the germ from which it sprang, and, as Dr. Sanday says, our Lord invariably

added to and deepened every Old Testament conception that He adopted.[2] [1] Sanday, op. cit., p. 125.

[2] Sanday, Life of Christ in Recent Research, p. 127.

It seems to suggest at once His lowliness and His Lordship, His oneness with humanity, and His uniqueness in humanity. He is the real, representative, typical Man, and the term is practically equivalent to Messiah, though it was not recognized as such in our Lord's time. The usage of the term in the Gospels may be said to fall into the two groups corresponding with the Old Testament representations of the Messiah, His lowliness as the Servant of Jehovah, and His Lordship as God's Vicegerent. These two lines of Old Testament prophecy and anticipation never meet in the Old Testament itself, and it is only in Jesus Christ that the problem of their remarkable contrast is resolved and explained. While, therefore, Jesus Christ generally avoided the term "Messiah" because of the false ideas associated with it by the Jews, He found in the designation "Son of Man" a true explanation of His own Messianic consciousness and mission which it at once asserted and concealed. Thus, as Holtzmarin says, "It was a riddle to those who heard it, and served to veil, not to reveal, His Messiahship."[1] [1] Quoted by Sheraton, Princeton Theological Review, October, 1903.

"Son of God" is another title closely related to the former. Each implies and explains the other. Its usage is not large in the Gospels. While in the Synoptics there is no explicit use of the title by Christ Himself, He employs it by implication, and certainly allows others to use it of Him. He speaks of God as "the Father" many times, but in regard to His relation to God He never associates Himself with men. Not once do we find Him speaking of "Our Father" as including Himself; it is always "My Father" and "your Father." In the same way He is never found praying with His disciples, though He does praise with them (Mark 14:26). Surely there is something like uniqueness here. The title "Son of God" is given to Him under a great variety of circumstances, and doubtless with a great variety of meaning, but a careful study of a number of passages compels the conclusion that, amid all the differences of circumstance and meaning, "an essential filial relation to God" is the only true interpretation (Matthew 11:27; Matthew 16:16; Matthew 17:25; Matthew 22:41-45; Matthew 27:43; Luke 10:22).[1] In the fourth Gospel we have one hundred and four instances of Christ calling God "Father" or "the Father," and the title "Son of God" is frequently employed, both by Himself and others (John 1:14-18; John 3:16-18; John 20:17). The usage is therefore clear and outstanding, and calls for explanation.

[1] See Fairbairn, Studies in the Life of Christ, p. 193.

What, then, does it mean? The term is found in the Old Testament as applied to Israel (Exodus 4:22), and to the Kings of Israel (Psalms 89:26-27), and in the second Psalm in particular a Messianic application also seems clear (Psalms 2:7). But while it undoubtedly has an official sense, it is obvious from the usage in the Gospel that it meant much more. The Messianic meaning was the basis of an ethical and metaphysical idea that went far beyond anything purely official (John 5:18; John 10:33; John 19:7). The Jews clearly realized the difference between their own idea of the Sonship of the Messiah and that which Jesus claimed for Himself. This witness of the Gospels to a unique Divine Sonship is a fact to be pondered and explained. It is impossible to avoid the force and variety of their testimony on this point.

Copious as it is, the language... is all the development of a single idea. It all grows out of the filial relation; it is a working-out of the implications of the title Son of God. The idea, as we have seen, rests upon evidence that is far older than the fourth Gospel. It would not be wrong to call it the first proposition of Christian theology, the first product of reflection upon the Life of Christ that has come down to us. The most detailed analysis of the idea is no doubt to be found in the fourth Gospel; but that Gospel really adds nothing fundamentally new. When once we assume that our Lord Jesus Christ thought of Himself as Son, thought of Himself as the Son, thought of God as in a peculiar sense His Father, or the Father, all the essential data are before us.[1] [1] Sanday, The Life of Christ in Recent Research, p. 137. That Jesus believed Himself to be the Messiah is another fact that emerges from a careful reading of the Gospels. At the baptism it is evident that Christ was conscious of His Messiahship (Matthew 3:15). The name Messiah was frequently applied to Jesus Christ by others. There are three occasions in which He accepted it for Himself (Matthew 16:17; Mark 14:61; John 4:26). And although He refused from time to time to reveal Himself to the Jews, who were only too ready to mistake His words and oppose His claim, the evidence of the Gospels is far too weighty to allow of any denial of the Messiahship of Jesus Christ as claimed, allowed, and implied by Him.

Some critics have called in question the fact that Jesus called Himself Messiah. But this article of evangelical tradition seems to me to stand the test of the most minute investigation.[1] [1] Harnack, History of Dogma, i. p. 63, n.

Historically considered, the calling which Jesus embraced, and with which was bound up His significance for the world, was and could be no other than to be the Messiah of His people.[1] [1] Weiss, Life of Christ, i. p. 195. As Dr. Sanday truly says—

There is no explaining away this deep-rooted element in the consciousness of our Lord. On this rock the persistent efforts to minimize the significance of His Person must assuredly be shipwrecked.[1] [1] Sanday, The Life of Christ in Recent Research, p. 136. On these three titles, therefore, and all that they express and imply, we can concentrate attention. When they are considered, first separately, and then together in their mutual relations, they surely carry their own message as to the claim and consciousness of Christ in regard to Himself, His Father, and His mission. They reveal to us what Dr. Sanday has so well called

Those little indications—for they are really little indications, strangely delicate and unobtrusive—scattered over the Gospels, that in spite of the humble form of His coming He was yet essentially more than man. Let me ask you to observe how it is all in keeping. It is in keeping with what I have already called the period of "occultation." Everything about the Manhood of our Lord is (so to speak) in this subdued key. But this is only for a time. It expresses the surface consciousness, not the deeper consciousness; the deeper consciousness, after all, is expressed by St. John’s "I and My Father are one." It is the unclouded openness of the mind of the Son to the mind of the Father that was the essence of His being. It is not only openness to influence, but a profound, unshakable inner sense of harmony, and indeed unity, of will. This is the fundamental fact that lies behind all our theologizings. They are but the successive efforts to put into words, coloured, perhaps, by the different ages through which the Church has passed, what St. Thomas meant by his exclamation, "My Lord and my God."[1] [1] Sanday, The Life of Christ in Recent Research, p. 141. This Divine consciousness is all the more remarkable when it is considered

against the background of His perfect humility. We see Him occupied with His own personality, and yet proclaiming and exemplifying meekness on every possible occasion. But, if His claims were untrue, is there not something here that is not merely egotism, but blasphemy?

It is doubly surprising to observe that these enormous pretensions were advanced by one whose special peculiarity, not only among His contemporaries, but among the remarkable men that have appeared before and since, was an almost feminine tenderness and humility. Yet so clear to Him was His own dignity and infinite importance to the human race as an objective fact with which His own opinion of Himself had nothing to do, that in the same breath in which He asserts it in the most unmeasured language, He alludes, apparently with entire unconsciousness, to His own humility: "I am meek and lowly in heart."[1] [1] Masterman, Was Jesus Christ Divine? p. 63.

Since, too, He claimed to bring God to man in a definite and unique way, and to bestow such grace as would transform and uplift man's life, the question naturally arises whether such an One as Jesus Christ would arouse hopes in man that He could not satisfy.

Bronson Alcott once said to Carlyle that he could honestly use the words of Jesus, "I and the Father are one." "Yes," was the crushing retort, "but Jesus got the world to believe Him."[1] [1] Religion and the Modern Mind. David Smith, "The Divinity of Jesus, p. 167. And so we have to face and explain this Divine consciousness of Christ. As Canon H. B. Ottley has truly put it, this is the "Great Dilemma," and a dilemma which takes various forms. Christ was sinless, and yet was condemned as a malefactor. He was the Truth, and yet was condemned for falsehood. He came fulfilling the law, and yet was condemned as a law-breaker. He claimed to be a King, and yet was condemned as a traitor. He was a worker of miracles, and yet was condemned as a sorcerer. He claimed to be a forgiver of sins, and yet was condemned as an impostor. He claimed to be God, and yet was condemned as a blasphemer.[1] Was ever a human being seen like this? A Man exemplifying the passive virtues combined with unique majesty. A man challenging attention to His sinlessness and meekness, and yet obviously sincere. A man claiming unlimited power, and yet ever expressing His dependence on God. A Man possessed of undaunted courage, and yet characterized by exceptional meekness. A Man interested in the smallest details of individual lives, and yet conscious of possessing universal relations with God and man. A Man deeply impressed with the awful realities and consequences of human sin, and yet ever possessed by a sunny optimism which faced the facts and looked forward to sin's eternal destruction. A Man born and educated amid narrow and narrowing Jewish tradition, and yet characterized by an originality and a universality which rises infinitely above all national and racial limits. A Man of perfect humility, absolute sincerity, entire sinlessness, and yet all the while actually asserting Himself to be humble, sincere, and sinless.

[1] H. B. Ottley, the Great Dilemma, passim. A young man who had not long left the carpenter's workshop, who at the moment He spoke was in a condition of poverty, and was associated only with those who were obscure and poor like Himself, calmly declared His sense of perfect faultlessness and of extraordinary relation to God.[1] [1] Young, The Christ of History, p. 211.

What are we to say in the face of these astonishing claims? How are we to reconcile this self-assertion on the one hand with that high degree of personal character and excellence which all men, friends and foes, have accorded to Jesus Christ throughout the ages? How is it that these claims which would be absolutely intolerable in any other man have been allowed and almost

universally accepted in the case of Jesus Christ?

Surely there is only one conclusion to all this; the old dilemma must once more be repeated, Aut Deus aut homo non bonus. Either Jesus Christ is God, or else He is not a good man. "If it is not superhuman authority that speaks to us here, it is surely superhuman arrogance."[1] There is no middle path, for no intermediate position has ever been found tenable. Jesus Christ is either God, or else He is utterly undeserving of our thought and regard.

[1] An Appeal to Unitarians, quoted by Bishop Gore, The Incarnation (Bampton Lectureh), p. 238.

We therefore find ourselves face to face with the problem how to account for the Person, life, and character of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. As it has been forcibly pointed out, the ordinary factors of life cannot possibly account for Him. Race, family, place, time, education, opportunity: these are the six ordinary factors of human life, and they can all be tested to the full and examined to the last point without any of them, or even all of them together, accounting for Jesus Christ.[1] Everything in Him is at once perfectly natural and yet manifestly supernatural. He is unique in the history of mankind. As the Bishop of Birmingham has well said—

[1] Fairbairn, Philosophy of the Christian Religion, pp. 311, 312.

One man of a particular race and age cannot be the standard for all men, the Judge of all men, of all ages and races, the goal of human, moral development, unless he is something more than one man among many. Such a universal Manhood challenges inquiry.[1] [1] Bishop Gore, The Incarnation, p. 25. This inquiry Christianity invites all men to pursue. Jesus Christ cannot be ignored. Whenever human thought has endeavored to do this it has been found impossible. Whenever human life now tries to do so the task is soon seen to be beyond it. He must be considered. He demands the attention of all true men. The supreme question today, as ever, is "What think ye of Christ?"

000.04. Chapter 4. The Teaching of Christ

Chapter 4.

The Teaching of Christ For several years past great emphasis has been laid ton the teaching of Christ. Some of the best books of modern days are on this subject. The teaching of Jesus Christ has been examined, explored, explained, classified, and applied as never before. This is all to the good, for it leads inevitably to the consideration of the Teacher Himself. The Gospels leave no doubt as to the impression made by Christ as "a Teacher come from God." The opening of His ministry struck the keynote: "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God," and all through those three years, preaching and teaching formed a large and essential part of His work. The effect of His teaching on His contemporaries was marked and continuous. At every stage they were impressed by Him. The "understanding and answers" which at the age of twelve astonished the teachers in the Temple gave promise of what was abundantly evident in after-years. It will help us to understand His teaching more thoroughly today if we first endeavor to gain an idea of how it impressed His earliest hearers. At the opening of His ministry the people of Nazareth were astonished at the graciousness of His utterances (Luke 4:22). There was a glow of grace and love, an accent of persuasiveness, a note of considerateness, a touch of tenderness in what He said that deeply impressed them. On another occasion the authoritativeness of His teaching was the prominent feature (Matthew 7:29). In contrast with their own teachers, He seemed to speak from personal knowledge, and the force of His convictions awed them. In close association with this was His boldness (John 7:26). Unlettered though He was, there was no timidity or self-consciousness, no hesitation as to what He felt to be truth. Without any thought of Himself or His audience, He spoke out fearlessly on every occasion, utterly heedless of the consequences to Himself, and only concerned for truth and the delivery of His Father’s message. The power of His teaching was also deeply felt. "His word was with power" (Luke 4:32). The spiritual force of His personality expressed itself in His utterances and held His hearers in enthralling grasp. And so we are not surprised to read of the impression of uniqueness made by Him. "Never man spake like this Man" (John 7:46). The simplicity and charm and the depth, the directness and yet the universality, the charm and yet the truth of His teaching made a deep mark on His hearers, and elicited the conviction that they were in the presence of a Teacher such as man had never known before. And thus the large proportion of teaching in the Gospels, and the impressions evidently created by the Teacher Himself, are such that we are not at all surprised that years afterward the great Apostle of the Gentiles should recall these things and say, "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:35). The same impression has been made in every age since the days of Christ and His immediate followers, and in any full consideration of His Person as the substance of Christianity great attention must necessarily be paid to His teaching.

What, then, was the substance of His teaching, which has been so attractive to the world? First and foremost, His teaching about God. Two ideas perhaps sum it up; the Kingdom of God and the Fatherhood of God. The term "Kingdom of God" is found over one hundred times in the Gospels and in every part of the ministry from the outset to end. Its central idea is the reign and rule of God

over human life, and it was the theme of Christ's preaching from the first. "The Kingdom of God" was the earliest word in Jerusalem (John 3:3) and in Galilee (Mark 1:15), and the theme is found in sermon, parable, and prophecy to the close of of His ministry. Man ruled over by God, and thereby finding the full realization of life: this is the essence of the idea of the Kingdom of God. The Fatherhood of God is equally characteristic of Christ's teaching, and although it was known in part before by reason of God's unique covenant relation to Israel, it came with all the force and freshness of a new revelation. While the holiness and majesty of God as emphasized in Old Testament times were presupposed and taken for granted, the thought of Fatherhood was added, giving richness and fulness to the message, and joy and hope to the hearers. This Fatherhood was essentially spiritual and ethical, and correlated with a spiritual and ethical sonship, and was proclaimed with such frequency and variety that it had all the glory of a new revelation concerning God's relation to man. And so from the day of Christ we have had ideas of God, and of God in relation to man, that the world never knew before Christ came. Our highest and best knowledge, indeed almost all we know of God, has come from or through Him. The very high ideas of God which some men say are impossible of practical realization have really come from Christ. In close connection with Christ's teaching about God was His message of forgiveness for man. It was soon evident that He had come not only to reveal, but also to redeem. The fact of sin was therefore emphasized and the need of deliverance from it pointed out. On the paralytic brought for healing, Jesus Christ bestowed first of all the man's deepest need, forgiveness, and all through His ministry in a variety of ways sin and redemption were prominent features of His teaching. The burden of human iniquity and the bounty of Divine mercy were His themes. No wonder the "common people heard Him gladly" (Mark 12:37), or that "sinners" flocked to Him (Luke 15:1). It was the glory of His ministry that He brought peace and rest to weary, sin-stricken hearts by His message of a free, full forgiveness. In the face of murmuring and opposition He justified His conduct by saying that "the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

Arising out of this message of redemption was another closely allied to it—the value and possibility of human life when thus redeemed. "How much, then, is a man better than a sheep?" (Matthew 12:12). This, too, may be said to have been a keynote of Christ's teaching. The possibility of redemption from sin and of becoming a child of God in ethical relationship led immediately and naturally to the great truth of the possibility of holiness and service. "Born again," and within the Kingdom of God (John 3:3; John 3:5), the redeemed soul can grow and expand, and deepen into untold capabilities of character, conduct, and usefulness. As no heart was too hard for His mercy, so no life was too poor for His grace. There was hope for the worst and encouragement for the feeblest through the infinite possibilities of Divine love and grace. These three great truths concerning God, forgiveness, and human life, expressing as they do the three ideas of Revelation, Redemption and Restoration, may be said to summarize and include all the important and essential elements of Christ's teaching. While He never taught systematically, there are certain "ruling ideas"[1] which may be regarded as the cardinal points of His message. He came to bring God to men and to bring men to God: this sums up all His teaching.

[1] D'Arcy, Ruling Ideas of Our Lord, Preface.

If the substance of Christ's teaching is noteworthy, so also are its characteristics. Not only the immediate hearers but readers of the Gospels in all ages have been attracted and impressed by the way in which the teaching was given. Other religions have had their ethical ideals of duty,

opportunity, and even of love, but nowhere have they approached those of Christ either in reality or in attractiveness or in power. Christ's message is remarkable for its universal adaptation. Its appeal is universal; it is adapted to all men from the adult down to the child; it makes its appeal to all times, and not merely to the age in which it was first given. And the reason of this is that it emphasizes a threefold ethical attitude towards God and man which makes a universal appeal as nothing else does or perhaps can do. Christ calls for repentance, trust and love. Repentance in relation to Sin; Trust in relation to God; and Love in relation to God and man. Nowhere else do we find this specific appeal. The universal obligation of Repentance, Trust and Love is the peculiar contribution of Christianity to the ethics of the world. The completeness of Christ's teaching is also to be observed. It touches life at every point, from the regulation of the thoughts and motives to the control of the will and conduct. Its moral ideal is love to God and man, and in this is a unity which binds in one all the elements of the spiritual life. Its emphasis on humility and its exclusion of fame and reputation, its refusal to pander to any personal interest, its insistence on the passive virtues, thereby practically adding an entirely new realm of morality—all show the completeness of Christ's ethic. Nor can we fail to see this also in the fact that since the days of Christ, in spite of all the progress of thought, not a single new ethical ideal has been given to the world. The inexhaustibleness of the teaching of Christ is constantly being realized. Generation after generation finds in it what is new, fresh and inspiring. Christ said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35), and every day brings fresh proof of the truth of this statement.

Never did the Speaker seem to stand more utterly alone than when He uttered this majestic utterance. Never did it seem more improbable that it should be fulfilled. But as we look across the centuries we see how it has been realized. His words have passed into laws, they have passed into doctrines, they have passed into proverbs, they have passed into consolations, but they have never "passed away." What human teacher ever dared to claim an eternity for his words?[1] [1] Maclear, St. Mark, The Cambridge Bible for Schools, p. 149. From this it follows naturally that Christ's teaching has a permanence all its own. It is not discarded and set aside as obsolete even by the greatest thinkers of the world. Christ's teaching is almost as remarkable for what it omits as for what it includes.

One of the strongest pieces of objective evidence in favour of Christianity is not sufficiently enforced by apologists. Indeed I am not aware that I have ever seen it mentioned. It is the absence from the biography of Christ of any doctrines which the subsequent growth of human knowledge—whether in natural science, ethics, political economy, or elsewhere—has had to discount. This negative argument is really almost as strong as is the positive one from what Christ did teach. For when we consider what a large number of sayings are recorded of—or at least attributed to—him, it becomes most remarkable that in literal truth there is no reason why any of His words should ever pass away in the sense of becoming obsolete... Contrast Jesus Christ in this respect with other thinkers of like antiquity. Even Plato, who, though some four hundred years before Christ in point of time, was greatly in advance of Him in respect of philosophic thought, is nowhere in this respect as compared with Christ. Read the Dialogues, and see how enormous is the contrast with the Gospels in respect of errors of all kinds, reaching even to absurdity in respect of reason, and to sayings shocking to the moral sense. Yet this is confessedly the highest level of human reason on the lines of spirituality when unaided by alleged revelation.[1] [1] G. J. Romanes,

Thoughts on Religion, p. 157. From all this it is not surprising, therefore, to observe the authoritativeness of Christ's teaching. Both in His "earthly ministry and ever since, men have realized that He speaks "with authority," and that His words are final. There is a sureness, an absence of doubt and hesitation about what He says; He does not recall, or modify, or safeguard, or add. Within the limits of His sphere there is no correction, and while whole continents of knowledge were outside His plan, there was no indication of error in what He actually said. While His knowledge was limited by the conditions and requirements of His earthly manifestation, it was infallible within those limitations. His words carried conviction even in the face of opposition. Although He was denied and rejected, yet He could not be gainsaid; it was so evident that He lived all He taught. That sinless consciousness is the fountain-head of our faith and our morals. We can no more get beyond Jesus than we can sail past the North Star. Whole chapters of Aristotle are out of date. Some sections of Paradise Lost now seem unworthy of the writer and unmeaning to the reader. But just as the sense of beauty culminated in Greece some twenty-three centuries ago, so that all our artists bend in admiration over a poor fragment of the Elgin marbles, so the revelation of ethical standards culminated in Palestine. The Parthenon, battered and crumbling, shows us a building beyond which architecture may not go. We may build something different—something more nearly perfect no man hopes to build. So character reached its supreme embodiment and standard in Jesus of Nazareth. We desire no new edition of the Sermon on the Mount, and no modification of the Golden Rule. We can easily surpass Jesus in the length of His life, or the quantity of His labour, or in the amount of His human knowledge. In quality and revealing power He is unsurpassable and final. Different men there may be and should be; but in the realm of character and religion a greater master and leader the world will never see.[1] [1] W. H. P. Faunce, The Educational Ideal in the Ministry, p. 38. Not least of all these characteristics is the verifiableness of Christ's teaching. He who "wills to do His will shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17). It is a thing which verifies itself in human lives because it possesses a dynamic, a special and unique power for making itself a force in the hearts of men. It introduces into morality an entirely new spirit, the filial spirit, the joyous response of a child to a Father. No longer merely under obligation to an impersonal law, the disciple of Christ realizes, is conscious of, and obedient to, the will of a loving Father. Love to Christ is the response of the soul, and

It is the only thing in the region of moral motives that can be described as an imperishable yet convertible force, whose changes of form never mean decrease of energy or loss of power.[1] [1] Fairbairn, Christ in Modern Theology, p. 380. No wonder, then, that the original hearers of Christ were impressed by the "charm" of His words, or that succeeding ages should have pondered His words and placed them high above all others as the supreme and final word in ethics.

Some years since Sir Edwin Arnold, the distinguished poet, and author of The Light of Asia, and Dr. William Ashmore of China, the heroic and renowned American missionary, met each other on a Pacific steamship. "I have been criticized," said Sir Edwin Arnold to Dr. Ashmore, "for an implied comparison between Buddhism and Christianity in regard to the doctrines derived from them and the principles contained in them respectively. No such object was in my mind. For me, Christianity, rightly viewed, is the crowned queen of religions, and immensely superior to every other; and though I am so great an admirer of much that is great in Hindu philosophy and religion, I would not give away one verse of the Sermon on the Mount for twenty epic poems like the Mahabharata, nor exchange the Golden Rule for twenty new Upanishads."[1]

[1] Hoyt, The Lord’s Teaching concerning His own Person, p. 42. See also a fine passage in A. C. Benson’s The House of Quiet, p 71. But it may be asked, it often is asked, wherein lay the originality, the uniqueness of Christ’s teaching? Wherein was He so really and essentially different from other teachers that He is removed entirely out of the same category? Now it may at once be said that the fact, the admitted fact, that Christian ethic is the highest the world has ever seen is in itself no proof of its divine origin. It may be only the highest and best experienced thus far in the evolution of human thought and endeavor. Nor should it be surprising if we find in Christ’s teaching much that is found elsewhere, for the simple reason that human nature and its ethical needs are practically the same under all circumstances, and it would have been impossible for Jesus to have avoided emphasizing those essential features of life and duty which are common to all. Originality, therefore, is not of supreme moment.

Lotze and Harnack regard as the great point in which Christianity is unique the value it assigns to each individual man in its assertion that every man is a child of God.[1] Other points emphasized by Harnack as characteristic of Christianity as of no other religion are the severance of the existing connection between ethics and external forms of religion; the insistence on the root of morality in the intention and disposition; the concentration on the one basis and motive—love, and the combination of religion and morality in the union of love and humility. Thus the problem of accounting for Christ as a Teacher is a very real one. How are we to explain the substance and characteristics of His teaching in view of all the circumstances of His life, race and environment?

[1] Lotze, Microcosmus, vol. ii, book 8, ch. 4, "The Religious Life." Harnack, What is Christianity, p. 63 ff., 68, 70 ff.

It is sometimes said, Everything that Jesus said had been said before Him by others. Let us grant that it is true, what then? Originality may or may not be a merit. If the truth has already been uttered, the merit lies in repeating it, and giving it new and fuller application. But there are other considerations to be borne in mind. We have no other teacher who so completely eliminated the trivial, the temporal, the false from his system, no one who selected just the eternal and the universal, and combined them in a teaching where all these great truths found their congenial home. These parallels from the teaching of others to that of Christ are brought together from this quarter and from that; how was it that none of these teachers furnishes us with any parallel to the teaching of Christ as a whole, while each of them gives us such truths as He expresses mingled with a mass of what is trivial and absurd? How was it that a carpenter, of no special training, ignorant of the culture and learning of the Greeks, born of a people whose great teachers were narrow, sour, intolerant, pedantic legalists, was the supreme religious Teacher the world has known, whose supremacy here makes Him the most important figure in the world’s history?[1] [1] Peake, Christianity: Its Nature and its Truth, p. 226 f. But the real newness of Christ as a Teacher is found in His Person rather than in what He said or in the way He said it. The unique contribution Christ makes to ethics is Himself. It is the way in which He associates His teaching with Himself that demands and commands attention. He connects the Kingdom of God with Himself as King. He links the Fatherhood of God with Himself as the unique Revealer (Matthew 11:27). He associates Forgiveness with His own prerogative and authority (Mark 2:10). He teaches the value of possibilities of human life in intimate connection with Himself as its Master here and its Judge hereafter. There is no word of His teaching which He does not in some way make to depend on Himself.

We can see this in the Gospels at every stage from the first to the last. His teaching is a revelation of Himself. His ministry was marked off in three great periods, in each of which He was occupied mainly and predominantly with one particular subject. Not that these are absolutely distinguished or that they do not overlap, but they are defined with sufficient clearness to allow of our observing the great theme of each period. His ministry commenced with the preaching of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:17). In this period Christ was essentially and pre-eminently the Prophet. The Sermon on the Mount, the Parables, and other teaching were all concentrated on the Kingdom. This part of the ministry culminated in the confession of St. Peter at Caesarea Philippi. At that time and thenceforward we observe a marked change (Matthew 16:21), and the main subject of His teaching was His approaching suffering and death. In a variety of ways this theme was uppermost until a few days before His death. It may be said to culminate in the incident associated with the desire of the Greeks to see Christ (John 12:21). These references to His atoning death naturally associate themselves with the idea of Jesus as a Priest and Sacrifice. Then from the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday we are at once conscious of yet another change, and He appears before the people and before His disciples in a new guise. The entry itself with its publicity was quite different from His former attitude of secrecy. His teaching began to refer to the future, and became largely eschatological. Parables of judgment and predictions of His own coming stood out prominently in the teaching of that week, and in all this Jesus Himself assumes the attitude of King and Judge. There is nothing more striking in the Gospels than this royal and judicial element in the events and teaching of the closing days of His earthly life. And thus His teaching all through the Gospels is summed up in His mission, and this is threefold. In the language of theology, He came to be Prophet, Priest and King. As Prophet He reveals God to man; as Priest He redeems man for God; as King He rules and judges mankind. Revelation, Redemption, Rule—these constitute His mission, and each point is found in His teaching. He interprets God to man, He brings man to God and God to man, and He exercises Divine authority in relation to man. For the spiritual life of man these three offices meet three human needs, spiritual, illumination and government. In the Old Testament these offices were never blended in one person; there were separate prophets, priests, and kings, but in Christ they met for the first time and blended, and in this completeness of Divine provision man’s life is satisfied and blessed. Hence it is not so much in the ideas of Christianity that its superiority is seen as in the dynamic for realizing them, a dynamic found in the relation of the soul to Christ and to those who are in like manner associated with Christ in a society of His followers.

Now it is this association, definite, intimate and essential, between Christ’s teaching and Himself that constitutes the real problem. He Himself is the real theme of His teaching. This is certainly a unique feature among the teachers of the world. A true teacher usually keeps himself in the background and makes his message prominent. But here Jesus Christ is Himself the Truth, and is at once the Subject of His teaching and the Medium through whom Truth is to be perceived and received. His words were so completely parts and utterances of Himself, that they had no meaning as abstract statements of truth uttered by Him as a Divine oracle or prophet. Take away Himself as the primary (though not the ultimate) subject of every statement and they all fall to pieces.[1] [1] Hort, The Way, the Truth, and the Life, p. 207. This is the absolutely unique contribution of Christ to ethics, Himself. There is scarcely a passage in the Gospels without the self-assertion of Jesus coming out in connection with His teaching. His message and His claims are really inextricable. We have already seen what this self-assertion means in general (ch. iii.), but one element may be

specially emphasized here in connection with His teaching. In His eschatological teaching Jesus refers to Himself as Judge of the world. Do we realize what this means and involves? A young Jewish carpenter claims to be the judge of all mankind! The place assigned in the last judgment to Himself in the words of Jesus is recognized by all interpreters to imply that the ultimate fate of men is to be determined by their relation to Him. He is the standard by which all shall be measured; and it is to Him as the Saviour that all who enter into eternal life will owe their felicity. But the description of Himself as Judge implies much more than this: it implies the consciousness of ability to estimate the deeds of men so exactly as to determine with unerring justice their everlasting state. How far beyond the reach of mere human nature such a claim is, it is easy to see.[1] [1] Stalker, The Christianity of Jesus, p. 241. This simple but all-significant fact of the connection between the Person and the teaching, which is patent to every reader of the Gospels, has been felt ever since the days of Christ. Just as the Jews opposed Him because He made Himself equal with God, because His teaching implied and involved immense claims for Himself, so men have never been able to rest long in His teaching alone; it has inevitably led them up to His personality and compelled them to face His claims. Besides, ideas alone never save and inspire lives; they must have a personality behind to give them reality, vitality and dynamic. A disciple is more than a scholar, and inspiration is more than instruction. Christ's words are of permanent value because of His Person; they endure because He endures. The egoism of all this has to be reckoned with much more seriously than is sometimes done by men who profess to accept Jesus as Teacher while denying him as Lord. The self-assertion of Christ is either a serious blot on His character or an integral part of a gracious and deliberate saving purpose of God.[1] [1] Johnston Ross, The Universality of Jesus, p. 122.

It is simply impossible to accept the teachings without acknowledging the claim of the Teacher. So inextricably are they bound up that men in sacrificing the one are not long before they let the other go also. It is an utterly illogical and impossible position for any one to accept the Sermon on the Mount without recognizing the full claims of Christ as Master and Judge which He made in that discourse.

It will in the long run, I believe, be found impossible to maintain supreme reverence for the character of Jesus, and to reject the truth of His ideas. The character is simply the ideas translated into temper and conduct. If the ideas are illusory, then the character is not in accordance with the nature of things, and in such a case it is not what we ought to imitate or admire. All such admiration is simply sentimentality; it is not ethical, and it stands in the way of human progress. But if we cannot face this, if we feel, in spite of ourselves, awe and veneration for the character of Jesus, we must, sooner or later, go on to faith in the ideas.[1] [1] Cairns, Christianity in the Modern World, p. 19.

Christianity in its final and ultimate analysis is the acceptance of the Person, not the teaching of Christ. He came not so much to teach as to redeem, and redemption involves His Person, His community of believing followers, His relation to and rule over their lives. As Dr. R. W. Dale used to say, Jesus Christ came not to preach the Gospel, but that there might be a Gospel to preach. And it is the Gospel which He Himself is rather than anything He ever taught that constitutes Christianity. What think ye of the teaching? is an interesting, valuable inquiry. But, What think ye of the Teacher? is far more important, and more vital and central to the issues involved in the problem before us.

000.05. Chapter 5. The Miracles of Christ

Chapter 5.

The Miracles of Christ For our present purpose of answering the question "What think ye of Christ?" it is necessary and important to observe the place given to our Lord’s miracles in the Gospels. A careful study of them, just as they appear, reveals the undoubted fact that they were not wrought by our Lord primarily for evidential purposes, for convincing those who were not as yet His disciples. At the outset of His ministry we are significantly told of the limited result of His first miracle. "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on him" (John 2:11). "His disciples"—that was all; no one else of the company seems to have been impressed. Soon afterwards, when He exercised His authority by cleansing the Temple of the money-changers, He was asked to justify His action by means of a miracle. "What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" Instead of working a miracle, He referred them to the then far-off event of His resurrection. "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." In the same way throughout His ministry He frequently enjoined silence on those on whom He had bestowed physical blessing, a silence which would have been unnecessary, out of place, and inexplicable if the primary idea of miracles had been to spread the knowledge of Himself over the land. Of course it was inevitable that such works should become known and have their effect in calling attention to Him, but this was a consequence rather than the primary purpose. The same secondary place of miracles is seen in our Lord’s words to His disciples on the eve of His passion. He puts first, belief in Himself apart from miracles. "Believe me that I am in the Father" (John 14:11). And then He introduces miracles only if the disciples could not otherwise rise to faith in Him. "Or else believe me for the very works’ sake" (John 14:11). In accordance with this, the summary statement of the purpose of the Fourth Gospel is significant. "Many other signs did Jesus in the presence of His disciples" (John 20:30). Another indication in the same direction are the words used to describe these wonderful works. The first in order of thought is wonder, which expresses the feelings of the witnesses in the presence of what had been done. The next is power, which indicates the result of their thought as it began to play on these deeds; some "power" was evidently at work. But the most important of all is sign, which clearly indicates the place of miracles in the Gospels. They were signs of something other and higher than themselves—they were symbolic of Christ’s Divine mission. But it should be observed that a "sign" is not necessarily a proof, and it is significant that the miracles are never called by any word meaning "proof." The word "proof" (Acts 1:3) is only found in connection with our Lord’s manifestation of Himself after His resurrection. In other words, the real proof was Himself rather than His works. A sign cannot compel belief, or enemies would surely have been convinced. It only carries a meaning, or sign, or significance to those who are already impressed. So Westcott rightly says that—

Miracles or signs are more properly in their highest form the substance than the proofs of revelation... The best idea which we can form of a miracle is that of an event or phenomenon which is fitted to suggest to us the action of a personal spiritual power... Its essence lies not so

much in what it is in itself as in what it is calculated to indicate.[1] [1] Westcott, The Gospel of Life, p. 76.

We may observe this true place of miracles still further as we contemplate the almost utter disregard of them on the part of those in whose presence they were wrought. They created interest and stirred curiosity, but apparently they seldom led to conviction unless there had been some other predisposing cause of faith in Christ. The powerlessness of miracles to convince the gainsayer is clearly seen in the words, "When Christ cometh will he do more miracles than this man doeth?" (John 7:31). "Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him" (John 12:37). Those who were not prepared to receive His message without miracles were not as a rule ready to accept miracles as an attestation of His Divine commission. The phenomenon, I say, which is apprehended as a miracle suggests the idea of the action of a personal spiritual power. But in itself it can do no more than suggest the idea of his action. It is wholly unable in any intelligible sense to prove the existence of such a power, and still less to prove that the power is Infinite.[1] [1] Westcott, op. cit., p. 76. In view of this clear indication of the place of miracles and purpose of miracles in the life of Christ, it is obvious that we cannot, and, indeed, for our purpose we have not need to emphasize them as evidence for His Person. Any such evidence that they carried was to contemporaries only, and this necessarily diminishes in force with lapse of time.

Few would now maintain that the miracles are to us proofs of the Divine mission of Jesus Christ. Their evidential force, supposing them to have been wrought, was immediate: they appealed to those who originally saw them. And the conviction aroused in the primary witnesses could not be communicated to later generations. Thus the problem presented by our Lord’s miracles is for us less theological and apologetic and far more historical and literary than it used to appear to our fathers.[1] [1] Bishop Chase, Cambridge Theological Essays, p. 402. See also Illingworth, Divine Immanence, pp. 88-90. For us today the Person of Christ is the great miracle, and the true line of thought is to argue from Christ to miracles rather than from miracles to Christ.

We are not then justified, either by reason or by Scripture, in assigning to miracles, and still less to the record of miracles, a supreme power of proof. But none the less they fulfil externally an important function in the Divine economy They are fitted to awaken, to arouse, to arrest the faith which is latent. They bring men who already believe in God into His presence. They place them in an attitude of reverent expectation.[1] [1] Westcott, The Gospel of Life, p. 82. But this is not for an instant to say that the miraculous element in the Gospels is not a fitting and even necessary part of the record of the life of Christ, on the contrary, the place of the miracles in the Gospels is exactly what we should have expected from whose Person was what His was.

Once Jesus was verily an incarnation of the Godhead, miraculous works in His life were only becoming and natural. This does not in the least exclude the application of the severest criticism to the historical accounts of the Christian miracles. But the unbroken course of nature, in the presence of a fact so stupendous as Incarnation, had been of all things unnatural and incredible.[1] [1] Young, The Christ of History, p. 255.

It is the most natural and obvious thing in the world that He who was what He was should do what the Gospels record of Him. And it is noteworthy that one of the words very frequently used of these miracles in the Gospels is the ordinary term, works (ëpya). They were the natural and necessary

outcome of His life, the expression in act of what He Himself was. The moral elevation and religious intensity of the Gospels should count for something. The indissoluble connection between the works and the words of Jesus, between these and His character and consciousness, must receive due regard. The narratives of miracles are woven into the very texture of the evangelical record. How many of the sayings of Jesus are closely linked with works of healing? How many of the most beautiful and attractive traits in the portrait of Jesus are drawn from His dealing with sufferers who came to Him for relief?[1] [1] Garvie, Studies in the Inner Life of Jesus, p. 51. That His own abundant vitality should have been somehow communicated to other persons is not surprising. That One who was so full of life and compassion should seek to help and bless the needy was surely to be expected. The miracles are harmonious with the character and consciousness of Jesus; they are not external confirmations, but internal constituents of the revelation of the Heavenly Father's love, mercy, and grace, given in Him, the beloved Son of God, and the compassionate Brother of men.[1] [1] Garvie, op. cit., p. 51. The miracles were not merely marvels; with two exceptions (which are not sufficient to set aside the general principles) they were restorative and beneficent. The motive and scope of the Lord's miracles recorded in the Gospels are ever the same. The notices of the miracles are scattered up and down over the Gospels. But when they are considered in relation to each other, we discover in them an undesigned unity. Together they cover the whole ground of our Lord's work as the Saviour, renewing each element in man's complex being and restoring peace in the physical order. They are not presented in the Gospels as primarily designed to enhance His dignity and His power. If they had been the invention of pious fancy, yearning to illustrate by imposing stories His greatness and His glory, it is a moral impossibility that this subtle unity of purpose should have been so consistently and so unobtrusively observed.[1] [1] Chase, Cambridge Theological Essays, p. 404.

We are therefore not now concerned with the abstract problem of the possibility of the miraculous; such a question would be entirely unnecessary for our present purpose. We are face to face with a supernatural Person, and the question whether He could or did do supernatural works is after all not of the first importance. The supreme question is as to the Person Himself, for "a sinless Christ is as great a miracle as a Christ who can walk on the water."[1] The question of miracles has often been too widely separated from the question of the miraculous Person. Modern thought in its belief in the uniformity of nature has undoubtedly modified our conception of the supernatural, and the "supernatural is not for us the same thing as the arbitrary or unnatural."[2] But the demand for absolute regularity of nature would really exclude Christ Himself as supernatural, and also make His appearance in time nothing more than the outcome of natural evolutionary processes. We therefore really gain nothing by simply insisting on absolute uniformity of nature as the great modern law, unless we are prepared to go further and deny the possibility of any Divine interposition which, while being not "arbitrary or unnatural" should nevertheless be truly supernatural.

[1] Bruce, Humiliation of Christ, p. 208, note I.

[2] Sanday, Expository Times, vol. xx, p. 158.

Every one will concede to Dr. Sanday "the uniformity of the ordinary course of nature." If it were otherwise, we should have no world in which we could live at all. The question is not, Do natural causes operate uniformly? but, Are natural causes the only causes that exist or operate? For

miracle, as has frequently been pointed out, is precisely the assertion of the interposition of a new cause; one, besides, which the theist must admit to be a vera causa.[1] [1] Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 51.

If, therefore, we are to allow the scientific doctrine of the uniformity and continuity of nature to bar the way, we shall inevitably come to the conclusion that miracles are impossible, and from this would follow, as it usually does follow, the conclusion that a miraculous Christ is impossible. The question is thus really decided on a priori grounds before the evidence is even looked at.

But, how, then, is the modern position to be met? How are we to retain our belief in the uniformity of nature and also in the miracles? In one way only: by predicating a true theistic view of the world. To the materialist miracle is, of course, impossible, but on the assumption that God is, and is at once transcendent and immanent, miracles are not impossible.

Those who accept the evangelical narratives of miracles do not assume any breach in the continuity of nature, any disregard of the universal laws of movement... Negatively, we define miracles as events which nature as known in our common experience cannot explain... Positively, we define miracles as events which, because of their character and purpose, we ascribe to the will of God, being ignorant whether that will acts directly or uses means of which we know nothing... May not that Divine will act generally according to fixed habit, and yet for special ends act in a way new and strange? In life physical forces are transcended; so vital processes in mind; the process of evolution allows at this stage or that a Divine initiative. Grant the moral significance and religious value of Jesus, is it incredible or unreasonable to hold that such a Divine initiative is connected with His Person?[1] [1] Garvie, Studies in the Inner Life of Christ, p. 52. The Person of Christ is therefore a great miracle, and the issue cannot be evaded. He represents a definite, Divine intervention on behalf of man at a particular moment of time in the world’s history, and on this great miracle of the Person of Christ we take our stand.

Jesus, in a word, was Deity manifested in humanity and under the conditions of time. Now this is in itself an extraordinary conception, and it is made more extraordinary by the marvelous way in which it is embodied in a personal history. There never was a loftier idea, or one better calculated to challenge prompt and complete contradiction, than the one expressed in our Gospels, models though they be of simplicity in narrative and language. Their common purpose is to describe the life and record the words of a person they conceive as miraculous... What is common to all four Evangelists, and what is in their mind essential, is the idea, not that the miraculous history proves the person to be supernatural, but that the history was miraculous because it articulated and manifested the supernatural person. The Gospels may indeed be described as the interpretation of this person in the terms of history; and so regarded, the Jesus of Mark is as miraculous as the Jesus of John.[1] [1] Fairbairn, The Philosophy of the Christian Religion, p. 326. When this is clearly seen the question of the number and character of the miracles becomes quite secondary. The inquiry resolves itself simply into this: granted such a supernatural Person, were supernatural deeds congruous with His life? The character of the works attributed to Him, their beneficence, the restraint under which they were worked, the comparatively insignificant place they occupied in His ministry, and the constant stress laid by Him on spiritual kinship as primary—these are all entirely congruous with the manifestation and working of so miraculous and superhuman a Person as Jesus is seen to be. Two things are perfectly clear to all careful readers of the Gospels. (1) The

writers do recognize a distinction between natural events and miracles, between occurrences which are ordinary and extraordinary. As Westcott says—

Whole structures of popular objections, for example, fall before a simple statement like that in which the Evangelist undesignedly contrasts the ministry of the Baptist with the ministry of Christ: "John indeed did no sign" (John 10:41).[1] [1] Westcott, The Gospel of Life, p. 83.

(2) The writers considered that there was an extraordinary element in our Lord's life. That there was conspicuously present in the Lord's life an element of activity transcending common experience is a conclusion which rests on amply sufficient evidence.[1] [1] Chase, Cambridge Theological Essays, p. 405. Nor must it be overlooked that this miraculous element is as clear and prominent in the earliest strata of the Gospels as it is in their present form.

000.06. Chapter 6. The Death of Christ

Chapter 6.

The Death of Christ

There are two well-known pictures, each with the same title, "The Shadow of the Cross." One by Holman Hunt represents the interior of a carpenter’s shop, with Joseph and the Boy Jesus at work. Mary also is present. The Boy Jesus pauses in His work, and as He stretches Himself the shadow of the Cross is formed on the wall. The other picture is a popular engraving which depicts the Infant Jesus running with outstretched arms to His mother, the shadow of the Cross being cast by His form as He runs. Both pictures are fanciful in form, but their underlying idea is assuredly true. If we read the Gospels just as they stand, it is clear that the death of Jesus Christ was really in view almost from the outset of His earthly appearance. At first sight there seems little in them about His death, but as we look deeper we see more. It was part of the Divine purpose and plan for Him from the first, and very early we have a hint of something like it in the words of the aged Simeon to the mother of our Lord: "A sword shall pierce through thine own heart also" (Luke 2:35). The impression that Jesus referred but little to His own death is due to a superficial reading of the Gospels. A closer acquaintance with them reveals the fact that at no period of His ministry was the thought of His death foreign to Him, and that during the last year of His life it was an ever-present and absorbing preoccupation.[1] [1] Stalker, The Christology of Jesus, p. 173.

If, therefore, we would thoroughly understand the true idea of the life of Jesus Christ as it is recorded in the Gospels, it is essential for us to give special attention to what is said concerning His death. And our consideration must include two important inquiries: what the death meant as He Himself interpreted it, and what it meant as those nearest to Him interpreted it. Both these aspects are found quite clearly in the Gospels, while the latter is, of course, very definitely seen in the Acts and Epistles. No one can even glance at the New Testament without realizing that for all its writers the death of Christ had a profound and far-reaching significance. The revelation of the death was necessarily vague and fragmentary at first, but as time went on the fact and its purpose stood out in ever-increasing clearness. At the outset of His ministry (in Judea) we find hints only, such as are implied in, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19); "The Son of Man must be lifted up" (John 3:14). The same reserve is seen in the early days of the Galilean ministry in such a word as "The Bridegroom shall be snatched away" (Mark 2:20, Greek). Another example of the same attitude is found in His reference to His death as a sign to His generation (Matthew 12:40). On any interpretation of the allusion to Jonah the significance of the sign is admitted.[1] Later on, as the Galilean ministry was reaching its climax, came the discourses at Capernaum, when Christ spoke of His "flesh" which He would "give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). These discourses provoked a crisis, and many of those who had professed allegiance left Him. From this point onwards retirement rather than publicity marked His ministry, and He gave Himself mainly to the work of training the Twelve. The dividing line between the general and specific teaching about His death is seen at Caesarea Philippi. That which before had been implicit

now becomes explicit. In the seclusion of that remote spot He asked His disciples what men were thinking of Him, and, in particular, what they themselves thought of Him. On eliciting from Peter the confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," Jesus Christ clearly felt that the time had come when He could entrust them with further and fuller teaching concerning Himself. And so we read significantly, "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matthew 16:21). The emphasis on "From that time forth" compared with the similar phrase which marked the beginning of Christ's ministry (Matthew 4:17) shows the importance of the new teaching. In this statement, together with two others uttered not long afterwards (Matthew 17:22; Matthew 20:18) Jesus Christ revealed certain circumstances of His death. It was to be contributed to by three causes—the Jewish authorities, His own disciples, and the Roman power. A careful study of these passages in the light of the previous silence about the death, so far as the first Gospel is concerned, clearly shows that in them we have what has been rightly called the culminating idea as to Himself and to His function.[2] [1] Contentio Veritatis, p. 202.

[2] See Fairbairn, The Philosophy of the Christian Religion, ch. v.

Later on the teaching becomes still more definite. The purpose for which He is to die is stated. "The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). "The Son of Man came... to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). On the eve of the crucifixion, other additions are made to the teaching about the purpose of His death. The corn of wheat must die if it is to bear fruit (John 12:24), and the greatest proof of love is the laying down of life (John 15:13). Then at the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ spoke of His blood as that of the New Covenant shed for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28).

Deeper and fuller still is the remarkable record of Gethsemane and Calvary. As we read of the agony in Gethsemane, we are impressed with the mystery of the sufferings of Christ, and as we ponder His cry on the Cross, we feel that we are in the presence of something other than ordinary sufferings, and that His death was indeed the "culminating idea" of His earthly ministry. Not least of all, we cannot help observing the prominence of the story of the last week of our Lord's earthly life in the record of the Gospels. Taking an ordinary Bible, it is surprising to observe the space devoted to the last week of the life and ministry of Christ, those days which were spent in full expectation of and preparation for His imminent death. For example, out of thirty pages devoted to the first Gospel, no less than ten are given to the record of the last week. In the second Gospel, out of nineteen pages seven are occupied with the story from Palm Sunday to Easter Day. In St. Luke's Gospel no less than one-fourth is taken up with the story of these days, and out of twenty-four pages in the fourth Gospel ten are actually concerned with the same period. This prominence given to the events of the last few days demands and calls for explanation. In view of the crowded three years of Christ's ministry, is it not striking that there should be such fragmentariness in the story of those years until we come to the last few days? Surely the conspicuous place given to the death in the Gospels must mean that the writers regarded it as of supreme significance. But there is something much more than this mere record of the Gospels concerning the death of Jesus Christ. When we review the entire situation we observe that two things stand out very prominently. The first is the utter inability of the disciples to understand this teaching about their Master's death. From the moment of the first disclosure, when Peter rebuked

Jesus and repelled the idea of death with abhorrence (Matthew 16:22), they not only showed themselves unable to grasp its meaning, but for some time they would not even contemplate it as a fact. It was unwelcome and repellent to them, and they evidently did their utmost to shut their eyes to it. Later on, when further reference had been made and fuller details had been given, they were still apparently unable to grasp the fact. To us, as we read the story now, this persistent dulness is astonishing, though, in view of what was to happen, we may well regard it as "providential," for

It became a security to the Church for the truth of the Resurrection. The theory that they believed because they expected that He would rise again is against all evidence.[1] [1] Plummer on St. Luke 18:34. The response of James and John to the inquiry whether they could be baptized with His baptism and drink of His cup, is another illustration of this inability to enter into that which was already filling His soul, while the strife of the disciples as to who should be the greatest—a strife repeated on the very eve of the Crucifixion—is perhaps the most striking feature of the situation. This inability to understand and appreciate the Master’s death, and the faithfulness with which this fact is recorded in the Gospels, constitute a very important feature of the problem of the death. The other thing which stands out with equal prominence is the attitude of our Lord to His own death. Jesus Christ was truly man, and it is evident that He was deeply affected by the death which He so often mentioned and anticipated. It is not fanciful to see in the topic of the conversation on the Mount of Transfiguration some Divine encouragement to the Manhood of Christ: "Who... spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). One of the most remarkable and mysterious passages is found in connection with an announcement of His death to His disciples. "And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed: and as they followed they were afraid" Mark 10:32). There was evidently something in His manner that impressed the disciples and gave rise to these feelings of awe and fear. Again, His reference to His "baptism" and His "cup" shows what was then in His mind as its over-mastering thought and purpose. "The prospect of suffering was a perpetual Gethsemane. In the last week these feelings found their full expression on three separate occasions. The request of the Greeks to see Him was the occasion and apparently the cause of profound emotion. "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour" (John 12:27). The Agony in Gethsemane is so sacred and mysterious that we shrink from discussing it, and yet we must observe that its record of sorrow, conflict and submission is a revelation of Christ’s consciousness which has a direct and important bearing on the meaning of the death. In a very real sense Calvary began in the Garden. And when we come to the last scene of all, the climax of the Cross, we are quite evidently in the atmosphere of something far exceeding, indeed quite different from ordinary sufferings and death. The cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" after all His wonderful life of fellowship, is the only time when the familiar term "Father" gave place to the more general one, "God." This must have had some deep meaning beyond anything ordinary and natural in connection with dying. And so, as we think of the record of the death by itself in view of its place and prominence; as we think, moreover, of the effect of the announcement on the disciples; and, above all, as we ponder the effect of the anticipation of it on our Lord, we find ourselves face to face with a problem which must be taken into consideration and solved if we are to arrive at any full and adequate explanation of the manifestation of Jesus Christ on earth.

What, then, does the death of Jesus Christ mean? Why did He die? We know that He was in the prime of life; we know, too, that He ended His days after a time of immense popularity and widespread influence. What is the meaning of this catastrophe, so mysterious, so striking, so unmistakably predominant in the record of the Gospels?

It was not the death of a suicide, for did He not say, "I lay down my life of myself"? The death was purely voluntary. We have to suffer: He need not have suffered. A word from Him might have saved His life. Nor was it an accidental death, for the obvious reason that it was foreseen, foretold, and prepared for in a variety of ways. Again, it was certainly not the death of a criminal, for no two witnesses could be found to agree together as to the charge against Him. Pilate declared that he found no fault in Him, and even Herod had not a word to say against Him. This, then, was no ordinary execution.

Some may say that the death of Jesus Christ was that of a martyr, and there is no doubt that as His death came at the hands of the Jews, and was a rejection of Him as their Messiah, there was in it an element of martyrdom for truth. But does this really explain the event? How are we to account for the unutterable sadness if Jesus Christ was a martyr? What, on this view, was the meaning of the mysterious agony in Gethsemane? When we recall the story of men like Stephen, Paul, and others who were martyred, and recall the triumphant joy and courage with which they met death, we are compelled to say either that Jesus Christ was inferior to them in the moment of death, or else that He was something more than a martyr.

Perhaps, however, we may think of His death as that of an example. This, no doubt, was part of the meaning, but it is obvious from the Gospels that it does not exhaust the idea. Death may come through a variety of circumstances, and some deaths are more painful than others. What, then, would be the value of the mere example of Jesus Christ in dying unless His death could in some way be an exact model for imitation for all who are called upon to die? Surely therefore, we must search again before we can understand the true meaning of His death. Nor must we overlook the serious problem raised by Jesus Christ’s death in connection with His personal character. The Jews charged Him with blasphemy because He made Himself the Son of God. If there was any misunderstanding in the meaning of this term, why did not Jesus correct it? It is clear that to the Jews this claim was tantamount to "making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18; John 10:33), and yet He suffered death for this without making any effort to show them their mistake. His character is therefore involved in the fact and meaning of His death. The one and only adequate explanation of the death of Jesus Christ in the prime of life when He might have continued to exercise a powerful and marvelous influence over all the land of Palestine is that it was a sacrifice. And this is the account given to us in the Gospels. It was the death of One who was consciously innocent, of One whose life-work had been completed, of One who had come into this world for the very purpose of dying, of One whose death was foreseen, foretold, provided for. It is thus exceptional and unique, and this is clearly the impression of those who wrote the Gospels and the impression of every one who reads those Gospels honestly, fairly, and as a whole. Its colour all through is the sacrificial colour, for Christ came not to be the mere Example, but also the Uplifter and the Redeemer of the world. We mark how as He drew near the close there were outbursts from a profound deep of sorrow. It was not that He had any secret remorse ravaging His heart. There had been no moment of madness in His holy years, no moment that He longed and prayed to pluck from out the past. There had been no moral tragedy, though He had His conflict with the enemy.

No, His grief was not for Himself; it was for us. It was a burden of sympathy. He had come to deal not with our sorrows only, not with our darkness only—He had come to save us from our sins, and all the forces of His nature were strained that He might deliver us. And the load of our guilt, the chastisement of our peace, was upon Him all His years. Towards the end His burden-bearing is made more manifest. The secrets of His heart are more fully disclosed, but all the story is of one piece.[1] [1] Robertson Nicoll, The Church's One Foundation, p. 46.

Taking the Gospels, therefore, as we have received them, we are compelled to give attention to the remarkable and unique feature of the death of Jesus Christ under circumstances which might easily have been prevented if only He had been willing to do what His enemies wished Him to do. No one can mistake the profound impression made by that death on all the immediate disciples of Christ and if we may be allowed for a moment to inquire how it impressed the early Church, and especially one of the greatest thinkers, the Apostle Paul, we find exactly the same effect. To that Apostle as to all the rest the death was the predominant fact and factor in the manifestation of Jesus Christ, and, as we know, St. Paul drew from it some of the deepest profoundest, and most practical lessons for Christian people. No consideration of our present subject, therefore, can possibly overlook the fact and meaning of Christ's death as recorded in the New Testament. This fact, too, is unique among the religions of the world. The Founder of the religion dies, and that, as a sacrifice for sin. Whence came this idea? How are we to account for it? In view of the prominence, not to say predominance, of this feature in the rest of the New Testament, can we doubt that the source of the idea was Christ Himself? And if so, we are brought once again face to face with the consciousness of Christ as the great problem for solution.

000.07. Chapter 7. The Resurrection of Christ

Chapter 7.

The Resurrection of Christ

There was one point on the battlefield of Waterloo which was taken and retaken three times during that memorable day. Both Napoleon and Wellington realized the strategical importance of the position and concentrated attention upon it. Its ultimate possession and retention by the British troops contributed largely to the final result. In the same way, there is one point in connection with Christianity which from the first has been felt to be vital and central—the Resurrection. As a consequence, the opponents of Christianity have always concentrated their attacks, and Christians have centered their defense upon it. Every one realizes that it is vital, fundamental and essential. With this uncertain, everything else is uncertain; with this safe, all is safe. It is therefore of the utmost importance for tour present inquiry that we should give attention to the subject of the Resurrection as it appears in the Gospels and as it is dealt with in the rest of the New Testament. There are several converging lines of evidence in support of the Resurrection, and not one of them can be overlooked. They include historical and moral proofs and each must have its place and weight. The issues at stake are so serious that nothing must be omitted. Christianity is either based on the fact of Christ or else it has no logical standing ground. What, then, are the lines of proof on which Christians base their belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ?

1. The first proof is the life and character of Jesus Christ Himself. It is always a keen disappointment when a life which commenced well finishes badly. We have this feeling even in fiction, an instinct which demands that a story should end well. Much more is this true of the life of Jesus Christ. A perfect life characterized by Divine claims ends in its prime and a cruel and shameful death. Is that an appropriate and fitting close? Are we satisfied? Surely there must be something else, for death could not end everything after such a noble career. The Gospels give us the resurrection as the answer to these questions, and as the natural, inevitable issue of such a life. The Evangelists record the resurrection as the completion of the picture they draw of their Master. There is no real doubt that Christ anticipated and spoke of His own resurrection. At first He used only vague terms, such as, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." But later on in His ministry He spoke quite plainly, and whenever he mentioned His death He added, "The Son of Man... must be raised the third day." These references to His resurrection are too numerous to be overlooked, and, in spite of all difficulties of detail, they are on any proper treatment of the Gospels an integral part of the claim made for Himself by Jesus Christ.[1] His veracity is therefore at stake if He did not rise. Surely the word of such an One as Jesus Christ must be given due credence. We are therefore compelled to face the fact that the resurrection of which the Gospels speak is the resurrection of no ordinary man but of Jesus— that is of one whose life and character had been unique, and for whose shameful death no proper explanation was possible or conceivable.

[1] Matthew 12:38-40, Matthew 16:21, Matthew 17:23, Matthew 20:19, Matthew 27:63; Mark 8:31, Mark 9:31, Mark 10:34, Mark 14:58; Luke 9:22, Luke 18:33; John 2:19-21.

It is the resurrection of Jesus. If the witnesses had asserted about Herod, or about any ordinary person, what they did about Jesus, the presumption would have been all against them. The moral incongruity would have discredited their testimony from the first. But the resurrection was that of one in whom His friends had recognized while He lived, a power and goodness beyond the common measure of humanity, and they were sensible when it took place that it was in keeping with all they had known, hoped, and believed of Him.[1] [1] Denney, Jesus and the Gospel, p 122 f.

Consider, then, the resurrection in the light of what we have already advanced about the character of Christ. Is it possible that, in view of that perfect truthfulness of word and deed, there should be such a climax as is involved in a denial of His assurance that He would rise again?

If, then, it be admitted that the existence of the Gospel portrait of Christ is sufficient proof that it was drawn from life, and that He who is there portrayed laid claim to no knowledge affecting the outcome of His work which He did not possess, it must also be admitted that if He definitely stated that He would rise again from the dead, we have a strong a priori ground for believing that He did so rise.[1] [1] C H. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection, p. 30.

Consider, too, the death of Christ in the light of His perfect life. If that death was the close of a life so beautiful, so remarkable, so Godlike, we are faced with an insoluble mystery—the absolute and permanent triumph of wrong over right, and the impossibility of believing in truth or justice in the world.

It does not seem unreasonable to expect that God should vindicate in some striking and exceptional manner One who had trusted in Him completely, and who could truthfully say of Himself, "I do always those things that please Him."[1] [1] C. H. Robinson, op. cit., p. 36. So the resurrection is not to be regarded as an isolated event, a fact in the history of Christ separated from all else. It must be taken in close connection with what precedes in the life of Him for whom resurrection is claimed. The true solution of the problem is to be found in that estimate of Christ which "most entirely fits in with the totality of the facts."[1] [1] Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 14

2. Another line of proof is the fact of the empty grave and the disappearance of the body. That Jesus died and was buried, and that on the third morning the tomb was empty, cannot be seriously challenged. There have been those who have suggested the theory of a swoon and a recovery in the tomb, but to this, as Dr. Orr says, Strauss "practically gives its death-blow"[1] in words that may be usefully quoted again.

[1] Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 43.

It is impossible that a being who had stolen half dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening, and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to His sufferings, could have given to His disciples the impression that He was a conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life—an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry.[1] [1] Quoted in C. H. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection of Christ, p. 42. At His burial a stone was rolled before the tomb, the tomb was sealed, and a guard

was placed before it. Yet on the third morning the body had disappeared. There seems to be only two alternatives. His body must have been taken out of the grave by human hands or else by superhuman power. If the hands were human, they must have been those of His friends or of His foes. If His friends had wished to take out His body, the question at once arises whether they could have done so in the face of the stone, the seal and the guard. If His foes had contemplated this action, the question arises whether they would have seriously considered the matter. Why should they do the very thing that would be most likely to spread the report of His resurrection? As Chrysostom said, "If the body had been stolen they could not have stolen it naked, because of the delay in stripping it of the burial cloths and the trouble caused by the drugs adhering to it."[1] There is therefore no other possibility but that the body was taken out of the tomb by superhuman power. How, too, is it possible to account for the failure of the Jews to disprove the Resurrection? We know that not more than seven weeks afterward Peter preached in that very city the fact that Jesus had been raised. What would have been easier or more conclusive than for the Jews to have produced the dead body and silenced Peter forever? As it has been truly said, "The silence of the Jews is as significant as the speech of the Christians."[2] [1] Quoted in Day, Evidence for the Resurrection, p. 35.

[2] Fairbairn, Studies in the Life of Christ, p. 357. The fact of the empty tomb and the disappearance of the Body still remains a problem to be faced. By some writers the idea of resurrection is interpreted to mean the revival of Christ’s spiritual influence on the disciples, which had been brought to a close by His death. It is thought that the essential idea and value of Christ’s resurrection can be conserved, even while the belief in His bodily rising from the grave is surrendered.[1] But the various forms of the vision theory are now being gradually but surely regarded as inadequate and impossible. They are seen to involve the change of almost every fact in the Gospel history, and the invention of new scenes and conditions of which the Gospels know nothing.[2] From the physical standpoint, it has never been satisfactorily shown why the disciples should have had this abundant experience of visions, nor why they should have had it so soon after the death of Christ and within a strictly limited period, and why it suddenly ceased. And so in the present day the old theory of vision is virtually set aside, and for it is substituted the theory of a real spiritual manifestation of the risen Christ. The question at once arises whether this is not prompted by an unconscious but true desire to get rid of anything like a physical resurrection. Even though we may be ready to admit the reality of telepathic communication, it is impossible to argue that this is equivalent to the idea of resurrection. "The survival of the soul is not resurrection."[3] As some one once observed, "Whoever heard of a spirit being buried?"

[1] Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 23.

[2] Orr, op. cit., p. 222.

[3] Orr, op. cit., p. 229. In view of the records of the Gospels and the testimony of the New Testament generally, it is impossible to be "agnostic" as to what happened at the grave of Jesus, even though we are quite sure that He who died now lives and reigns. We are sometimes told that faith is not bound up with holding a particular view of the relations of Christ’s present glory and the body that was once in Joseph’s tomb, that faith is to be exercised in the exalted Lord, and that belief in a resuscitation of the human body is no vital part of it. It is no doubt true that our faith today is to be exercised solely in the exalted and glorified Lord, but surely faith must ultimately rest

on fact, and it is difficult to understand how Christian faith can be really "agnostic" with regard to the facts about the empty tomb and the risen body, which are so prominent in the New Testament, and which form an essential part of the apostolic witness. The attempt to set faith and historical evidence in opposition to each other, which is so marked a characteristic of much modern thought, will never satisfy general Christian intelligence, and if there is to be any real belief in the historical character of the New Testament, it is impossible to be "agnostic" about facts that are writ so large on the face of the records. And so we come again to that insuperable barrier, the empty tomb, which, together with the apostolic witness, stands impregnable against all the attacks of visional and apparitional theories. It is becoming more evident that these theories are entirely inadequate to account for the records in the Gospels, as well as for the place and power of those Gospels in the early Church and in all subsequent ages. The force of the evidence for the empty grave and the disappearance of the Body is clearly seen by the explanations suggested by various modern writers.[1] It will suffice to say that not one of them is tenable without doing serious violence to the Gospel story, and also without putting forth new theories which are not only improbable in themselves, but are without a shred of real historical or literary evidence. The one outstanding fact which baffles all these writers is the empty grave.

[1] Those of Oscar Holtzmann, K. Lake, and A. Meyer can be seen in Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, ch. viii, and that of Reville in C. H. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection of Christ p. 69.

Others suggest that resurrection means a real objective appearance of the risen Christ without implying any physical re-animation, that "the resurrection of Christ was an objective reality, but was not a physical resuscitation."[1] But the difficulty here is as to the meaning of the term "resurrection." If it means a return from the dead, a rising again (re-), must there not have been some identity between that which was put in the tomb and the "objective reality" which appeared to the disciples? No difficulty of conceiving of the resurrection of mankind hereafter must be allowed to set aside the plain facts of the record about Christ. It is, of course, quite clear that the resurrection Body of Jesus was not exactly the same as when it was put in the tomb, but it is equally clear that there was definite identity as well as definite dissimilarity, and both elements must be faced and accounted for. How the resurrection Body was sustained is a problem quite outside our ken, though the reference to "flesh and bones," compared with St. Paul’s words about "flesh and blood" not being able to enter the Kingdom of God, may suggest that while the resurrection Body was not constituted upon a natural basis through blood, yet that it possessed "all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature."[2] We may not be able to solve the problem, but we must hold fast to all the facts, and these may be summed up by saying that the Body was the same though different, different though the same. So the true description of the resurrection seems to be that "it was an objective reality, but not [merely] a physical resuscitation."

[1] C. H. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection of Christ, p. 12.

[2] Article IV.

We are therefore brought back to a careful consideration of the facts recorded in the Gospels as to the empty tomb and the disappearance of the Body, and we only ask for an explanation which will take into consideration all the facts recorded, and will do no violence to any part of the evidence. To predicate a new resurrection Body in which Christ appeared to His disciples does not explain how in three days’ time the Body which had been placed in the tomb was disposed of. Does not

this theory demand a new miracle of its own?

There is much that must remain a mystery. We do not know how Christ was raised, nor with what manner of body He came. We cannot explain how that Body, which, as far as we know, had been subject in all respects to the laws to which all other bodies are subject, was so changed as to be able to pass out of time and space into infinity; but we do not know the origin and the essential nature even of that which is visible and tangible. And though we, who through the preaching of Christ's resurrection have reached a higher conception of eternal life than existed in the pre-Christian world, may be disposed to think that the resurrection of Christ would have been complete, even if His dead Body had turned to dust in the tomb where it was laid, it is difficult to see how in the first century the fact of Christ's perfect life after His death could have been made known to men apart from the resurrection of His body. Those who first appealed to the world to believe in the resurrection of Christ did so on the ground that they themselves had seen Him.[1] [1] Kennett, Interpreter, vol. v., p. 271

3. The next line of proof to be considered is the transformation of the disciples caused by the resurrection. They had seen their Master die, and through that death they lost all hope. Yet hope returned three days after. On the day of the crucifixion they were filled with sadness; on the first day of the week with gladness. At the crucifixion they were hopeless; on the first day of the week their hearts glowed with certainty and hope. When the message of the resurrection first came they were incredulous and hard to be convinced, but when once they became assured they never doubted again. What could account for the astonishing change in these men in so short a time? The mere removal of the Body from the grave could never have transformed their spirits and characters. Three days are not enough for a legend to spring up which would so affect them. Time is needed for a process of legendary growth. There is nothing more striking in the whole history of primitive Christianity than this marvelous change wrought in the disciples by a belief in the resurrection of their Master. It is a psychological fact that demands a full explanation.

4. From this fact of the transformation of personal life in so incredibly short a space of time, we proceed naturally to the next line of proof, the existence of the primitive Church.

There is no doubt that the Church of the Apostles believed in the Resurrection of their Lord.[1] [1] Burkitt, The Gospel History and its Transmission, p. 74.

It is therefore true, and is now admitted on all hands, that the Church of Christ came into existence as the result of a belief in the resurrection of Christ. Leaving for further and fuller consideration the general question of the Church's existence and progress, we are now concerned only with its commencement as recorded in the early chapters of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, and there we see two simple and incontrovertible facts: (1) The Christian society was gathered together by preaching; (2) The substance of the preaching was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Apostolic Church is thus a result of a belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. These early chapters of Acts bear the marks of primitive documents, and their evidence is unmistakable. It is impossible to allege that the primitive Church did not know its own history, that myths and legends quickly grew up and were eagerly received, and that the writers of the Gospels had no conscience for principle, but manipulated their material at will. For as Dr. Orr points out,[1] any modern Church could easily give an account of its history for the past fifty years or more, and it is simply absurd to think that the earliest Churches had no such capability. In reality there was nothing vague or

intangible about the testimony borne by the Apostles and other members of the Church. Archbishop Alexander has well said, "As the Church is too holy for a foundation of rottenness, so she is too real for a foundation of mist."[2] [1] Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 144.

[2] Alexander, The Great Question, p. 10.

5. One man in the Apostolic Church must, however, be singled out as a special witness for the resurrection. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is our next line of proof. Leaving for fuller examination the testimony of his whole life, we call attention to the evidence of his writings to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some years ago an interesting article appeared in the Expositor[1] inquiring as to the conception of Christ which would be suggested to a heathen inquirer by a perusal of Paul's earliest extant writing (I Thessalonians). One point at least would stand out clearly—that Jesus Christ was killed (1 Thessalonians 2:15, 1 Thessalonians 4:14), and was raised from the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:14). As this Epistle is usually dated about a.d. 51—that is, only about twenty-two years after the resurrection—and as the same Epistle plainly attributes to Jesus Christ the functions of God in relation to men (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 2:14, 1 Thessalonians 3:11), we can readily see the force of this testimony to the resurrection. Then a few years later, in an Epistle which is universally accepted as one of St. Paul's, we have a very much fuller reference to the resurrection. In the well-known chapter where he is concerned to prove (not Christ's resurrection, but) the resurrection of Christians, he naturally adduces Christ's resurrection as his greatest proof, and so gives a list of the various appearances of Christ after His resurrection, ending with one to himself, which he puts on an exact level with the others. "Last of all he was seen of me also." Now, quite apart from any consideration of the arguments based on the resurrection, we must give special attention to the nature and particularity of this testimony. "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." This, as it has been often pointed out, is our earliest authority for the appearances of Christ after the resurrection, and dates from within thirty years of the event itself. But there is much more than this. As Professor Kennett says—

[1] E. Medley, Fifth Series, vol. iv., p. 359.

Important as this consideration is, it is of even greater importance to notice that St. Paul expressly claims that the account of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which he states with the precision of a formal creed, is not something which has only recently taken shape, when men's memories have begun to fail, but something which he himself learned in substantially the same form when he first became a Christian. In other words, he affirms that within five years of the crucifixion of Jesus he was taught that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."[1] [1] Interpreter, vol. v., p. 267 And if we seek to appreciate the full bearing of this act and testimony we have a right to draw the same conclusion as Professor Kennett and

Maintain that within a very few years of the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus was, in the mind of at least one man of education, absolutely irrefutable.[1] [1] Interpreter, vol. v., p. 267

Besides, we find this narrative of St. Paul includes one small but significant statement which at once recalls a very definite feature of the Gospel tradition—the mention of "the third day." A reference to the passages in the Gospels where Jesus Christ spoke of His resurrection will show how prominent and persistent was this note of time. Why, then, should Paul have introduced it in his statement? Was it part of the teaching which he had "received"? What is the significance of this plain emphasis on the date of the resurrection? Is it not this that it bears absolute testimony to the empty tomb? Professor Kennett well sums up the argument on this point, and with it the testimony of St. Paul—

It may be claimed, then, for the story of the empty tomb, that St. Paul heard it, and, what is more, believed it, in Jerusalem at a date when the recollection of the tomb was fresh in people's minds; when it would have been possible for him to examine it and see for himself whether it was empty or not, and, if it were empty, to make full inquiries when and by whom it was discovered that it no longer contained the body of Jesus; at a date, moreover, when the hostility to the new doctrine must have exposed its adherents to the fiercest cross-questioning as to the reasons for their belief, especially when, as in the case of St. Paul, they had been identified with the anti-Christian party. Saul of Tarsus, the promising pupil of Gamaliel, who seemed the coming man of Judaism, threw away all his prospects for the belief in Christ's resurrection, turned his friends into foes, and exchanged a life of honourable ease for a life of toil and shame—surely common sense requires us to believe that that for which he so suffered was in his eyes established beyond the possibility of doubt.[1] [1] Interpreter, vol. v., p. 271. In view, therefore, of St. Paul's personal testimony to his own conversion his interviews with those who had seen Jesus Christ on earth before and after His resurrection, and not least the prominence given to the resurrection in the Apostle's own teaching, we may fairly challenge afresh the attention of today to the evidence of St. Paul for the resurrection. It is a well-known story how that Lord Lyttelton and his friend Gilbert West left the University at the close of one academic year each determining to give attention respectively during the long vacation to the conversion of St. Paul and the resurrection of Christ, in order to prove the baselessness of both. They met again in the autumn and compared experiences. Lord Lyttelton had become convinced of the truth of St. Paul's conversion, and Gilbert West of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If, therefore, Paul's twenty-five years of suffering and service for Christ was a reality, his conversion was true, for everything he did began with that sudden change. And if his conversion was true, Jesus Christ rose from the dead, for everything Paul was and did he attributed to the sight of the risen Christ. 6. The next line of proof of the resurrection is the record in the Gospels of the appearances of the risen Christ, and it is the last in order to be considered. By some writers it is put first, but this is in forgetfulness of the dates when the Gospels were written. It is obvious on a moment's thought that the resurrection was believed in by the Christian Church for a number of years before our Gospels were written, and that it is therefore impossible for the record of the Gospels to be our primary and most important evidence. We must get behind the Gospels if we are to appreciate to the full the force and variety of the evidence for the resurrection. It is for this reason that, following the proper logical order, we have reserved to the last our consideration of the appearances of the risen Christ as given in the Gospels. The point is one of great importance. So far as the fact of the resurrection of Jesus is concerned, the narratives of the Evangelists are quite the least important part of the evidence with which we have to deal. It is no exaggeration to say that if we do not accept the resurrection on grounds which lie outside this area, we shall not accept it on the grounds presented here. The real historical evidence for the

resurrection is the fact that it was believed, preached, propagated, and produced its fruit and effect in the new phenomenon of the Christian Church, long before any of our Gospels was written. This is not said to disparage the Gospels, or to depreciate what they tell, but only to put the question on its true basis. Faith in the resurrection was not only prevalent, but immensely powerful before any of our New Testament books were written.[1] [1] Denney, Jesus and the Gospel, p. 111.

Now, with this made clear, we proceed to consider the evidence afforded by the records of the post-resurrection appearances of Christ. Modern criticism of the Gospels during recent years has tended to adopt the view that Mark is the earliest, and Matthew and Luke are dependent on it. This view is said to be "the one solid result"[1] of the literary criticism of the Gospels. If this is so, the question of the records of the resurrection becomes involved in the difficult problem about the supposed lost ending of St. Mark, which, according to modern criticism, would thus close without any record of an appearance of the risen Christ. On is, however, two things may be said at the present juncture. (1) There are some indications that the entire question of the criticism of the Gospels is to be re-opened.[2] (2) Even if the current theory be accepted, it would not seriously weaken the intrinsic force of the evidence for the resurrection, because, after all, Mark does not invent or "doctor" his material, but embodies the common apostolic tradition of his time.[3] We may therefore meanwhile examine the record of the appearances without finding them essentially affected by any particular theory of the origin and relations of the Gospels.

[1] W. C. Allen, "St. Matthew," International Critical Commentary, Preface, p. vii.; Burkitt, The Gospel History, p. 37.

[2] Ramsay, St. Luke the Physician, ch ii. See also Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 63 ff.

[3] Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 62.

There are two sets of appearances, one in Jerusalem and the other in Galilee, and their number and the amplitude and weight of their testimony should be carefully estimated. While we are precluded by our space from examining each appearance minutely, and indeed it is unnecessary for our purpose to do so, it is impossible to avoid calling attention to two of them. No one can read the story of the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:1-53), or of the visit of Peter and John to the tomb (John 20:1-31), without observing the clear and striking marks of reality and personal testimony in the accounts.[1] The Bishop of Durham calls attention to these in discussing the former incident.

[1] Latham, The Risen Master, ch. i.

It carries with it, as great literary critics have pointed out, the deepest inward evidences of its own literal truthfulness. For it so narrates the intercourse of "a risen God" with commonplace men as to set natural and supernatural side by side in perfect harmony. And to do this has always been the difficulty, the despair of imagination. The alternative has been put reasonably thus: St. Luke was either a greater poet, a more creative genius, than Shakespeare, or—he did not create the record. He had an advantage over Shakespeare. The ghost in Hamlet was an effort of laborious imagination. The risen Christ on the road was a fact supreme, and the Evangelists did but tell it as it was.[1] [1] Moule, Meditations for the Church’s Year, p. 108.

Other writers whose attitude to the Gospel records is very different from that of the Bishop of Durham bear the same testimony to the impression of truth and reality made upon them by the

Emmaus narrative.[1] [1] A. Meyer and K. Lake. Quoted in Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 176 f.

It is well known that there are difficulties connected with the number and order of these appearances, but they are probably due largely to the summary character of the story, and are not sufficient to invalidate the uniform testimony to two facts: (1) the empty grave, (2) the appearances of Christ on the third day. These are the main facts of the combined witness.[1] The very difficulties which have been observed in the Gospels for nearly nineteen centuries are a testimony to a conviction of the truth of the narratives on the part of the whole Christian Church. The Church has not been afraid to leave these records as they are because of the facts that they embody and express. If there had been no difficulties men might have said that everything had been artificially arranged, whereas the differences bear testimony to the reality of the event recorded. The very fact that we possess these two sets of appearances—one in Jerusalem and one in Galilee—is really an argument in favor of their credibility, for if it had been recorded that Christ had appeared in Galilee only or Jerusalem only, it is not unlikely that the account might have been rejected for lack of support. It is well known that records of eye-witnesses often vary in details while there is no question as to the events themselves. The various books recording the story of the Indian Mutiny, or the surrender of Napoleon at Sedan, are cases in point, and Sir William Ramsay has shown the entire compatibility of certainty as to the main fact with great uncertainty as to precise details.[2] We believe therefore, that a careful examination of these appearances will afford evidence of a chain of circumstances extending from the empty grave to the day of the ascension. When we examine carefully all these converging lines of evidence and endeavor to give weight to all the facts of the case, it seems impossible to escape from the problem of a physical miracle. That the primâ facie view of the evidence afforded by the New Testament suggests a miracle, and that the Apostles really believed in a true physical resurrection, are surely beyond all question. And yet very much of present-day thought refuses to accept the miraculous. The scientific doctrine of the uniformity and continuity of nature bars the way, so that from the outset it is concluded that miracles are impossible. We are either not allowed to believe,[3] or else we are told that we are not required to believe,[4] in the re-animation of a dead body. If we take this view, there is no need, really, for investigation of evidence; the question is decided before the evidence is looked at.[5] [1] Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 212.

[2] Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveler, p. 29.

[3] See Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 44.

[4] C. H. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection of Christ, ch. ii.

[5] Orr, op. cit., p. 46.

We venture to question and even to challenge the tenableness of this position. It proves too much. If we are not allowed to believe in any Divine intervention which we may call supernatural or miraculous, it is difficult to see how we are to account for the Person of Christ at all. "A Sinless Personality would be a miracle in time." If it be said that no amount of evidence can establish a fact which is miraculous, we have still to account for the moral miracles which are really involved in and associated with the resurrection, especially the deception of the disciples, who could have found out the truth of the case; a deception, too, that has proved so great a blessing to the world.

And if we are not to believe in the possibility of physical resuscitation, then obviously the miracles recorded as wrought by Christ on Jairus' daughter, the young man of Nain, and Lazarus at once go by the board. Surely to those who hold a true theistic view of the world this a priori view is impossible Are we to refuse to allow to God at least as much liberty as we possess ourselves? Is it really thinkable that God has less spontaneity of action than ourselves? We may like or dislike, give or withhold, will or not will, but the course of nature must flow on unbrokenly. Surely God cannot be conceived of as having given such a constitution to the universe as limits in the least His power to intervene if necessary and for sufficient purpose with the work of His own hands Not only are all things of Him, but all things are through Him and to Him. The resurrection means the presence of miracle, and "there is no evading the issue with which this confronts us."[1] [1] Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, p. 53. And so we come back to a consideration of the various lines of proof. Taking them singly, they must be admitted to be strong, but taking them altogether, the argument is cumulative and sufficient, if it is not overwhelming. Thomas Arnold of Rugby, no mean judge of historical evidence, said that the resurrection was the best attested fact in human history. Christianity welcomes all possible sifting, testing, and use by those who honestly desire to arrive at the truth, and if they will give proper attention to all the facts and factors involved, we believe they will come to the conclusion expressed years ago by the Archbishop of Armagh, that the resurrection is the rock from which all the hammers of criticism have never chipped a single fragment.[2] [2] The Great Question, p. 24.

000.08. Chapter 8. The Gospels of Christ

Chapter 8.

The Gospels of Christ

We have now endeavored to consider the picture of Jesus Christ as it is presented to us in the Gospels—His character, claim, teaching, death and resurrection. It is necessary, however, at this stage to consider one feature which is apt to be overlooked. Indeed its very familiarity tends to make us forget its force and importance. It is this: taking the Gospels as they stand how are we to account for the delineation of Jesus Christ as there given? What is the relation between the character of Christ and the record in which it is found? The alternatives are only two: either the character is real, or else it was created by the writers. The value of this argument is such that it can be thoroughly examined and tested by even the most untrained mind, and it requires no technical scholarship and no presupposition of the Divine authority or inspiration of the Gospels. This is therefore a point of real importance because of its simplicity and directness, and the universality of its application.

It is the character of Jesus Christ which furnishes the most powerful argument for the historical character of the records in which it is portrayed. The examination of historical records is the work of trained experts, and at the end of the examination nothing more than a high degree of probability can be attained. The examination of the consistency of a certain character, however, is a much simpler matter, and yields an absolute certainty. The character of Jesus Christ stands or falls according as the drawing of it in the Gospel narratives is consistent or inconsistent. Its absolute consistency guarantees its reality.[1] [1] B. Lucas, The Faith of a Christian, p. 46.

Let us then state the argument again: either the character of Jesus Christ is real or else it was created by the writers. The character, as we observe it in the Gospels, bears every mark of reality, every indication of living personality.

It is almost a law of literature that any portraits of the ideal in the least degree satisfactory are closely transcribed from life, as was, for example, Dinah Morris in Adam Bede. This confirms what has been said. The wonderfulness, the originality of the character described in the Gospels, the minuteness, the freshness, the realization, the detail of the whole portrait, prove that it is drawn from life.[1] [1] Robertson Nicoll, The Church’s One Foundation, p 43.

Now we know who and what were the writers; they were ordinary men without any pretence to literary ability, still less to literary genius. And yet they have managed to depict for us a unique Figure which has been the greatest attraction of the ages. How are we to account for this even on purely literary grounds? Can we imagine such men inventing such a character? Is not the conception beyond anything merely human? As Dr. Fairbairn has well said— Were the Gospels inventions, whether mythical or conscious, spontaneous or purposed, they would be the most marvelous creations of literary art which we possess.[3] [1] Fairbairn, The Philosophy of the Christian Religion, p. 303. Have we anything in literature at all like it? If we take the finest

characters of history or the noblest ideal in fiction, we at once see the contrast. In all the world's great masterpieces we cannot find a single instance of a perfect human character. We think of Hamlet as perhaps the most perfect delineation of human character in Shakespeare's works, but no one would dream of saying that he was anything like a perfect human being. To paint the ideal is much, even for genius, but to picture the sinless is very much more. And yet in these Gospels, written by men possessing no literary genius, we have a perfect Human Being depicted.

They succeeded in giving us the Figure of the Sinless. The pencil does not swerve; and yet how inevitable it was that it should swerve had another Hand not held it! One false note would have destroyed all, but that false note never comes.[1] [1] Robertson Nicoll, The Church's One Foundation, p. 47.

And, what is in its way more remarkable than anything else, the sum total of the impression made by this sinless and perfect Being is one of absolute naturalness, with the entire absence of anything incongruous, unbalanced, or unfitting. The remarkable thing is not simply that these attributes and acts are represented as His, but that they are conceived as quite natural to Him, as not making Him anomalous or abnormal, but as leaving Him simple and rational and real—a person who never ceases to be Himself, who has no double consciousness and plays no double part, but expresses Himself in history according to the nature He has and the truth within Him. There is nothing quite like this in literature, no miraculous person who is so truly natural, so continuously one and the same; and no writers of the miraculous who so feel that they are dealing with what is normal and regular through and through. These are things which have more than a psychological interest; they speak of men who have stood face to face with the reality, and are conscious of only describing what they saw.[1] [1] Fairbairn, The Philosophy of the Christian Religion, p. 330.

How is all this to be explained? Did the Person create the record, or did the record create the Person? If the writers of the Gospels can be conceived of as inventing the character of Jesus Christ, it is hardly too much to say that we should be face to face with at least as great a miracle as anything we now possess in connection with Christianity. This has been admitted by several leading opponents of Christianity. Thus, Theodore Parker—

It takes a Newton to forge a Newton. What man could have fabricated a Jesus? No one but a Jesus.[1] [1] Theodore Parker, Life of Jesus, p. 363. And John Stuart Mill in like manner—

It is of no use to say that Christ, as exhibited in the Gospels, is not historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable has been superadded by the tradition of His followers. Who among His disciples or among their proselytes was capable of inventing the sayings of Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee; as certainly not St. Paul, whose character and idiosyncrasies were of a totally different sort; still less the early Christian writers, in whom nothing is more evident than that all the good in them was derived, as they always professed it was derived, from the higher source.[1] [1] Mill, Essays on Nature, pp. 253-255.

Rousseau's words, too, are often quoted—

It is more inconceivable that several men should have united to forge the Gospel than that a single person should have furnished the subject of it. The Gospel has marks of truth so great, so striking,

so perfectly inimitable, that the inventor of it would be more astonishing than the hero.[1] [1] See Robertson Nicoll, The Church's One Foundation, p. 41. To believe that unlettered Galilean fishermen, or even their immediate successors, invented a character which is so transcendent as to cast into the shade the finest efforts of all the greatest writers of every age, requires greater credulity than to believe that such a life was actually lived. And besides this, the individuality of each of the writers, so marked that an ordinary reader sometimes thinks one contradicts another, joined with the marvelous unity of the picture, which is clear to the mind of every student, together with the absence of all sophistry or special pleading, will not allow us to believe that the facts given are anything else than an accurate record by honest men of what they saw and heard. If Jesus was acclaimed, they put it down; if He was scorned, they recorded it. When He was called liar, blasphemer, deceiver, devil, when His own townsmen rejected His claims, they drew no veil over the unpalatable circumstances, but let the truth be put down just as it was.

It is inconceivable that the Evangelic Jesus should be a creation, whether of some master mind or of the myth-forming genius of the primitive Church. Humanity cannot transcend itself. Surely scepticism has its credulity no less than faith when it is gravely maintained that so radiant an ideal arose "among nearly the most degraded generation of the most narrow-minded race that the world has ever known, and made it the birthplace of a new earth." The mere fact that there dawned on the world, and that in a land barren of wisdom and an age morally bankrupt, an ideal which has been the wonder and inspiration of mankind for more than sixty generations, is an irrefragable evidence that is no mere ideal, but a historic fact. The Divine Life which the Evangelists portray must have been actually lived out on the earth, else they could never have conceived it. And thus the Evangelic Jesus is Himself the supreme evidence at once of the historicity of the evangelic narratives and of His own Divinity.[1] [1] Religion and the Modern Mind. David Smith, "The Divinity of Jesus," p. 176.

It will readily be seen from what has been said that this argument is quite independent of any theory we may hold as to the origin, dates, and primitive character of the Gospels. It is the picture itself that has to be accounted for. There is no reasonable doubt that our four Gospels have occupied their present place in the Church at least since 200 a.d., whatever may have been their history previous to that date. How, then, are we to explain the picture of Christ? And even when we go further and accept the irreducible minimum of the Gospels allowed us by modern criticism, the general result is exactly the same.[1] Analyze the Gospels as we will, the Portrait is there. Not only so, but the more complex the origin and the more numerous the strata of the Gospels, the greater the problem of the Portrait. Even if we admit the presence of inaccuracies, inconsistencies, later additions, and interpolations, the Character remains and has to be accounted for. The larger the number of authorities, the more difficult to account for the unity. How is it that the net result of so many different hands at so many different times should be the perfect Picture, the consistent, balanced delineation of Jesus Christ as it stands in the Gospels today? And how and why, too, did this happen just then in Judea, under such adverse conditions? Why was the Perfect Man depicted then, and not before or since? How is it that the Gospels remain unique in literature today? Among the striking proofs of this uniqueness is the contrast afforded by the apocryphal Gospels.

[1] Nolloth, The Person of our Lord and Recent Thought, chapters iii and iv.

All who read them with any attention will see that they are fictions, and not histories; not traditions even, so much as legends... Before I undertook this work I never realized so completely as I do now the impassable character of the gulf which separates the genuine Gospels from these.[1] [1] B. Harris Cowper, Preface to Translation of the Apocryphal Gospels.

Again: we may look at the question from the standpoint of modern criticism of the Gospels which, as we have already seen, regards Mark, or a document equivalent to our Mark, as the earliest Gospel. Does the acceptance of this position make any difference to the conception of Christ formed by readers? None whatever. The earliest Gospel is as full of the picture of a perfect and supernatural Christ as the later ones. This is admitted by critics who do not accept the orthodox Christian view of Christ and Christianity. Let us quote some representative testimonies of well-known scholars:—

Even the oldest Gospel is written from the standpoint of faith; already for Mark Jesus is not only the Messiah of the Jewish people, but the miraculous, eternal Son of God, whose glory shone in the world.[1] [1] Quoted, Warfield, The Lord of Glory, p. 144, from Bousset, Was Wissen Wir von Jesus? For the belief of the community, which is shared already by the oldest Evangelist, Jesus is the miraculous Son of God, on whom men believe, whom men put wholly by God's side.[1] [1] Quoted, Warfield, The Lord of Glory, p. 144, from Bousset, Was Wissen Wir von Jesus? Nor must we lose sight of the fact that the Gospels, whenever and by whomsoever written, represent not merely four men, the writers, but the entire Christian community among whom they arose and by whom they were universally accepted. The picture of Christ of the earliest Gospel is the Christ of the Christian Church, not only of the Evangelists. To quote Bousset again—

We have not merely pupils transmitting the teaching of their Master, but a believing community speaking of one they honour as the exalted Lord.[1] [1] Quoted, Warfield, The Lord of Glory, p. 144, from Bousset, Was Wissen Wir von Jesus? So also Otto Schmiedel— The early Church, in whose circles the narratives of the life of Jesus originated... was at one in its acknowledgment of Christ, its exalted Lord.[1] [1] Quoted, Warfield, The Lord of Glory, p. 133, from O. Schmiedel, Die Hauptprobleme der Leben-Jesu Forschung.

As, therefore, we study closely the most recent and acutest criticism of the Gospels in the light of the generally accepted view that Mark is the earliest, it is impossible to doubt or question the conclusion drawn by Professor Warfield:—

It is clear, then, that the documents which, even in the view of the most unreasonable criticism, are supposed to underlie the structure of our present Synoptics, are freighted with the same teaching which these Gospels themselves embody as to the Person of our Lord. Literary criticism cannot penetrate to any stratum of belief more primitive than this. We may sink our trial shafts down through the soil of the Gospel tradition at any point we please; it is only conformable strata that we pierce. So far as the tradition goes, it gives consentient testimony to an aboriginal faith in the Deity of the Founder of the religion of Christianity.[1] [1] Warfield, The Lord of Glory, p. 141. See also pp. 157, 158.

It will be seen that our argument in this chapter has proceeded on two distinct though connected lines. The one is that of taking the Gospels as they stand, and as they have stood since 200 a.d., and seeking to account for their picture of Jesus Christ. The other is that of accepting the

consensus of modern criticism as to our earliest Gospel and endeavoring to account for the picture and view of Christ there given. In both cases the result is the same; a supernatural Person is depicted and has to be accounted for. And this is surely sufficient, whatever criticism may say as to the origin and date of our Gospels. When Christians are asked to furnish a reply to every fresh assault on the Gospel history, they are entitled to say that if they can establish the great faiths of the historic creed, the critic who denies these, and justifies the denial on the grounds of criticism, must be in error. To establish the sinlessness of Christ and His Resurrection is virtually to refute many critical arguments.[1] [1] Robertson Nicoll, The Church's One Foundation, p. 11.

But, as a matter of fact, the best of modern scholarship tends more and more to put back our Gospels to the position of contemporary documents, and to see in them the testimony of eye-witnesses to the Person and circumstances there recorded. The more these works are studied the more conviction will grow that they were written by men who had companied with eye-witnesses of the Saviour's life and who have faithfully reported their words.[1] [1] Salmon, Introduction to the New Testament, p. 581. That the third Gospel and the Acts are by Luke, a companion of Paul, is now fully admitted by Harnack. The momentous consequence of this as a testimony to early date and contemporary knowledge is perfectly obvious to all who have given attention to the subject.[1] [1] Harnack, Luke the Physician, passim. See also Ramsay, Luke the Physician, ch. i. And even with the inclusion of the fourth Gospel this position is scarcely weakened. Dr. Sanday, speaking of John 21:24, says— This is the most explicit of all the passages which imply that the author of the Gospel was an eye-witness, and wrote as an eye-witness... There is no ambiguity in the verse... A statement like this if not true is deliberately false; and if it is false, then I should say that the writer stamped himself as dishonest and insincere.[1] [1] Sanday, Expository Times, vol. xx, p. 154. In the same way the Dean of Westminster says—

It is to my mind impossible to doubt that the Evangelist of the fourth Gospel intended the scenes which he described to be accepted as real occurrences; it is impossible to believe that he knew them all the while to be the outcome of his imagination.[1] [1] Armitage Robinson, The Historical Character of St. John's Gospel, p. 9. The more thoroughly the Gospels are studied the stronger will be the conviction that they have come from men who were eye-witnesses of Christ and who have faithfully reported the events of their Master's life. Dr. Kenyon, of the British Museum, closes an essay by referring to evidence which has become available during recent years for the study of the Gospels. So far as they have borne upon the question at all, the tendency has been the same—to confirm the traditional view of the date and authority of our Gospels. The traditional view had been hotly assailed by the searching historical criticism which, for good or for evil (and certainly very largely for good) has beaten upon the Christian records during the last sixty years, as it has upon all other departments of human knowledge; and although the great defenders of that tradition made good their case with the materials which already lay to their hands, it is a striking fact that witness after witness has risen, as it were, from the grave to testify that they were right. The historical critic will accept the new evidence and record it, after the searching examination which it requires, with that loyal obedience to the established fact which is characteristic of the best criticism of the day; but the Christian student is entitled to go one step further, and to say: "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes."[1] [1] Kenyon, The Gospels in the Early Church, p. 48, "Essays of the Times," No. 3. And so from the Gospels

themselves, their conception of Christ, their reality and candor,[1] we argue for our position that Christ is Christianity. We invite the closest scrutiny, and ask men to submit the Gospels to the severest tests, feeling confident of the conclusion when all the facts and factors are properly taken into account.

[1] See a suggestive article in the Spectator for Jan. 30, 1909, on "The Candour of the New Testament."

We are confronted by the story of the Gospels. However critically we may analyze them, the marvellous picture which they have created remains. And it is that picture, and not any critical explanation of it, which has dominated human history for nigh upon two thousand years. And what is that picture? It professes, in the form in which it has come down to us, to be a revelation of God to man. It has the very characteristics which we might imagine such a revelation to possess; for it startles, it surprises us, it takes away our breath; it is utterly unlike what we should have expected; we could never have invented it. And yet the longer we look at it, the more truly Godlike it appears. It is not what we thought God would be like, if we could see Him, but it surpasses our utmost thought. It is too superhuman not to be true. And not only so, but it has subserved the purpose, the only purpose, for which a revelation could be made. It has drawn all its serious believers into the experience of a closer communion with God. It has introduced in consequence a new type of spiritual life into the world. It has ennobled the whole subsequent history of our race. Can it be other than the revelation which, as Theists, we must antecedently expect?[1] [1] Illingworth, Reason and Revelation, p. 151.

This, then, is the problem of the Gospels in relation to Christ, and we are not surprised that men of very different schools of thought have realized its force and admitted its power. Thus Professor Gwatkin says—

There is a tremendous dilemma there which will have to be faced. Assuming that the stupendous claim ascribed to him is false, one would think it must have disordered his life with insanity if he made it himself, and the accounts of his life if others invented it.[1] [1] Gwatkin, The Knowledge of God, vol. i, p. 120. And a very different thinker, Matthew Arnold, whose attitude to orthodox Christianity is well known, writes:—

Jesus himself as He appears in the Gospels, and for the very reason that He is so manifestly above the heads of His reporters there, is, in the jargon of modern philosophy, an absolute; we cannot explain Him, and cannot get behind Him and above Him, cannot command Him.[1] [1] Matthew Arnold, Preface to Literature and Dogma. Is there any solution of this problem except that which the New Testament and the Christian Church provide?

000.09. Chapter 9. The Church of Christ

Chapter 9.

The Church of Christ When we stand on the Nore Lightship we see the Thames at its mouth; when we stand on the Cotswold Hills at Thames-head we see the great river at its source. When we look over the world today we see Christianity as a great and almost world-wide fact; but the stream must have had a source, the effect must have had a cause. Here all around us is the community which men call the Christian Church, the various communities which make up the totality of Christian profession. How did they come into being originally? For our present purpose we take the Church in its widest sense, "the blessed company of all faithful people," or "all who profess and call themselves Christians."

How did the Church begin? It has been well said that "the Church of Christ is built on an empty grave." Seven weeks after the Crucifixion the Apostle Peter preached in Jerusalem the resurrection of Jesus Christ; the weak and cowardly disciple was transformed into the bold witness, and in language as plain as it could possibly be, he declared to the Jews their sin of crucifying Christ, and the work of God in raising Him from the dead. Not only was there no attempt on the part of the Jews to deny the Apostle’s words, but, on the contrary, no less than three thousand of them believed what he said, accepted his word, obeyed his exhortation, and became united together in a new fellowship through his teaching and the ordinances of Baptism and the Holy Communion. There is no possibility of doubting that these men were drawn together into this new community by their separate individual new relation to Christ. Thus and thus only the Church began.

How did the Church continue? By the proclamation of the same message on the part of the Apostolic preachers, and by the reception of that message on the part of their hearers. Wherever they went the substance of their teaching was "Jesus and the Resurrection," and wherever it was given it was received through faith, and faith expressed itself in the ordinances of Baptism and the Communion as proofs of relationship to God, and also as marks of fellowship between those who professed and called themselves Christians. This apostolic testimony meant persecution, ostracism, and not seldom death. Why should they have thus been willing to suffer? Why did they not remain silent, go to their homes in Galilee and prevent the Jewish authorities from hearing of them from that time forward? The answer is that they could not but speak of the things they had seen and heard. Jesus Christ was a reality to them, and out of a full heart they preached Him as a living Saviour and Lord. This is the fact that stands out prominently from the Day of Pentecost onwards through the entire New Testament—the fact of a new community whose one tie of fellowship was their relation to Christ, their common Master. When we open the New Testament we find ourselves in presence of a glowing religious life. There is nothing in the world which offers any real parallel either to this life or to the collection of books which attests it. The soul, which in contemporary literature is bound in shallows and in miseries, is here raised as on a great tidal wave of spiritual blessing. Nothing that belongs to a complete religious life is wanting, neither

convictions nor motives, neither penitence nor ideals, neither vocation nor the assurance of victory. And from beginning to end, in all its parts and aspects and elements, this Religious life is determined by Christ. It owes its character at every point to Him.[1] [1] Denney, Jesus and the Gospel, p. 1.

Even a cursory study of the New Testament reveals the fact that the one and only thing that united men of different races, creeds, temperaments, and grades was their relation to Christ, while The most careful scrutiny of the New Testament discloses no trace of a Christianity in which Jesus has any other place than that which is assigned Him in the faith of the historical Church.[1] [1] Denney, op. cit., p. 373. And the same thing is true of the books of the New Testament as records of teaching. In spite of the great and striking differences of aspect, standpoint, and substance between such writers as Paul, John, James, Peter, and Luke there is nothing more striking than the essential unity amid all these remarkable differences. This unity is simply that of a common attitude to Jesus Christ. Whatever they have to record or teach converges towards Him and has Him for its theme and object.

There is a unity in all these early Christian books which is powerful enough to absorb and subdue their differences, and that unity is to be found in a common religious relation to Christ, a common debt to Him, a common sense that everything in the relations of God and man must be and is determined by Him.[1] [1] Denney, Jesus and the Gospel, p. 101. But this problem of the Church thus begun and seen in the New Testament record of its first seventy years needs still more careful attention. We have to account not only for its beginning and early years, but also for its continuance to this day. Its history is capable of being followed from century to century, from country to country, up to the present time, when we see it settled in many places, and ever extending to fresh parts in the non-Christian world. Now all through these centuries there has been not a little essential continuity of method in all parts of the Christian community. There are in fact four chains stretching across the centuries which link the Church of today with that of the first ages.

First, there is the proclamation of the Christian message. In spite of differences of substance and method, something which has been regarded as a Christian Gospel has been proclaimed by means of various ministries through all the ages. Pioneers have gone from land to land with a message, a message about Christ, and this has been proclaimed and received and passed on everywhere. Second, there is the rite of Baptism, which has almost invariably accompanied the proclamation of the message of Christianity. This ordinance has been regarded and accepted as the occasion of initiation into Christianity, the proof of acceptance on the part of those who would become adherents. Third, there is the weekly worship on the first day. Christians have been accustomed from the very first to meet together on this day and celebrate their Master’s resurrection. There is scarcely anything more thoroughly capable of demonstration than this fact from the very rise of Christianity. It is incapable of explanation that companies of Jews should in time have ceased to meet together on the seventh day and at length transferred their gatherings to the first unless there had been sufficient cause for altering so ancient and honored an observance. Fourth, there is the worship and fellowship in the Lord’s Supper. Christians have been in the habit of meeting every week for the specific purpose of remembering their Master’s death.

Now these four chains stretch across the centuries without the gap of a link and are found everywhere. How are they to be accounted for? Only in one way; as expressive of belief in and devotion to Jesus Christ on the part of the men and women who observed them. They were in use years before a line of our New Testament was written, so that our present records are not the cause of, but only an evidence for their existence. This identity of observance compels attention, and can only be explained by the relation of the people to Jesus Christ. These Christians believed in the death, resurrection, and Deity of their Master, and the ordinances were the outward expression and proof of their faith. The evidential value of preaching, Baptism, the Lord's Day, and the Lord's Supper is of the very first importance and demands and warrants the closest attention.

There is, however, one remarkable fact connected with the existence of the Church of Christ which is an additional factor in the problem. Whenever Christianity has been faithfully proclaimed no compulsion has been used to lead men to believe in Christ, and, indeed, in all ages for the most part there has been no earthly advantage for men to become Christians. Not only so, but Christian profession has often meant social ostracism, persecution, and death. Both in regard to individual experience and to corporate life, opposition has had to be faced. Christianity has been checked and thwarted by civil and national authorities in almost every age. Whether in the Roman Empire or among barbaric hordes, attempts have been made to crush and destroy Christianity. But the result has ever been to make the Church stronger than before.

Now we have to account for this marvellous vitality, and we must have a sufficient explanation. If the law of causation obtains anywhere it surely applies here. Every effect must have its adequate cause. We have two problems to face which are, however, only parts of one still greater problem. The first is how to account for the New Testament attitude to Christ in the face of His death as a malefactor.

We do not always fully realize the nature of the issue here brought before us. Here is a young man scarcely thirty-three years of age, emerged from obscurity only for the brief space of three years, living during those years under the scorn of the world, which grew steadily in intensity and finally passed into hatred, and dying at the end the death of a malefactor: but leaving behind Him the germs of a world-wide community, the spring of whose vitality is the firm conviction that He was God manifest in the flesh. If anything human is obvious, it is obvious that this conviction was not formed and fixed without evidence for it is of the most convincing kind.[1] [1] Warfield, The Lord of Glory, p. 275. In the New Testament we find Jews with all their monotheistic passion actually regarding Jesus of Nazareth as equal to, God the Father, and this well within twenty-five years of the time at which He was put to death as a criminal.[1] The fact is so striking and even startling that it is scarcely surprising that attempts should be made to modify or break its force. But it resists all such attempts, and remains one of the most convincing facts of early Church history.

[1] Fairbairn, Christ in Modern Theology, p. 377.

What I cannot credit is, that by the time of the earliest Christian records His followers had already distorted and mistaken Him altogether, so that the history of Christianity was built from the very foundation on a misunderstanding and a misrepresentation, behind which we must, after two thousand years, get back, if we are to have a real Christ and a genuine Christianity. "Back to Christ" is the watchword of theology in this generation; and I will repeat it with an enthusiasm born of a lifelong study of His words; but, when I go back to Him, I do not find a Christ who puts to

shame the highest which His Church has taught about Him. He is different indeed—far more simple, actual, and human—yet in all that is most essential He is the same Son of God as for nineteen centuries has inspired the lives of the saints and evoked the worship of the world.[1] [1] Stalker, The Christology of Jesus, p. 122. The second part of the problem is the persistence of this view of Christ in relation to the Church all through the Christian centuries. It is no mere question, interesting and important as it is, of something happening nineteen centuries ago, as a fact of history; it is the question of the existence of a living, widespread, and ever-growing society, which has never been more alive than it is at present. And it is the existence of a society by means of one fact only, the persistent influence of Jesus Christ. The one bond which unites Christians together, the one secret of continuance in the Christian Church, is essentially a personal relation to Christ as a living Lord and Friend. The most remarkable fact in the history of His religion is the continuous and ubiquitous activity of His person. He has been the permanent and efficient factor in its extension and progress. Under all its forms, in all its periods, and through all its divisions, the one principle alike of reality and unity has been and is devotion to Him. He is the Spirit that inhabits all the Churches, the law that rules the conscience and binds into awed and obedient reverence the saintly men who live within all the communions that bear His name.[1] [1] Fairbairn, Christ in Modern Theology, p. 380. And so we challenge attention to the existence of the Christian Church as a proof of the uniqueness and supernatural power of the Person of Jesus Christ, for we are confident that it is impossible to account for the former apart from a belief in the latter. It is surely more probable that the Christian view of Christ arose out of the history than that the entire Christian Church should have invented a history to explain its foundation. The very divisions of the Christian Churches constitute an argument in support of this position, for this view of Christ is common to all the communities and underlies all their differences. How did the Church come by its faith in Christ? At least the history explains the faith, but the faith cannot fairly explain away the history.[1] [1] Garvie, The Inner Life of Jesus, p. 45. The connection between Jesus and the Christian religion remains; and unless we are content to leave it entirely in the dark, we shall find ourselves compelled to raise the ulterior question which by this assumption is foreclosed. Granting that the figure in the Gospels is the product of the Church’s faith, by what was that faith itself produced? The New Testament taken as a whole represents the most astonishing outburst of intellectual and spiritual energy in the history of our race: by what was it evoked? Surely the probabilities are that some extraordinary reality—something quite unlike the rest of us—lies behind and explains all this.[1] [1] Denney, Jesus and the Gospel, p. 166. The problem of the Christian Church, then, has to be faced and solved. Its history requires some operative cause adequate to explain nineteen centuries of existence and progress. It is true that there have been other religions with millions of adherents, but it is also true that the existence and progress of the Church is something unique in history to say nothing of the fact that Christianity has attracted to itself the profoundest thinkers of the human race, and is in no way hindered by the ever-advancing tide of human knowledge. The Church is, and ever has been, in such direct and constant relation to Christ that only His personality can explain its continued life and movement. The most extraordinary and inexplicable thing in the New Testament is the power of Jesus Christ of Nazareth over His early followers, and the most marvelous and astonishing thing in nineteen centuries of history is the power of His life over the members of the Christian Church.

000.10. Chapter 10. The Grace of Christ

Chapter 10.

The Grace of Christ

It is only within comparatively recent years that attention has been given by scientific men to the fact and reality of Christian experience. Formerly it was either disregarded altogether or else set aside as too variable and unreliable to be worthy of serious notice. But this is no longer possible. The domain of science is being enlarged almost daily, and place is now being found for those experiences in human hearts and lives which accrue from the reception of Christ's teaching and the acknowledgment of His authority. They can be studied, and should be studied, for they are available for scientific investigation. There is such a thing as Christian experience, the precise and unique experience of those who are true followers of Christ, and this constitutes an argument of no mean weight and importance for the position for which we are now arguing.

We have already considered the evidence of the Church as a whole regarded as an objective fact of history and present-day life. We must now seek to analyze what this means from the standpoint of the individual Christian who is a member of the Church—what it is that makes and keeps him a member of that society whose one bond of union is personal relationship to Christ. What constitutes this relationship—wherein lies its power over human lives?

It will be seen that this argument from experience is capable of being verified, quite apart from any question of the credibility of the Gospels or any proper appreciation of the various historical, philosophical, and critical arguments for Christ and Christianity. Not that we have any desire or intention to separate the Christ of History from the Christ of Experience, for the two are ultimately and inextricably united. But the verification of the Christ of Experience is possible apart from any elaborate discussion or intellectual conviction of the historical and theological grounds of belief in Christ. In its proper place and for its precise purpose this argument from experience is eminently worthy of consideration.

We can imagine some one approaching an old Christian of no great education or intellectual power, and putting before him the various arguments for Christianity based upon the Gospels, or the witness of the Church, or the results of Christianity in the world, and we can also imagine that old believer expressing his utter inability to understand and appreciate these arguments, and yet able to bear his own personal testimony to what Jesus Christ is to him as a living experience today. Now the question arises whether this argument from personal experience is valid. What is the claim of Christian experience? What does Christianity claim today for the individual? A true follower of Jesus Christ will say that Christ has made an entire change in his life. He is conscious of a great difference between his past and his present. Old things have gone, new things have come. He is conscious of a burden removed, of a vision clarified; he knows something of what is meant by the Bible phrase, "the joy of salvation." Those who have not experienced this change may deny its reality, but not with any pretence to reason and fairness. We must take the testimony

of reasonable, upright, and competent men when they tell us that Christ has made a difference to them.

Further, the true believer of Jesus Christ tells us that Christ has given a new direction to his life. Not only is the past different, the present also is changed. He is conscious of a new life, new powers, new principles, new aspirations, new hopes. He can say with literal truth, "Once I was blind; now I see," and "Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Yet again, the true follower of Jesus Christ tells us that Christ has provided a perfect satisfaction for his life. His mind is now at rest in the truth of Christ, his heart in the love of Christ, his conscience in the law of Christ, and his will in the grace of Christ. He is ready to be, to do, to suffer anything by reason of what Christ is to his soul. This consciousness of peace as he looks back over the past, of power as he considers the needs of the present, of hope as he surveys the possibilities of the future, are all very real, precious, and potent in his experience, and constitute the very life of his life. This is the argument from Christian experience which is found in the New Testament, in all the centuries of Church history, and in the Christian life of today. Christ is real, Christ is precious, Christ is powerful, Christ is all. In our books of devotion Christ is the supreme object, in our hymns of praise and adoration Christ is the one theme, in the work of Christian missions Christ is the one subject underlying all differences of race, place, circumstance, temperament, and community. There is an irreducible minimum of experience, true of all genuine followers of Jesus Christ, and he who possesses it is perfectly conscious that Christ is a living reality. In proof of this argument from Christian experience it would be possible to bring forward the evidence of representative men of all ages and Churches, such as Augustine, Bernard, Luther, Leighton, Bunyan, Wesley and Wilberforce, but we will confine ourselves to one witness, a man who was formerly the ruthless persecutor of the Church of Christ, and who became one of the leading Christians of his age. We mean, of course, the Apostle Paul. He was never tired of bringing forward his own life as a testimony to the reality of Jesus Christ, and to the Gospel that he preached and lived. The witness of St. Paul is one of the chief arguments from the standpoint of Christian experience.

It will help us to appreciate this evidence the more if we recall something of what Saul the persecutor was as a man. He was a man of powerful intellect. He was a thinker, a man whose intellectual life showed unmistakable signs of his training at home, in Jerusalem, and as a member of the chief Council of the Jews. He was also a man of strong feeling. Intellect always influences feeling, and if the intellect is feeble the feelings will be feeble also. Saul of Tarsus could love in a way worthy of the name of love, and he could also hate so as to make people fear his hatred. His feelings gave force to his purpose, emphasis to his words, decision to his action. Still more, he was a man of intense conscientiousness. His training as a Jew had developed his scrupulosity and conscientiousness to a very high degree. Above all, he was a man of determined will. When intellect, feeling and conscience combine to influence the will the real man is clearly seen. Saul had learned to hate Christ and Christianity. We are told that he persecuted them in Jerusalem, and went on his errand of hatred to the far-off city of Damascus. He was "exceedingly mad" against them, he "compelled them to blaspheme," he "breathed out threatenings and slaughters" against the Christians, he "made havoc of the Church," "dragging men and women to prison." This is the man of high capacity, expert knowledge, high culture, lofty intellect, intense virility, whom we wish to examine on behalf of Christian experience.

It is a simple matter of fact that the persecutor became convicted of his errors and that this conviction led to an entire change of life and purpose. He soon began to love what he had formerly hated, and to preach the very Gospel that he had set out to destroy. How are we to account for this simple yet stupendous change? One of the keenest intellects of modern times, F. C. Baur of Tubingen, confessed that the conversion of Saul of Tarsus was an insoluble problem to him. "No psychological or dialectical analysis sufficiently explains the mystery of the act by which God revealed His Son to Saul." This admission of Baur remains unshaken today, and the problem of Saul's conversion still awaits solution by any other method than the one that he puts forth himself. His conversion, however, was only the beginning of a new life. It is one thing to change, it is another to continue changed; and yet for twenty-five years his life was devoted to entirely opposite ends to those which had formerly been his experience. We have only his own testimony to what those years meant (II Cor. xi) as he preached, labored and suffered, to see the reality and the permanence of the change. It lasted. He had everything to lose, and, humanly speaking, nothing to gain by accepting Jesus Christ as his Master. Yet amidst all the anxieties toils, sufferings, and strain of those twenty-five years he reveals a perfect satisfaction with what had taken place on the way to Damascus and with the living Christ whose servant he rejoiced to be. In spite of his intensely strong individuality, he was only an echo of Jesus Christ. From the moment of his conversion his life was summed up in his own motto, "To me to live is Christ."

Now if the Apostle's life of testimony to Christ is true, his conversion must have involved a real change, a deliberate break with his past. And if his conversion is real, then Christ rose from the dead, and Christ is God. The Apostle attributes everything to Christ. "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" He has the three marks of the true witness—intelligence, candor and disinterestedness. And we are therefore warranted in accepting his personal assurance that the revelation of Jesus Christ produced in him that system of thought and life which he calls his Gospel, and which is with us today in the Christianity of the Epistles, and also in that Christianity as reproduced in human life. We can only account for his influence by means of his apostleship and conversion. These in turn can only be explained by his own personal experience of Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord.

Now this testimony of one man could be reproduced in its essential features from the history of Christian experience through the centuries. Christian biography bears witness to the simple fact that in whatever way the experience called conversion comes, it brings with it a definite break with the past, it gives an entirely new aim to life, and it provides a perfect satisfaction in the deep recesses of the soul. Wendell Phillips once made this reply in a coterie at Boston when some one told him that Jesus was amiable, but not strong. "Not strong?" replied he, "test the strength of Jesus by the strength of the men whom He has mastered." From the earliest records in the earliest books of the New Testament down to the latest records of the newest mission to the heathen the facts of Christian experience are to all intents and purposes essentially the same. Christ is living, Christ is real, Christ is powerful, Christ is precious—this is the one theme. Every conversion involves a distinct change, a definite consciousness of Christ, and a deep devotion to Him. The old world knew nothing of conversion: instead of an Ecce Homo they had only some choice of Hercules.[1] [1] Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, book ii, ch. 10. Nor is it to be found in the other great religious systems of today. The almost entire absence of the data of religious experience outside Christianity is a striking and significant fact. Professor William James acknowledges this in his

study of religious experience. The absence of strictly personal confessions is the chief difficulty to the purely literary student who would like to become acquainted with the inwardness of religions other than the Christian.[1] [1] James, Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 402.

How is it that these things are so? What is that type of saintliness which is found in the Christian Church and is not found elsewhere? It is best described as Christlikeness, and the term at once suggests the reason why it is not found outside Christianity.

It is impossible to account for these experiences apart from personality. As they are realized in the personality of the Christian, so they proceed from the personality of Christ. No mere influence or impersonal force can explain the spiritual experiences of the Christian man. When we analyze them this is clearly seen. If we think of the forgiveness which leads to the break with the past, it is obvious that pardon comes from, and is received by, a person. If we think of the new aim and object which marks the Christian life, it is equally clear that nothing short of personal relations to a Person whose Will is henceforward the law of life can explain the force of this new trend in experience. And if we think of the inner satisfaction which is the deepest experience of the Christian, it seems impossible to believe that such satisfaction, covering as it does intellect, heart, conscience, and the whole inner moral being, can be derived from any source less than personal.

Religious thought is carried on in terms of personality, this being in the world of religion the one fundamental fact.[2] [2] James, Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 491. And since personality is the source of religion, it is obvious that if that personality is not Christ's it is no one else's. We are therefore once again brought face to face with the fact of Christ in relation to Christian experience. It calls for close scrutiny and personal verification, and the more it is tested in this way, the more it will be found to crown the other arguments from history and reason.

000.11. Chapter 11. The Influence of Christ

Chapter 11.

The Influence of Christ

There are many things in life about which we may be perfectly indifferent. Some are outside the sphere of our interest, others we can entirely ignore, while others again we may hold in solution without coming to any definite opinion. In politics it is not absolutely necessary for all to take sides, and in history there are many questions concerning men and movements as to which we may reserve our judgment. But the remarkable thing about Jesus Christ is that men have invariably had to take sides for or against Him. Indifference has always been impossible. Men have had to declare themselves either as His friends or as His foes. In considering the question with which we are now concerned, it is therefore valuable to inquire what those have thought of Christ who for any reason have not submitted their lives to Him. The testimony of opponents is often the very best evidence we can obtain of the reality of a life or a movement. It is to the subject of the influence of Christ, as witnessed both by His opponents and also by facts patent to everybody that we now call attention.

We have a remarkable chain of testimony to the impression made by Jesus Christ Himself during His earthly life. Among His contemporaries were those who, when sent to apprehend Him, came back without their prisoner, saying, "Never man spake like this Man." Men of keen intellect like Pilate and Herod could not find any flaw in His conduct, while at His trial no two witnesses agreed together.

Subsequent testimony is in the same direction. Napoleon the Great said that Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and himself founded empires dependent upon force, while Jesus founded one on love, with the result that millions would die for Him.

I think I understand something of human nature, and I tell you all these were men, and I am a man. None else is like Him—Jesus Christ was more than man.[1] [1] Quoted in Ballard, Miracles of Unbelief, ch. viii.

Renan said that Jesus was the greatest religious genius that ever lived or will live, that His beauty is eternal, and His reign will never end.

Jesus is in every respect unique, and nothing can be compared with Him. Be the unlooked-for phenomena of the future what they may, Jesus will not be surpassed.[1] [1] Quoted in Ballard, Miracles of Unbelief, ch. viii.

Strauss calls Him— The highest object we can possibly imagine with respect to religion, the being without whose presence in the mind piety is impossible.[1] [1] Quoted in Ballard, Miracles of Unbelief, ch. viii.

Rousseau says that—

If the life and death of Socrates are those of a philosopher, the life of Jesus Christ are those of a God.[1] [1] Quoted in Ballard, Miracles of Unbelief, ch. viii.

These are but a few out of many more testimonies that could be adduced to the life and character of Jesus Christ, derived from the writings of those who, in spite of their encomiums, did not accept Him as their Saviour and God.

Scarcely less remarkable is the testimony of great scholars and thinkers to the work of Jesus Christ through the centuries as seen in Christianity. His work began in the place where He was crucified, among His enemies, and if there had been any untruth in the statements of His earliest disciples about Him it could easily have been shown and condemned. But His message made remarkable progress even among His inveterate foes, and it was not long before one of His disciples could say that the Gospel had not only gone through Judea and into Asia Minor, but into all the world. Not very much later we have the testimony of Tactus the Roman historian to the progress of Christianity. Then in the second century comes the well-known evidence of Pliny concerning the early Christians who met week by week and worshipped Christ as God, and banded themselves together by an oath not to steal or to be untrue. Then arose the persecutions of the second and third centuries, with the boast of Tertullian that the more the Christians were persecuted, the more numerous they became—"the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church"—until at length, in the fourth and fifth centuries, we see the futile attempts of the Roman authorities to curb and crush Christianity, only to lead to the spread of it far and wide. Dr. Jowett, speaking of the century in which Christianity arose, says, "Could we have seen depicted the inner life of that brilliant period, we should have turned from it with loathing and disgust." And Renan, in words often quoted, said, "Jesus Christ created a paradise out of the hell of Rome."[1] [1] See also Glover, The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire, chapters iv and v. As Christianity commenced, so it continued through the centuries, influencing men and States in proportion as it was allowed to be propagated in its purity and fulness. On the evidence of some of the greatest opponents of Christianity, it has surpassed all other religions in its remarkable power over human life. It has kept up with human growth and evolution through the ages, and it has shown itself to possess a capacity for cultivating holiness and developing character which has no equal in philosophy or religion in any part of the world. Mr. Lecky's words are well worth repeating— The Platonist exhorted men to imitate God; the Stoic, to follow reason; the Christian, to the love of Christ. The later Stoics had often united their notions of excellence in an ideal sage, and Epictetus had even urged his disciples to set before them some man of surpassing excellence, and to imagine him continually near them; but the utmost the Stoic ideal could become was a model for imitation, and the admiration it inspired could never deepen into affection. It was reserved for Christianity to present to the world an ideal character, which through all the changes of eighteen centuries has inspired the hearts of men with an impassioned love; has shown itself capable of acting on all ages, nations, temperaments, and conditions; has been not only the highest pattern of virtue, but the strongest incentive to its practice; and has exercised so deep an influence that it may be truly said that the simple record of three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists. This has indeed been the wellspring of whatever is best and purest in the Christian life. Amid all the sins and failings, amid all the priestcraft and persecution and fanaticism that have defaced the Church, it has preserved in the character and example of its Founder, an enduring

principle of regeneration.[1] [1] Lecky, History of European Morals, vol. ii. p. 8 The testimony to the present work of Jesus Christ is not less real than it has been in the past. In the case of all the other great names of the world's history, the inevitable and invariable experience has been that the particular man is first a power, then only a name, and last of all a mere memory. Of Jesus Christ the exact opposite is true. He died on a cross of shame, His name gradually became more and more powerful, and He is the greatest influence in the world today. There is, as it has been well said, a fifth Gospel being written—the work of Jesus Christ in the hearts and lives of men and nations. The present social status of men, women, and children is so familiar to us that we sometimes fail to realize what it was before Christ came. In the Roman world the father had absolute right over his children, to sell, enslave, to kill them. It is Christianity that has made these atrocities impossible. Woman was the living chattel of her husband, as she is still in India and Africa. It is through Christianity that she has obtained a new status, and now in Christian countries "Home" receives its true and full meaning. The slavery of the Roman Empire was one of its most deep-seated features, and the power of master over slave was as absolute as it was often exercised with cruelty and ferocity. But Christianity proclaimed the universality and brotherhood of all men in Christ, and thereby struck at the root of slavery, and wherever the Gospel of Christ has had its way, slavery has been compelled to disappear. Then, too, the reality and purity of marriage are what they are today because of Christianity, while the blessings of humanitarianism, with the absence of cruelty, torture, and callousness, and the presence of hospitals, refugees, care for prisoners, kindness to animals, are all largely, and indeed mainly, attributable to the influence of Christ and His Gospel. The teaching of Christ about God, sin, redemption, holiness, love, has impressed, influenced, and inspired human life as nothing else has done and as, apparently, nothing else can do.[1] [1] See Brace, Gesta Christi, chapters ii to vii.

Then, too, we are compelled to face the fact, the truly wonderful fact, of missionary enterprise. There are many things in which Christianity is like other religions, but the one element of unlikeness and uniqueness is its world-wide missions. Other religions may have their missions, but they lack the note of universality which is the most remarkable feature of Christian missions. Christianity, rising out of the narrowest of religions, is becoming the universal religion. Prompted by universal loyalty to Christ and universal love to man, missionaries have gone forth far and wide, backed by no earthly power, influenced by no earthly incentive, proclaiming the simple message of a personal Saviour, and wherever they have gone the results have been nothing short of stupendous. The general influence alone has been great in its formation of new literatures, new ideals, new philanthropies, while the transformations of men and races in Fiji, Uganda, New Zealand, Tierra del Fuego, are among the most noteworthy features of modern history. And when we study the lives of the missionaries who have gone forth on this errand of universal evangelization we find among them the finest types of manhood. As we recall such names as Carey, Martyn, Livingstone, Patteson, Paton, Chalmers, Hudson Taylor, Hannington, Mackay, Pilkington, we realize that we are face to face with some of the most splendid and noble of characters. There is, in a word, no part of the modern outlook in which the power of Christianity is more evident than in the mission fields. A competent witness who has recently visited most of the great missionary centers of the world has given his testimony to the power of missionary effort.

I do not recall visiting a single country where I formed the impression that Christ and His cause are meeting with defeat. I do not remember having heard the voice of despair and pessimism from the

leaders of the Christian hosts on any of these continents. True it is that I have visited fields where the forces of our Lord seem to be hard pressed; but taking the world as a whole, I may say that victory is being achieved.[1]

[1] Address, July 1908, by Mr. J. R. Mott. Cf. his Modern World Movements, p. 17. See also a fine statement by Dr. J. H. Moulton, Hibbert Journal, vol. vii, p. 665 (July 1909).

When, therefore, we think of the moral and social achievements of Christianity in the past, especially in regard to women, children, and slaves; when we think of its influence today both at home and in other lands; when we recall its power compared with that of other religions in regard to deliverance from sin, power for holy living, and incentives to individual and collective progress, we fearlessly challenge all attempts to find anything like it, or to account for this influence apart from a belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and God. All the great modern nations of the world date their history from the birth of Christ, and even the sceptic testifies to Christ by the date of his letters. It is Christianity alone which gives to the Western world its vast superiority over the Eastern, and its irresistible impulse to progress. Japan in particular bears its indirect but very real testimony to the power of Christianity, for the main secret of Japan's metamorphosis and marvelous development is the adoption of Western ideals which have largely sprung from Christianity. East and West unite in their testimony to the influence of Jesus Christ.

I shall take, first, the well-known saying Keshub Chunder Sen, one of the most remarkable and representative figures of modern times. "If you wish to secure that allegiance and attachment of India, it must be through spiritual influence and moral suasion." And such indeed has been the case in India. You cannot deny that your hearts have been touched, conquered, and subjugated by a superior power. That power, need I tell you, is Christ. It is Christ who rules British India, and not the British Government. England sent out a tremendous moral power in the life and character of the mighty prophet, to conquer and to hold this vast Empire... Take now what Max G■hre in his remarkable volume, Drei Monate Fabrik-Arbeiter, tells us of the inner thought of that formidable new democracy that is growing up in modern Germany, alienated not only from the present social order, but from all conventional religious belief and communion. After drawing the darkest picture of the lapse from all definite Christian belief of the workmen in the Chemnitz factory in which he laboured, he says, "One thing only has remained in all of them—esteem and reverence for Jesus Christ."[1] [1] Cairns, Christianity in the Modern World, p. 16. Nor can we overlook the evidence of Christ's influence, as men are brought face to face with the deepest problems of life. What are we to say of the problem of human sin? Call it what we like, the fact by any other name would be as bad. Where can we find the power to deliver man from evil, to overcome the evil principle within, and to give the conscience rest and peace amidst the burdens of life? Cotter Morison in his Service of Man, which on its publication twenty-two years ago was spoken of as the most powerful attack on Christianity during that generation,[1] frankly admits that there is no remedy for a bad heart, that society has a right to extirpate the hardened criminal, and to prevent him from leaving a progeny as bad as himself.[2] There is no good news in this for the outcast, the depraved, the abandoned, the hopeless. To tell such people that they are to be extirpated is to confess the ghastly failure to deal with sin. Nor can education, or philosophy, or even social reform cope with this gigantic power of evil. Yet thousands and millions today, as in all ages, are testifying to the power and glory of Christianity in dealing with their sin and wickedness. These are facts which stand the test of examination and carry their own conclusion to all who are willing to learn.

[1] Athenaeum, Jan. 29, 1887.

[2] J. C. Morison, Service of Man, pp. 293-295.

What, too, shall we say about human weakness, the inability to live righteous lives, the constant struggle and defeat in the face of what seem to be omnipotent foes? Science, with all its discoveries and glories during the past century, has no word of hope for the individual. It may be true, as Darwin says, that all organized beings are slowly advancing towards perfection, but meanwhile what joy or comfort is this to the individual who longs to live a holy life, and who finds himself powerless to resist the forces within him and around him? The old question still awaits an answer—

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased, Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow?" And there is no answer apart from Jesus Christ. What, too, are we to say about the unrest of soul as we attempt to peer into the future? Here again science has nothing to say. Science has inspired us with wonderful hope during the last fifty years, until there seems scarcely any limit to human discoveries and inventions, and yet in the midst of all this hopefulness there never has been a time when men have been more hopeless or uncertain about the future. The testimony of Tyndall to the futility of materialism,[1] the tacit admission of Huxley in his invention of the word "agnostic," and the pessimism of Thomas Hardy are illustrations of the utter powerlessness of philosophy, science, education, culture, progress to deal with the deepest problems of human life. And yet all the while many and many a simple-hearted life is finding in Jesus Christ the secret of deliverance from sin, the guarantee against moral weakness, and the inspiration of an immortal hope.

[1] Belfast Address, Preface, p. 36.

It is, of course, true that Mohammed, Buddha and Confucius have founded religions that now possess millions of followers, but the patent fact is that these religions are not making progress among the most enlightened and civilized races, while Christianity is gradually extending its boundaries and compelling the attention of the best thought of the world. How is it that the other religions are either stationary or else retreating before the advance of knowledge, while Christianity is ever pushing forward into fresh enterprises of thought and action all over the world? What was it in the personality of Jesus Christ that accounts for His influence on mankind in the past, and what is it that accounts for His growing influence on the most civilized nations today? How is it that during the nineteen centuries of Christianity in the world, with all the progress of human thought and life, not a single new ethical idea has been discovered outside the teaching of Jesus Christ? How is it that a religion emanating almost entirely from a narrow and obscure people like the Jews should possess the completest ethical ideal that the world knows, and one capable of ever-extending application to all circumstances and conditions of human life? When Jesus Christ left this earth He told His disciples that after His departure they should do greater works than He had done, and the centuries of Christianity have borne out the truth of this statement. Works greater in kind have been done—are being done. Jesus Christ is doing more wonderful things today than ever He did when on earth, redeeming souls, changing lives, transforming characters, exalting ideals, inspiring philanthropies, and making for the best, truest, and highest in human life and progress.

We are therefore justified in calling attention to the influence of Christ through the ages as one of the greatest, most direct, and most self-evident proofs that Christianity is Christ, and that Christ has to be accounted for. It is impossible to consider this question solely as one of history; it touches life at every point today.

We have not solved, we have not even stated and defined, the problem as to the Person of Christ when we have written the life of Jesus, for that problem is raised even less by the Gospels than by Christ's place and function in the collective history of man... The very essence of the matter is that the Gospels do not stand alone, but live, as it were, embosomed in universal history. And in that history Christ plays a part much more remarkable and much less compatible with common manhood than the part Jesus plays in the history of His own age and people. And we have not solved, or even apprehended, any one of the problems connected with His person until we have resolved the mystery of the place He has filled and the things He has achieved in the collective life of man.[1] [1] Fairbairn, The Philosophy of the Christian Religion, p. 13. Who and what must Jesus Christ be to have effected all this? Surely we are compelled to admit at least His uniqueness. And when we have done this we are bound to go further and inquire as to the secret and explanation of this uniqueness. Why should Jesus, the Jewish peasant of Nazareth, have become the Founder of a religion which has shown and is showing its power to become a universal religion? The only adequate explanation of His work is the Christian explanation of His Person—He was God manifest in the flesh.

000.12. Chapter 12. The Virgin-Birth of Christ

Chapter 12.

The Virgin-Birth of Christ[1]

[1] This chapter appeared in substance in the Bible Record (New York, U.S.A.) for December, 1907, as one of a series of papers issued in connection with a course of lectures on the Virgin-Birth of Christ by Dr. Orr, which have since been published in book form in The Virgin-Birth of Christ. References to the quotations from the paper appear on p. 284 ff. of Dr. Orr's book.

Although the Virgin-Birth is not strictly an evidence of the Divine Person of Christ, but simply the New Testament explanation of the earthly origin and appearance of His Person, it seems necessary to include a consideration of it in the present discussion. The prominence given to the question is one of the most obvious facts of recent theological thought. While, therefore, the purpose of this book would have been fully served without any discussion of the Virgin-Birth, the attention devoted to that problem for several years past is so thoroughly indicative of a general attitude to Christianity on the part of many minds, that it may be well to state the Christian view and to give reasons for adhering to the New Testament teaching. Without concentrating attention on particular arguments, it is proposed to adduce several reasons which singly and cumulatively support a belief in the truth of the Virgin-Birth.

Starting from the most obvious position, the Virgin-Birth is the account of our Lord's introduction to earth which is found in the New Testament. The chapters in Matthew and Luke present this view, and no other is fairly deducible from the records as we now possess them. We are therefore on sure ground in arguing that at least the authenticity of the first and third Gospels in their present integrity is involved in the denial of the Virgin-Birth. If this is not a fact, our Gospels can hardly retain the position they have had for centuries, at any rate so far as the early chapters are concerned. And even though the rest of the Gospels may conceivably be spared, their value must necessarily be greatly weakened by the removal of these early chapters.

There is no certain warrant on purely literary and textual grounds for separating these chapters from the rest of the Gospels of which they form a part. The brevity and reserve which characterize the chapters in relation to the Virgin-Birth are very noteworthy. There are only two verses in Luke's account which actually deal with the Virgin-Birth, though, of course, the whole narrative is instinct with the idea. Further, there are no valid arguments based on textual criticism that would lead us to separate these chapters from the rest of the Gospel. Still more, the claim made by Luke in his preface to have "carefully traced everything accurately from the first" is a strong argument in favor of their authenticity. Nor can we disregard Luke's medical training, his close association with St. Paul, and the significant reference in Galatians 4:4 to our Lord being born of a woman. Even if this be not a subtle allusion to the uniqueness implied in the Virgin-Birth, we may fairly argue for the authenticity of the story from all that we know of Luke personally and from his association with the great Apostle of the Gentiles. Not least of all, the clear independence of the genealogies given by

Matthew and Luke is an unmistakable proof of the genuineness of these chapters.

We find another support for belief in the Virgin-Birth in the universal belief of the Church in all ages. All recent criticism tends to push back the dates of the Gospels well into the first century, and they thus become strong witnesses for the belief of the Church of that day. It is also a simple matter of historical fact that from the time of Ignatius the Virgin-Birth has been held by the Church, and has for centuries been enshrined in the great historic creeds. Surely this would count for a great deal even after making all possible allowance for the uncritical ages of the Church. The early date of the Gospels leaves no adequate time for the growth of myth and legend or for the apotheosis of Christ by enthusiastic disciples. The early reception and universal acceptance by the Christian Church of the idea of the Virgin-Birth is one of the greatest historical problems unless it has been based upon simple fact. The chief support for the doctrine is, however, the necessity of accounting for the uniqueness of the life of Jesus. The fact of this uniqueness, as we have seen, is "writ large" on the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. It constitutes the problem of the ages, and has hitherto defied solution in any other way except by the Christian explanation. Now it may fairly be contended that such a unique life demands a unique origin and entrance into the world. We have to be told when and how this supernatural life began on earth. If we believe that in the Person of Jesus Christ God was manifest in the flesh, we may point to the Virgin-Birth as at least a satisfactory way of accounting for that Divine coming into human life. As it is impossible to reduce the person of Jesus to the limits of ordinary humanity, we work back from His uniqueness to discover some explanation of His method of entrance upon human conditions. Let us suppose Jesus to be very God, and the Virgin-Birth becomes at least credible. Our belief in the doctrine is supported by the consideration that no other adequate explanation is forthcoming as an alternative. The doctrine continues to hold the field as accounting for the entrance of Jesus into our humanity. Every effect must have its adequate cause, and the life of Christ finds no other cause or explanation than that of the Virgin-Birth, so far as His earthly origin is concerned. Besides, the Virgin-Birth seems to include and combine all the elements which were required for the human life of the Messiah.

(a) The Messiah was to be the legal heir of Joseph. Betrothal gave the legal status of wedlock (Deuteronomy 22:23-24), and in such phrases as "Mary thy wife" (Matthew 1:20), "His father David" (Luke 1:32), we see the fulfillment of this requirement in the Person of Jesus, the Son of Mary, the betrothed wife of Joseph, the heir of Solomon.

(b) The Messiah was to be born of a virgin, or at least of a young woman. Whether Isaiah 7:14 is to be rendered by "virgin" or "young woman," a Messianic application of the passage seems clear, and coming midway between the "seed of the woman" (Genesis 3:15), and "born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4), it certainly points to His human parentage on the maternal side.

(c) The Messiah was to be the Son of God. Another Messianic passage is Isaiah 9:6, where the Child with the four or five names is clearly some one far beyond any human personality, and in the light of Luke 1:32; Luke 1:35; Luke 2:11, it is impossible not to see in these passages the unique Divine Sonship of the Messiah as realized in Jesus the Son of Mary.

(d) The Messiah was to be a perfect sacrifice for sin. The Passover and other offerings required by the Mosaic law pointed forward to something yet to come, to the blood which spoke "better things than that of Abel"; and in view of such passages as 1 Peter 1:19 we can readily see how the

sinless and spotless Person of Jesus was the complete fulfillment of these typical anticipations.

Now, when these four historical requirements are considered separately and together, they are seen to be fulfilled by Him whom the Church believes to have been "conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." There is no other personage in history in whom all these four requirements are blended, united, correlated, and fulfilled. We have a right to demand an alternative before giving up the universal belief of centuries. Our reluctance to yield the question of the Virgin-Birth is confirmed by a consideration of the attitude of mind on the part of many who deny it. In general, the denial is due to the prevalence of belief in a doctrine of evolution. Now, whatever may be said of this doctrine in the spheres of natural and mental science, we are still without proof that morality can be accounted for by it, much more that human self-consciousness and self-determination are explicable thereby. Above all, we are faced with the fact that Jesus Christ cannot be explained in terms of evolution; the records of His life and extraordinary influence conclusively disprove the theory in His case, and in view of this great exception we have a right to say that if evolution cannot account for His personality as Man, it may well be unable to account for His human origin. If a Divine intervention was necessary to account for the Man Christ Jesus, it may have been equally necessary for His earthly origin. At least there is no a priori reason why this should not be the case.

There is, however, a special reason for being suspicious of present-day denials of the Virgin-Birth. They are connected with a phase of modern philosophy which substitutes for a Divine Incarnation in the Person of Christ a Divine Immanence in creation, and will allow only such Immanence in Christ as we find in nature and in man. Further, this philosophy substitutes ideas for facts, and dissipates the historic personality of Jesus in ideas which are to have for us the value of God and His truth. Now it is manifestly easy to surrender the Virgin-Birth if there has been no Incarnation and no historical revelation of God in Christ, but granted the historical appearance at a particular period of Jesus Christ as Messiah and Redeemer, it is obvious that no mere natural and human considerations, and certainly no mere ideas, will account for Him. It is an unquestioned historical fact that from the time of Cerinthus, who was the first to deny the Virgin-Birth, denial of this has often led to the rejection of the Incarnation itself. The historic Person of Jesus as Messiah and Savior as stated in the former chapters has still to be explained, and all attempts to solve the problem apart from a Divine Incarnation have utterly failed. It it futile to say that belief in the Virgin-Birth is due to Jewish ideas, while at the same time the one Old Testament text that looks in that direction (Isaiah 7:14, is denied. If that passage is not to be used in support of the doctrine, then there is no Old Testament anticipation whatever, and certainly nothing in Jewish literature of the time of Christ to account for the doctrine. Nor is there any proof that any such expectation prevailed among Alexandrian Jews as represented by Philo. Again, there is no trace of Oriental influence on Christianity which would account for a belief in the Virgin Birth. The chapters in the Gospels are essentially Jewish in characteristics, and not only is there no trace of any such contact of Oriental ideas with primitive Christianity as would suffice for the doctrine of the Virgin-Birth, but still more, the hostility of early Christianity to other forms of thought would almost certainly have prevented any such influence if it had been forthcoming. The argument from incarnations as believed in India today is not to the point, because there is no trace of early contact between Christianity and India, and because Indian incarnations have no virgin-birth associated with them. They are witnesses to the doctrine of a Divine Immanence, but nothing

more.[1]

[1] See Tisdall, Mythic Christs and the True, for a discussion on the supposed connection of Christianity with Eastern faiths and cults. The one rock on which all these non-miraculous theories are shattered is the historic Person of the Man Christ Jesus. He has to be accounted for. The effect demands a sufficient cause, and the Virgin-Birth alone gives this adequate explanation of the mode of entrance upon His earthly life.

If it be asked why this doctrine was not made prominent in the early Church and put in the forefront of apostolic preaching, the reply is obvious. There was no need of it. Attention was rightly concentrated on the resurrection of Jesus and the Divine claim involved in that. In other words, it was the unique Personality rather than the mode of His earthly appearance that formed the Gospel. We can see this by a simple illustration. The Apostles preached the Divine forgiveness of sins in Christ instead of proclaiming the Godhead as a Trinity revealed in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. By so doing the hearers would be led through the avenue of personal experience to a spiritual assurance concerning Christ which no intellectual discussion could either give or take away. But on the basis of this personal experience the early Christians would inevitably seek some intellectual explanation, and thus from their personal consciousness of Jesus Christ in His redeeming power they would rise to a distinction between Him and the Father which virtually carried with it an essential distinction such as is now involved in the doctrine of the Trinity. We can see that by the time of II Corinthians (2 Corinthians 13:14) the Christian doctrine of the Godhead as Triune was perfectly clear. In the same way, the doctrine of the Virgin-Birth would in due course give the early Christians the needed and adequate explanation of the mode of the appearance of Christ, and we know by the date of Luke’s Gospel that the doctrine was then fully known and accepted. The preaching of the fact of the Incarnation rather than the mode is the true method of presenting the Gospel; first what Christ is, and only then how He came to be what He is. In these considerations of the true perspective of Christian teaching we may rightly explain the silence of St. Paul and St. John. There was no need of the Virgin-Birth for evangelistic purposes, but only for the intellectual instruction of Christian people. Adequate reasons could be given for silence on this point in the earliest years of the Church, but to argue from this silence to a disbelief, or at any rate to an ignorance of the doctrine on the part of the early Christians, is not only in the highest degree precarious, but is really contradictory of the facts associated with the early date of Luke’s Gospel. From all this it will have been seen that the Virgin-Birth cannot be viewed alone or discussed merely on its historical evidences. It must be considered in the light of our impression of Christ and His revelation. In other words, our decision will virtually depend upon our theological and philosophical presuppositions concerning Jesus Christ. As Illingworth rightly says—

It is impossible to approach any complex problem without presuppositions; and doubly so a problem that not only involves physical, moral, and spiritual elements all combined, but is also of supreme personal interest, of one kind or another, to all who approach it, and touches human nature to the quick. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the controversies waged over the Gospel history are entirely concerned with the presuppositions of the respective combatants. The Gospels considered as documents that have come down to us are the same facts for all alike. It is over their interpretation that issue is joined, and this interpretation is determined by our presuppositions.[1] [1] Illingworth, Reason and Revelation, pp. 88, 89.

Even if it were possible to satisfy every one on the historical and critical problems connected with the early dates and integrity of the first and third Gospels, we should not have settled the question. The decision depends on something far deeper than scholarship. It turns on our view of the Person of Christ, whether or not He is Divine, supernatural, miraculous. Attention must be concentrated on this point. The ultimate solution of a belief in the Virgin-Birth lies in the answer to the question, "What think ye of Christ?"

We therefore see no reason for rejecting the testimony of the Gospels and the witness of the whole Church to the Virgin-Birth. If the narratives of the Gospels are not true, they are a deliberate fiction; there is no other alternative. And if the Church has been mistaken throughout the centuries, it is certainly the greatest, most widespread, and most persistent delusion that has ever been known. Two almost insuperable difficulties appear in this connection: (1) How did the idea of the Virgin-Birth arise so soon if it was not based on fact? (2) How were the narratives of the Gospels accepted so early and universally if they were not historical? The Person of Christ must, therefore, be accounted for. A sinless Man is a moral miracle, and inasmuch as mind must have an organism by which to express itself, there is no valid reason for not accepting a physical miracle. We approach the Virgin-Birth with the definite belief in Jesus Christ as God to which we have come on independent grounds, and our acceptance of the truth of the Virgin-Birth is thus mainly due to our prior belief in the Godhead of Christ. To quote Dr. Stanton—

Believing in the indissoluble union between God and man in Jesus Christ, the miraculous birth of Jesus seems to us the only fitting accompaniment of this union, and so to speak, the natural expression of it in order of outward facts.[1] [1] Stanton, The Jewish and the Christian Messiah, p. 376. The ultimate decision will perhaps only be arrived at by settling the question as to what Jesus came into the world to do. If the one thing that man needs is illumination, then ideas will suffice, and no Divine Incarnation is necessary, but if there is such a thing as sin in the world, we must predicate a Divine, sinless Redeemer to deal with it. For such a Redeemer the only adequate explanation, so far as His earthly origin is concerned, is the ancient belief of the Church Universal that He was "conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."

000.13. Chapter 13. The Meaning of Christ

Chapter 13.

The Meaning of Christ

Facts can never be properly appreciated until an endeavor is made to penetrate behind them to their meaning. We have now reached the point when an attempt must be made to discover the meaning of all this emphasis on Christ. We have considered His character as perfect and sinless, His claim to Divine authority over mankind, His death as an atonement for sin, His resurrection as the demonstration of His Divine life, His Gospels as faithful records of His earthly manifestations, His Church as the perpetual testimony to His saving power, His grace as witnessed to by His devoted followers, His influence as acknowledged by some of His greatest foes. But what does it all mean? Why do we lay such stress on the Fact, the Person, and the Work of Christ? The answer is, because Christ is before everything else a revelation of God. This, and nothing short of it, is the one and complete explanation of Christ. The idea of God is the dominating idea in all religions, and the idea of Christ as the Revealer of God is the dominating idea in Christianity. The supreme message of Christianity is, "There is one God and one Mediator between God and man, himself man, Jesus"; one God, and one unique Mediator as the personal Revealer of God to man. No one can doubt that this is the meaning of the place given to Christ in the New Testament. The Name of Christ is found everywhere therein, and always in connection with His personal revelation of God. It meets our gaze at all points, and proclaims with no uncertain sound that to us men God has revealed Himself in Christ Jesus, that for us, for religion, for Christianity, for salvation, for life, Christ is God. The disciple’s question addressed to Christ, "Show us the Father," is at once an admission of his own need and a confession of his belief that Christ could supply it; and the relation of Jesus Christ to God is set forth in the New Testament with no uncertain sound. "All things are delivered to me of my Father" (Matthew 11:27). "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 16:9). He is the image of the invisible God, the effulgence of His glory (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus Christ, divine and human, is for all time and for all men the final, complete and sufficient manifestation of God. The unchangeable sum of Christianity is the message: The Word was God, and the Word became flesh. This being so, it is clear that Christianity is not essentially a law for the regulation of our conduct; not a philosophy for the harmonious co-ordination of the facts of experience under our present forms of thought; not a system of worship by which men can approach their Maker in reverent devotion. It offers all these as the natural fruit of the Truth which it proclaims in the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ. But Christ Himself, His person and His life, in time and beyond time, and not any scheme of doctrine which He delivered, is the central object and support of faith.[1] [1] Westcott, The Gospel of Life, p. 100.

This, and this alone, constitutes essential Christianity.

Whatever men may find and emphasize in Christ, His Sonship, His Messiahship, His Teaching, His Manhood—while these are all included in the essence of Christianity, they do not exhaust it. Christianity as Christ conceived of it transcends all these different aspects of embracing them in

the one supreme and dominant truth of His personal revelation of God. The essential fact is that He brings God to man in order that He may bring men to God.

Man’s greatest, deepest need is God, and union and communion with Him. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee." Personality can only be satisfied with personality, and man’s personality can never be satisfied with any personality short of God’s. Now this fellowship with God, Christ came to reveal and mediate, and it is the bare truth to say that He reveals and mediates it as none else does or ever has done.

We may argue, first, directly from the fact of Christ Himself—His life, His teaching, and especially His consciousness—as the greatest and most significant fact in the world, and so our best proof of the existence of God in the full Christian sense. This seems to me, even from the side of pure argument, the most decisive proof. The argument goes upon the simple assumption that, if we are ever to discern the real nature of the ultimate world-ground, our best light must come from the greatest and most significant facts. For myself, I have no doubt that Christ is the most significant of all facts known to us, and, therefore, the best basis for direct and decisive inference to the nature of the world-ground. The argument does not at all go, it should be noticed, upon any assumption of the arbitrary authority of Jesus, but simply upon the significance of what He is. Any authority subsequently given Him must be based wholly upon what He is in fact found to be. I count the fact of Christ, the greatest of all proofs of a completely satisfying God—the proof most powerful to produce conviction in the mind of a man who has himself come to full moral self-consciousness.[1] [1] King, The Seeming Unreality of the Spiritual Life, p. 202. In Christ we see what God is, both in His personal character and also in His relation to us. He is that Love, Wisdom, Righteousness, Grace for which we crave, while in Him we are enabled to understand and experience what God wills us to be. The doctrine meets our deepest needs as nothing else can.

"The very God! Think, Abib; dost thou think?

So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too— So through the thunder comes a human voice, Saying, ’O heart I made, a heart beats here! And thou must love Me who hast died for thee.’"

This is the Gospel, the good news. He was God manifest in the flesh, and came to this earth "that He might bring us to God." It is this that makes Christ central and dominant in every life that receives Him, winning trust, redeeming from sin, eliciting devotion, and inspiring hope. It is because He is God manifest, God entering into human life, God meeting human need. The most important thing for the man who is to submit himself to God is surely that he should be absolutely certain of the reality of God, and Jesus does establish in us, through the fact of His personal life, a certainty of God which covers every doubt. When once He has attracted us by the beauty of His Person, and made us bow before Him by its exalted character, then even amid our deepest doubts, that Person of Jesus will remain present with us as a thing incomparable, the most precious fact in history, the most precious fact our life contains.[1] [1] Herrmann, Communion with God, p. 97.

But, it is said, the Person of Christ is a mystery—the union of God and Man in one Person is beyond our comprehension. True, but is this a reason for setting it aside altogether? Beyond comprehension is not necessarily beyond apprehension, and apprehension is a reality and provides a sufficiency which covers most of the essential things of life. Wherever deity and

humanity meet there is—there must be—mystery, and we cannot therefore be surprised that since they meet in Jesus Christ as they do nowhere else, the element of mystery has always been realized. The Person of Christ is exactly the point in the Christian religion where the intellect feels overwhelmed by mysteries it cannot resolve, yet where Christian experience finds the factors of its most characteristic qualities, and the Church the truth it has lived by and is bound to live for.[1] [1] Fairbairn, The Philosophy of the Christian Religion, p. 5. The solution of the problem has been attempted in almost every age, but without success. It is easy to cut the gordian knot by denying one or other of the conditions of the problem—by rejecting either the Deity or the Humanity. This at once resolves the mystery, but it also leaves the facts concerning Christ a greater problem than ever. These facts have to be explained, and cannot be set aside simply because they are mysteries. When all allowance has been made, there remains an irreducible minimum of fact about the historic Christ which calls for attention and explanation. We cannot get rid of facts by describing them as inexplicable. The true humanity of Jesus Christ is a patent fact of the New Testament record, and yet the way in which His life transcended humanity is equally patent. The supreme idea that runs through the Gospel story is the consciousness that Jesus Christ is more than man. Whether we read of the Virgin-Birth, the Miracles, the Character, the Death, or the Resurrection, it cannot be doubted that the writers intend us to obtain the impression that Jesus Christ was a unique manifestation of God. Dr. Denney points out this in referring to the Virgin-Birth—

It provides a way of expressing the assurance that the line of Christ is throughout Divine. If He was Son of God at all, He did not begin to be so at any given age... He never was anything else. This is the truth guarded by the Virgin-Birth.[1] [1] Denney, article, "Jesus Christ," Hastings' Bible Dictionary, One Volume Edition.

It is impossible to reconstruct the life of Jesus on a purely natural historic and non-mysterious basis. Those who attempt to do so have confessedly no new historical facts to deal with, no new contemporary documents to put against our Gospels. The supernatural element in Christ and Christianity remains, and demands attention.

I start from the fact, which appears to me to be as certain as anything in history, that extraordinary phenomena happened in connection with the life of Christ and the ministry of His Apostles, and happened on a large scale. The most decisive witness on this head is St. Paul, who speaks not only from his own experience, but from that of his immediate contemporaries and associates... These forces of which the Apostle is conscious had their rise, as he knows and the whole Church knows, in the life and work of Christ, which set the train in motion... The inference backwards that we draw from the writings of St. Paul is abundantly confirmed by every document that criticism can distinguish bearing upon the life of Christ. We cannot help seeing that not only St. Paul and the authors of these documents, named or unnamed, but the whole body of Christian opinion at the time, agreed in assuming, not merely that extraordinary things happened in connection with the Person of Jesus, but that His Person was itself extraordinary and transcendent, something beyond the measures of common humanity.[1] [1] Sanday, Expository Times, vol. xx, p. 157. So that when we read the Gospels and the testimony of the Apostles we are face to face with the belief not only and merely of the particular writers, but with that of the whole Christian community of which they were the exponents and for which they wrote.[1] [1] Warfield, The Lord of Glory, pp. 133, 144. But beyond this and arising out of it is the supernatural element in the Christianity of the centuries.

After destructive criticism has done all its work on the Gospels, the problem still remains. The Church, as we have already seen, has to be accounted for, the community of all races drawn and held together through the ages by the love of Christ's Name. This, too, is a supernatural fact, which is characterized by mystery and needs an explanation. Whether, then, we think of Christ or of the Church, we are in the presence of the supernatural, and therefore of mystery, and we maintain the utter impossibility of resolving the mystery on natural grounds. If we are to reject Christ because He is mysterious, we shall inevitably find ourselves face to face with other facts for which there is no explanation. The history of nineteen centuries becomes an insoluble enigma, and man is left absolutely alone without God, and without the satisfaction of those needs which are as clamant today as they have ever been. The only possible explanation of Christ and Christianity is that He was God revealed in human form. His uniqueness in relation to God makes the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation the only adequate explanation of His personality and work. It is utterly impossible to hold to a merely human Christ. The Christ who proclaims God, who forgives sin, who unites men to God, who is and has ever been honored and worshipped in the Church, is the only satisfying solution of the problem of how God and man may be brought together, and man's life find its full realization and satisfaction.

Grant that Jesus was really God, in a word, and everything falls orderly into its place. Deny it, and you have a Jesus and a Christianity on your hands both equally unaccountable: and that is as much as to say that the ultimate proof of the deity of Christ is just—Jesus and Christianity. If Christ were not God, we should have a very different Jesus and a very different Christianity. And that is the reason that modern unbelief bends all its energies in a vain effort to abolish the historical Jesus and to destroy historical Christianity. Its instinct is right, but its task is hopeless. We need the Jesus of history to account for the Christianity of history. And we need both the Jesus of history and the Christianity of history to account for the history of the world. The history of the world is the product of that precise Christianity which has actually existed, and this Christianity is the product of the precise Jesus which actually was. To be rid of this Jesus we must be rid of this Christianity, and to be rid of this Christianity we must be rid of the world-history which has grown out of it. We must have the Christianity of history and the Jesus of history, or we leave the world that exists, and as it exists, unaccounted for. But so long as we have either the Jesus of history or the Christianity of history we shall have a divine Jesus.[1] [1] Warfield, The Lord of Glory, p. 278.

000.14. Chapter 14. The Verification of Christ

Chapter 14.

The Verification of Christ A well-known American scholar in his early ministry many years ago preached a course of sermons on the Resurrection, in which he stated and tested the various arguments to the fullest extent of his power. There was present in his audience an eminent lawyer, the head of the legal profession in the city. He listened to the preacher Sunday by Sunday as he marshalled proofs, weighed evidence, considered objections, analyzed the stories of the Gospels, and stated the case for the Resurrection. At length the conclusion was drawn by the preacher that Christianity must be true since Jesus was raised from the dead. At the close of the last sermon the lawyer went to see the minister and said, "I am a lawyer; I have listened to your statement of the case; I consider it incontrovertible, but this case demands a verdict. This is no mere intellectual conflict; there is life in it. If Jesus Christ rose from the dead, His religion is true, and we must submit to it." The lawyer was as good as his word and became a Christian. The same is true of our present subject; the case demands a verdict. It is no mere question of dialectic, no topic of argumentative discussion only, no matter of pure contemplation, no problem of philosophy. It is vital, essential, fundamental, and demands immediate and full attention. It claims the careful consideration of every mind, conscience, heart and will.

It is not a matter of mere argument, still less of personal indifference what a man thinks of Jesus Christ. There are those who seem to think that so long as the spirit and life are right, opinion counts for very little. This was not Christ’s own view. He regarded it as of importance that men should have right opinions about Him. "Who do men say that I am?" He was above all things solicitous of training His disciples in the direction of right thoughts of Himself. There are, of course, many things in life on which we may have an open mind, and in which right opinion or wrong opinion leads to no serious results but this is not the case in regard to Christ, for it does matter very much what we think of Him and what our attitude to Him is. What we receive from Christ will largely depend on what we believe Him to be. It is obvious that the results must necessarily be vastly different according as we regard Christ as a good man or as God manifest in the flesh. Everything we know of God, and everything we need from Him, is deeply affected by our attitude to Christ. If He be not God then fellowship with Him is an impossibility, for He is dead "in the lorn Syrian town," and we cannot get into personal contact even with His writings, for He left none. So in regard to redemption from sin, it matters very much whether Christ is God, because our view of His death turns on this fact. If He were any one other than God His death would differ in no respect from an ordinary death. If He be not God, then God’s gift of Him, and His love in giving, would be no giving of Himself, and would have no special and unique characteristics. And even in regard to prayer and worship, if Christ be not God our approach to Him in prayer were nothing short of irreverence and blasphemy in placing Him where God alone should be. It makes a profound difference, therefore, what we think of Christ, for no one can reasonably, honestly, and heartily trust, follow, and obey Christ if he has no definite and strong convictions as to His Deity.

Verification, therefore, is the great essential, the imperative necessity. We must verify the claim of Christ and come to some definite conclusion concerning Him. And it is to this that we now call attention.

What is the great, the supreme problem in connection with Christ? It is to discover how a historical personality can become a religious fact for all men. How can a historic Person who appeared at one point of time centuries ago become the permanent religious fact and force for all time? How can One who appeared under the specific conditions and limitations of history be the universal spiritual life of millions in all ages, races, and circumstances? There have been several attempts to solve this problem.

Many argue that the solution is found in reverting to the historical Christ of the Gospels, in discovering the essential features of "the inner life of Jesus," and making that the standard of our life. "Back to Christ" has been for years the watchword of a school of thinkers with the object of recovering and realizing for today the personality of Jesus Christ. But does it really help faith and satisfy human need today to revert to the past, to picture a Christ of centuries ago, and to live solely in the light of that great Figure? We need and must have something far more real, far more definite, far more present than this. The Christ who is to be our life today must be something more than a fact, however beautiful, of nineteen centuries ago.

People told us some years ago that our views of the Gospel were inadequate, and the direction was shouted to us—"Back to Christ!" Well, we went back: and we found that they had prepared the scenery and the dresses and the manners and customs of His Palestinian environment, and they told us about the subjects of His teaching, and gave us a syllabus of His method and His views upon religious questions, and they said, "Thus and thus spake the Teacher of Galilee: in this and that group of sayings we unfold to you the mind of the Master!" It is all very beautiful and valuable: it is always educative to be made conscious of the spaces of history, and to be reminded of facts and truths which have been unduly subordinated. But has there not been all the while at our hearts a chill—a loneliness? Is not the deepest religious question, after all, for each man, this: whether there be in Christ a present Saviour, who can cover me now with the robe of His righteousness? No historic research, no exposition of the doctrines of an old-world Teacher, removes the burden of the friendlessness of my sin-stained soul in a universe ruled by a holy God. If by your scholarship you so make to live again the classic scenes in which the Nazarene moved and taught that I am made painfully conscious of the long centuries that intervening divide Him from me: then all the more, if you would secure the abiding of my faith in Him, you must let me see how He can still reach me, and stand for me, the wings of His affluent personality outstretched to cover me.[1] [1] Johnston Ross, The Universality of Jesus, pp. 15 ff.

Others adopt a different method of solving the problem. They do not concern themselves with the Personality, but concentrate attention on His ideas. The real meaning and significance of Christ, on this view, lies in the principles which actuated Him, and which He taught His disciples. Love, self-sacrifice, pity, tenderness, righteousness, holiness—these and many other similar ideas are the essential things in life, and they are to be realized and lived without concerning ourselves about the Personality in which they were originally embodied. But the question at once arises whether this method meets all the demands of the situation. It may suit the philosopher but will it satisfy the needs of the average man? There is such a thing as sin in the world and in the human

heart, and ideas, however lofty, have never yet proved powerful enough to meet its terrible force. Let a man endeavor to help a fellow-sinner in his need when he comes with a burdened conscience and a haunting past. Let a man work among the fallen, the degraded, the vicious. Ideas will prove utterly powerless. Let a man face his own sin, the plague of his own heart, and try to get rid of it. Ideas will prove utterly futile and leave him more hopeless than before. Ideas in Christ were the expression and achievement of His Personality, and it is this difference of fact and experience between His life and ours that makes the burden and condemnation of sin still more real. "Ideals may charm the intellect, but cannot satisfy the heart."[1] If men could be saved and blessed by ideas, then the disciples of Christ after those wonderful three years of His teaching would surely have enjoyed the most uplifting and transforming of experiences. But we know they were morally powerless and entirely incapable of translating those ideals into reality. Ideas have no moral dynamic, and our deepest need is not knowledge, but power—a power in life that makes for righteousness.

[1] Quoted in Streatfeild, The Self-Interpretation of Christ, p. 41. The only God that can reveal Himself to us is one who shows Himself to us in our moral struggle as the Power to which our souls are really subject. This is what is vouchsafed to us in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.[1] [1] King, The Seeming Unreality of the Spiritual Life, p. 218.

Yet again, others endeavor to solve the problem of Christ's historic Personality as a religious fact and force by laying all the stress on personal spiritual experience as something really independent of historical fact and criticism. It is argued that even if we knew little or nothing more than the fact of Christ's life on earth, we should still be able to experience His grace and power as a living personal Saviour and Friend. The experiences of Christian men in all ages would, it is said, be a sufficient certification and guarantee that given the same conditions of personal reception and appropriation, the same spiritual results would accrue. Now there is a profound truth in the emphasis placed by this view on spiritual experience, and the way in which it has been insisted on during recent years and the power with which it may be used in life can hardly be over-estimated. It is one of our strongholds of certitude.

"Whoso hath felt the Spirit of the Highest, Cannot confound, or doubt Him, or deny.

Yea, with one voice, O world, though thou deniest, Stand thou on that side, for this am I." But experience as the sole and adequate foundation for religious life is a very different matter, and those who take up this position really admit its inadequacy in being compelled to predicate some knowledge, however slight, of the historical fact of Christ's life on earth. Even the mere knowledge that He lived and died is a testimony to the need of some historic foundation. The Christ of Experience cannot be sundered from the Christ of History, and the appeal to experience is impossible unless experience is based on historic fact. The history must guarantee the experience in the individual today just as the history has been the basis of the Church's experience in all ages. If we lose our faith in the historic fact of the Christ of the Gospels it will not be long before we lose our faith in the experience of the Christ of today. This process of disintegration is even now being realized among those who are reducing to virtual valuelessness the Gospel records of Jesus Christ. The Christ of faith cannot be separated from the Jesus of history without our soon losing both. If there is one thing that modern scholarship has made clear beyond question, it is that it is now impossible to deny that Jesus Christ had a unique relationship to God and a unique

relationship to man, and it is this uniqueness that provides the foundation and must give the warrant for that experience of Christ today which every Christian has and enjoys. It is vain to think that by sublimating the history into a philosophy we can retain its reality and power. It is impossible even for the learned to possess for long the Spirit of Jesus if we surrender the historical Jesus, while the attempt to set aside the historical Jesus in the case of ordinary people would result in the loss of vital Christianity altogether. What, then, is the true solution of this all-important problem? There is essential truth in all the foregoing contentions, but none of them singly is anything like the whole truth. The solution is found in taking the truths in all these three suggested solutions, and uniting them and making them effective for life by means of that which is the unique feature of Christianity as a Divine revelation. What this is will be evident from an incident. Some time ago a thoughtful French pastor expressed to the writer great perplexity in the face of the fact that while scholars often spent years in arriving at adequate conclusions about the Jesus of the Gospels, unlettered Christian people became convinced of the reality of Jesus Christ through experience, with scarcely any difficulty. He could not understand the reason for these very different results. "May it not be due," he was asked, "to the Holy Spirit?" "How so?" he replied, "the Holy Spirit does not witness to a man's heart that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, lived at Nazareth, worked at Capernaum, and died in Jerusalem." "No," was the answer, "but the Holy Spirit is admittedly the Spirit of Truth and the fact that He does witness to Jesus and does make Him real to the soul, and that He does not do this in regard to Mohammed, or Buddha, or Plato, is surely a proof that the facts about Jesus are true, or the Holy Spirit would not witness to them." "I never thought of that" he said; "I believe this will resolve my difficulty." Is it not in this way that the problem of the personality of Christ as a religious fact for today is to be solved? Jesus Christ said of the Holy Spirit, "He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall shew it unto you." Bishop Thirlwall once said that "the great intellectual and religious struggle of our day turns mainly on this question, Whether there is a Holy Ghost." Observe how this works out. Historical criticism may send us back to Christ, may insist on our concentrating attention on the Jesus of the Gospels, and may produce for us what it regards as the true picture of that Personality. Then the Holy Spirit will take the irreducible minimum which criticism has left, and has been compelled to leave simply because it is irreducible, and will use it to impress, convince, and inspire the soul with its picture of a unique, sinless, perfect, Divine Figure. In the same way the ideas which philosophy finds in such fulness and fruitfulness in the historic Jesus will be taken by the Holy Spirit and made real and vital to the soul. For Christian life and character it is not possible to dwell much on mere ideals, for they are matters of philosophy rather than of religion. Ideals must be realized if they are to be of value for life, and the work of the Holy Spirit is to make these ideals of Christ real in the souls of His followers. It is for this reason that neither the Example of Christ nor His ideas are of special practical value if considered alone, Imitatio Christi is but a small part of the truth: Repetitio Christi is nearer the whole. Christ is not full set before us when He is regarded simply as an external Object to imitate, and when His ideas and ideals are to be produced in us by imitation. The true life is that which comes as the result of the Holy Spirit glorifying Christ in the heart and working in us that life and those ideals. And this has already brought us to the central truth of Christianity, that the Holy Spirit brings to bear on our hearts and lives the presence and power of the living Christ, and thereby links together the Christ of History and the Christ of Faith. The Holy Spirit, in a word, is God active in the soul for man's salvation, and the purpose and method of His activity is the revelation of Christ to heart and life. The Holy Spirit is thus no impersonal influence, but God

Himself in contact with the spirit of man. In the abysmal deeps of personality He is at work, and what He does is simply this: He makes Christ real to the soul. And thus the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to Christ is the very heart of Christianity, and by means of it the antithesis between past and present, history and experience, objective and subjective, is, if not reconciled, at any rate transcended, and God and man meet in Christ for life and fellowship, character and conduct, holiness and service.

Christianity, in a word, meets and hallows our broadest views of nature and life. It receives the testimony of universal history to the adequacy of its essential teaching to meet the needs of men. It reaches with unfailing completeness to the depths of each individual soul. The Person of Christ includes all that belongs to the perfection of every man. The Spirit of Christ brings the prayer through which each one can reach his true end. Christianity, in a word, to sum up what has been said already, offers us an ideal and offers us strength to attain to it.[1] [1] Westcott, The Gospel of Life, p. 110.

We end, therefore, where we began, by saying that Christianity is Christ, and we add thereto the complement—Christ becomes Christianity for us by the Holy Spirit of God. In these two truths are found essential Christianity and the simple though sufficient secret of its verification and proof.

It follows, therefore to present our conclusion under another aspect, that the ultimate criterion, the adequate verification, of Revelation to man, in its parts and in its completeness, lies in its proved fitness for furthering, and at last for accomplishing, his destiny... This character belongs perfectly, as we affirm, to the Gospel. If it could be shown that there is one least Truth in things for which the Gospel finds no place; if it could be shown that there is one fragment of human experience with which it does not deal; then, with whatever pathetic regret it might be, we should confess that we can conceive something beyond it—that we still look for another. But I can see no such limitation, no such failure in the Gospel itself, whatever limitations and failures there may have been and may be still in man’s interpretation of it. Christ in the fulness of His Person and of His Life is the Gospel. Christ in the fulness of His Person and of His Life is the confirmation of the Gospel from age to age.[1] [1] Westcott, The Gospel of Life, p. 112. The crowning proof of the revelation of the Christ of the Gospels and of experience is that He is capable of being reproduced by the Holy Spirit in the lives of His followers. The culminating evidence of the Godhead of Christ is that He is able by the Holy Spirit to bestow His Divine life on the lives of all who are willing to receive Him. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name" (John 1:12). He thus assures us at once of the certainty of human access to God and of Divine approach to man. All other views of Christ fail either on one side or the other. A human Christ would be unable to satisfy us as to access to God, while a Christ who is not directly in touch with God could not assure us of any direct approach of God to man. Like Jacob’s ladder, which was set up on earth with the top reaching to heaven, Jesus Christ in His human life is a solid foundation, and in His Divine life is a sure guarantee for every soul that wishes to come to God by Him and to commune with God through Him.

We see, then, that for human life Christ is essential, Christ is fundamental, Christ is all. We may, like some, reject Him. We may, like others, be impressed and attracted without definitely yielding to Him. Or we may be intellectually convinced and yet try to evade Him. But the one thing we cannot do is to ignore Him. "What think ye of Christ?" is a question that has to be answered. "What

shall I do with Jesus?" is a question that cannot be avoided. The question is far too serious to be ignored even if we could do so. The remarkable fact about Christ is that, unlike every other founder of religion, He cannot possibly be overlooked. Even the attempt to ignore Him is in reality a confession of an opinion about Him. Indifferentism is possible about many things, but absolutely impossible about Christ.

Christ's call to the soul is four-fold: Come unto Me, Learn of Me, Follow Me, Abide in Me. Come unto Me as Redeemer; Learn of Me as Teacher; Follow Me as Master; Abide in me as Life. And all that is required of us is the one sufficient and inclusive attitude of soul which the New Testament knows as faith. This attitude and response of trust, selfsurrender, dependence, is the essential attitude and response of the soul of man to God. Every sincere man knows full well the impossibility of realizing his true life in isolation, apart from God. Faith as man's response to God for ever puts an end to the spiritual helplessness and hopelessness of the solitary man. It introduces him to a new relationship to God in Christ, and opens the door to the coming of the Holy Spirit of light and life. It is the means whereby the needed strength, satisfaction, and security come to the soul from fellowship with God. Faith introduces the soul into a new world of blessed fellowship, uplifting motives, satisfying experiences, and spiritual powers, and from the moment the attitude of trust is taken up the Holy Spirit begins His work of revealing Jesus Christ to the soul. He brings into the heart the assurance of forgiveness and deliverance from the burden of the past, He bestows on the soul the gift of the Divine life, and then He commences a work that is never finished in this life of assimilating our lives to that of Christ, working in us that Christlikeness which is the essential and unique element of the Gospel ethic. In the deep and dim recesses of our personality the Holy Spirit works His blessed and marvellous way, transfiguring character, uplifting ideals, inspiring hopes, creating joys, and providing perfect satisfaction. And as we continue to maintain and deepen the attitude of faith the Holy Spirit is enabled to do His work and we are enabled to receive more of His grace. "That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:14). By every act of trust and selfsurrender we receive ever larger measures of the life of Christ, and all the while we are being changed into the image of Christ "from glory to glory" by the Spirit of the Lord.

Immortal love, for ever full, For ever flowing free, For ever shared, for ever whole, A never-ebbing sea. Our outward lips confess the Name All other names above;

Love only knoweth whence it came, And comprehendeth love.

We may not climb the heavenly steeps To bring the Lord Christ down; In vain we search the lowest deeps, For Him no depths can drown. And not for signs in heaven above Or earth below they look, Who know with John His smile of love, With Peter His rebuke. In joy of inward peace, or sense Of sorrow over sin, He is His own best evidence— His witness is within. No fable old, nor mythic lore, Nor dream of bards and seers, No dead fact stranded on the shore Of the oblivious years; But warm, sweet, tender, even yet A present help is He; And faith has still its Olivet, And love its Galilee. The healing of His seamless dress Is by our beds of pain;

We touch Him in life's throng and press And we are whole again.

O Lord and Master of us all, Whate'er our name or sign, We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call, We test our lives by Thine. Our thoughts lie open to Thy sight;

And, naked to Thy glance, Our secret sins are in the light Of Thy pure countenance.

Apart from Thee all gain is loss, All labour vainly done; The solemn shadow of Thy Cross Is better than the sun.

Alone, O Love ineffable, Thy saying Name is given; To turn aside from Thee is hell, To walk with Thee is heaven.

We faintly hear, we dimly see, In differing phrase we pray;

But, dim or clear, we own in Thee The Light, the Truth, the Way.

—Whittier.

000.15. Bibliography

Bibliography Allen, W. C. "The Virgin Birth," The Interpreter, Feb. 1905.

Ballard, F. The Miracles of Unbelief.

Box, G. H. Article, "Virgin Birth," Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels.

Brace, C. L. Gesta Christi.

Brooks, Bishop Phillips. The Influence of Jesus.

Bushnell, H. The Character of Christ.

Cairns, D. S. Christianity in the Modern World.

Cairns, J. Christ and the Christian Faith.

Chadwick, Bishop. Christ Bearing Witness to Himself.

Chase, Bishop. Cambridge Theological Essays, "The Gospels."

Dale, R. W. Essays and Addresses (No. 1, "Christ and Christendom").

D’Arcy, Bishop. Ruling Ideas of our Lord.

Day, E. H. The Evidence for the Resurrection.

Denney, J. Jesus and the Gospel.

Denney, J. Article, "Jesus Christ," Standard Bible Dictionary.

Denney, J. The Death of Christ.

Du Bose, W. P. The Gospel in the Gospels.

Dudden, F. H. In Christ’s Name.

Fairbairn, A. M. The Philosphy of the Christian Religion.

Fairbairn, A. M. The Place of Christ in Modern Theology.

Figgis, J. N. The Gospel and Human Needs.

Forrest, D. W. The Christ of History and Experience.

Forsyth, P. T. The Person and Place of Jesus Christ.

Garvie, A. E. Studies in the Inner Life of Jesus.

Glover, T. R. The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire.

Gore, Bishop. The Incarnation of the Son of God.

E. G. Guthrie, P. H. Epler, W. B. Thorp, The Personality of Christ.

Henslow, G. Christ no Product of Evolution.

Hoyt, W. The Lord’s Teachings concerning His own Person.

Illingworth, J. R. Reason and Revelation.

Illingworth, J. R. Divine Immanence.

Illingworth, J. R. Personality, Human and Divine, Jefferson, C. E. The Character of Jesus.

Kilpatrick, T. B. Article, "Incarnation," Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels.

King, H. C. The Seeming Unreality of the Spiritual Life.

Knowling, R. J. Article, "Birth of Christ," Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels.

Latham, H. The Risen Master.

Liddon, Canon. The Divinity of our Lord and Saviour.

Lucas, B. The Faith of a Christian.

Mastermann, J. H. B. Was Jesus Christ Divine?

Mullens, E. Y. Why we Believe in Christianity.

Nicoll, W. R. The Church’s One Foundation.

Nolloth, C. F. The Person of Our Lord and Recent Thought.

Orr, J. The Christian View of God and the World.

Orr, J. The Virgin-Birth of Christ.

Orr, J. The Resurrection of Jesus.

Ottley, H. B. The Great Dilemma Parker, J. Ecce Deus.

Parkin, G. The New Testament Portrait of Christ.

Paterson, W. P. Article, "Jesus Christ," Hastings’ one-volume Bible Dictionary.

Robinson, C. H. Studies in the Character of Christ.

Robinson, C. H. Studies in the Resurrection.

Robinson, J. Armitage. Thoughts on the Incarnation.

Ross, G. Johnston. The Universality of Jesus.

Sanday, W. The Life of Christ in Recent Research.

Simpson, P. C. The Fact of Christ.

Simpson, W. J. S. The Resurrection of Our Lord.

Smyth, Newman. Old Faiths in New Light.

Speer R. E. The Deity of Christ.

Spurr, F. C. Jesus is God.

Stalker, J. The Christology of Jesus.

Streatfeild, G. S. The Self-Interpretation of Jesus Christ.

Thorburn, T. J. The Evidence for the Virgin-Birth.

Tisdall, W. St. Clair. Mythic Christs and the True.

Warfield, B. B. The Lord of Glory.

Westcott, Bishop. The Gospel of Life.

Young, J. The Christ of History.

Varley, H., Junr. Scientia Christi.

Chapter 18

00A.00.1 Genesis, A Devotional Commentary

Genesis A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY W.H. GRIFFITH THOMAS Originally copyrighted in 1901. This work is now in public domain

00A.01 Introduction

Introduction The first book of the Bible is for several reasons one of the most interesting and fascinating portions of Scripture. Its place in the Canon, its relation to the rest of the Bible, and the varied and striking character of its contents combine to make it one of the most prominent in Holy Writ. It is with a real spiritual insight, therefore, that the people of God in all ages have fastened upon this book, and given it their earnest attention. It is also a testimony to its value and importance that criticism of various kinds and degrees has also concentrated itself upon this first book of the Bible. Its substance and claim are far too important to be overlooked. In the Hebrew the title of the book is taken from its first words, Bereshith (“In the beginning”). The title of the Authorized Version, following the Septuagint, refers to the contents of the book. It is a book of beginnings, and is true to this idea throughout.

I. Its Purpose. As the purpose is not definitely stated in any part of the book, it is, of course, necessary to read it through in order to gain an idea of the author’s meaning and object. It should therefore be read through at one time, so as to gain an adequate idea both of its contents and proportion. Indeed, the oftener it can be read right through at once with this aim the better, more particularly as we are accustomed to read it merely in chapters or sections. It is only as the book is carefully read and pondered that its purpose becomes manifest. The first thing that strikes us is the summary and fragmentary character of the first eleven chapters, and the fullness of detail in the remainder of the book, the latter chapters (12 to 50) dealing practically with only four men. Eleven chapters are thus concerned with the affairs of the human race, and thirty-nine chapters with one family. This, ordinarily, would seem very disproportionate, but in fact it is really an indication of the specific purpose of the book. The first eleven chapters are evidently introductory to the rest. Abraham is clearly the central figure of the book, chapters 12: 1 to 25: 10 being devoted to him; and all that follows is seen to be closely connected with, and to arise out of, the record of his life. If, then, we take our stand, as it were, at the beginning of chapter 12 and look backwards and forwards we can see (1) the descent of Abraham from Adam, and (2) the descendants of Abraham.

It must be evident from these simple facts that was no intention of writing a universal history of man, but only of recording the development of the Divine will and purpose for and through Abraham. It is history written with a special purpose. The book might easily have begun with Abraham if the purpose had been to record the ordinary history of an ordinary people; yet inasmuch as Israel was not an ordinary people, but charged with God’s purposes for the whole of man kind, it was necessary to show at least in brief form the connection between the progenitor of the human race and Abraham, in whom and in whose descendants the Divine purpose was to be realized. The two main divisions, therefore, are chapters 1 to 11 and chapters 12 to 50. The former section can be divided by the Flood, and the two parts referred respectively to Adam as the head of the original race, and to Noah as the head of the new race. Then follows the record of Abraham, the head of the family through which God’s purposes for the race were to be fulfilled, and the story of his three great descendants Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Before proceeding to a more detailed

consideration of the book it is essential that these main outlines should be clearly in view.

II. Its Plan.

Taking up the book again for the Plan of the purpose of fuller study, as we look at it more closely we become conscious of the recurrence of a phrase. These are the generations, or The Book of the Generations, and we observe that it occurs no fewer than ten times. Inasmuch as nine of these are without doubt superscriptions, and are therefore closely connected with what follows, it is a strong argument in favour of the view that the first of these occurrences is to be interpreted in the same way: These are the generations of the heaven and the earth (Genesis 2:4). It refers, not to what precedes, but to what follows. This view is clearly borne out by the meaning of the word translated “generations” (Toledoth), which comes from the Hebrew Yalad (‘to beget’), and invariably refers to results, not causes ; not to ancestry, but to descendants ; not to origin, but to effects. The book should therefore be analyzed as follows:

1. Introduction. The Creation. (Genesis 1:1-31; Genesis 2:1-3.) 2. The Generations of the Heaven and the Earth. (Genesis 2:4-25, Genesis 3:1-24, Genesis 4:1-26.) 3. The Generations of Adam. (Genesis 5:1-32; Genesis 6:1-8.) 4. The Generations of Noah. (Genesis 6:9-22, Genesis 7:1-24, Genesis 8:1-22, Genesis 9:1-29.) 5. The Generations of the Sons of Noah. (Genesis 10:1-21, Genesis 11:1-9.) 6. The Generations of Shem. (Genesis 11:10-26.)

7. The Generations of Terah. (Genesis 11:27-32, Genesis 12:1-20, Genesis 13:1-18, Genesis 14:1-24, Genesis 15:1-21, Genesis 16:1-16, Genesis 17:1-27, Genesis 18:1-33, Genesis 19:1-38, Genesis 20:1-18, Genesis 21:1-34, Genesis 22:1-24, Genesis 23:1-20, Genesis 24:1-67, Genesis 25:1-11.) 8. The Generations of Ishmael. (Genesis 25:12-18.)

9. The Generations of Isaac. (Genesis 25:19-34, Genesis 26:1-35, Genesis 27:1-46, Genesis 28:1-22, Genesis 29:1-35, Genesis 30:1-43, Genesis 31:1-55, Genesis 32:1-32, Genesis 33:1-20, Genesis 34:1-31, Genesis 35:1-29.) 10. The Generations of Esau. (Genesis 36:1-43; Genesis 37:1.)

11. The Generations of Jacob. (Genesis 37:2-36, Genesis 38:1-30, Genesis 39:1-23, Genesis 40:1-23, Genesis 41:1-57, Genesis 42:1-38, Genesis 43:1-34, Genesis 44:1-34, Genesis 45:1-28, Genesis 46:1-34, Genesis 47:1-31, Genesis 48:1-22, Genesis 49:1-33, Genesis 50:1-26.)

All thorough study of the Book of Genesis in the light of its structure, purpose, and plan should proceed along these lines. The book is thus seen to be in great measure a compilation of family documents; the author, whoever he was and whenever he wrote, made use of pre-existing materials, as was the case in the composition of the Gospels (Luke 1:1-4), and welded together the whole into a striking and beautiful unity. The record is thereby shown to partake of a genealogical character, and this is due to the author s purpose of tracing the fulfillments of God’s purposes of redemption through the line of the chosen people. These genealogies are consequently an essential part of the book, and form a consecutive series from Adam to Jacob. Although, as it has been often pointed out, they are occasionally interrupted for the purpose of introducing collateral and connected facts, the thread is soon resumed and the main purpose never allowed to go out of sight.

We may therefore describe the present Book of Genesis as consisting of an introduction, and ten books representing ten sections or stages of history, each complete in itself. It is worth while noticing once again, that in the course of bringing forward these successive genealogies the plan is to deal with collateral branches first, before dwelling upon the main line of descent in regard to the purpose of redemption. Thus the genealogy of Cain comes before that of Seth, those of Ham and Canaan before Shorn, that of Terah before Abraham, those of Ishmael and Esau before Isaac and Jacob. All the apparent deviations are strictly according to the idea of the book as a book of beginnings. As it has been well said, 'Genesis is full of geneses.' [1] [1] Cf. Green's Unity of the Book of Genesis.

III. Its Unity.

It is generally admitted, even by men of very different schools that our present Book of Genesis is a unity; however that unity has been brought about. For this reason it should be studied as a whole, and allowed to make its own definite and deep impression upon the reader. As Dr Whitelaw (Pulpit Commentary, p. viii.) truly says, there is a chronological thread running through the entire book, and all its parts are so interdependent that if one were omitted it would create a gap, and entirely rob the book of its unity. There are few facts more certain than that of the literary unity of Genesis as it has come down to us, and no study of the book will arrive at right conclusions unless this fact is kept well in view.

IV. Its Value. As the title clearly indicates, it is essentially and pre-eminently a book of origins; it deals with a number of characteristic beginnings. It records the beginning of creation, of man, of woman, of the Sabbath, of marriage, of home, of childhood, of sin, of murder, of sacrifice, of grace, of trade, of agriculture, of city life, of races, of languages, and of the chosen people. In the light of its title and evident purpose it is worthy of notice that there are in particular seven important beginnings recorded and dealt with in this book: The beginning of the material universe, or the Sphere of the Divine revelation of grace. The beginning of the human race, or the Subject of the Divine revelation of grace. The beginning of human sin, or the Cause of the Divine revelation of grace. The beginning of divine redemption, or the Character of the Divine revelation of grace. The beginning of the nations of the earth, or the Scope of the Divine revelation of grace. The beginning of the Hebrew nation, or the Channel of the Divine revelation of grace. The beginning of the life of faith and consecration, or the Outcome of the Divine revelation of grace. The first four words form the keynote of the book, which is struck again and again through out the record "In the beginning God." It is essentially a book where God is prominent and predominant, notwithstanding human willfulness, wandering, and wretchedness through sin.

God in Creation. The outstanding impression God in derived from the story in Genesis 1:1-31 is that the Creation - universe is not self-originated, but is the result of the Creator s handiwork. God saw, God said, God made, are the prominent teachings.

God in History. In this book we have the dawn of history and the earliest years of the life and progress of the human race ; and although the narrative of the first eleven chapters takes various literary forms, and is only brought before us in very summary fashion, there is no doubt of the essential historical character of the events underlying the record. And when we come to the fuller details of the patriarchal narratives we can readily appreciate the truth of Dr Driver's dictum with reference to the parts of 2 Samuel: The abundance and particularity of detail show that the

narratives must date from a period very little later than that of the events related (Intro. O.T., p. 173). No student of history can afford to overlook the instructive and fascinating record contained in the first book of the Bible.

God in Providence. No book in the world shows so clearly the truth that “There’s a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will. From the time that man was created, God’s providence is seen watching over him, warning him, checking him, overruling his mistakes, and, in spite of his willfulness, carrying out the Divine purpose. In the record of the ages before the Flood and of the time of the Deluge, in the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, we see step by step the working of that never- failing providence that ordereth all things in heaven and earth.

God in Redemption. This is the most important, even though it is not the most prominent, feature on the surface of the book. Genesis has been well summed up in three words generation, degeneration, regeneration. The great promise of redemption recorded in Genesis 3:1-24 is taken up and gradually prepared for through a long line from Seth through Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In this connection, too, we must not overlook the typological value of Genesis, for it is a book of type as well as of prophecy, of picture as well as of promise. From the sacrifice of Abel straight onward to the sacrifice of Isaac, the vision of Jacob at Bethel, and the story of Joseph, we have picture after picture of redemption, which find their full meaning, vividness, and glory, in the New Testament revelation, until at length in Jacob’s benediction we have a striking reference to the primeval fact of sin and the primeval promise of salvation (Genesis 49:17-18). The red thread of redemption binds every chapter together, and gives the book one of its essential marks of unity.

God in Human Life. Not the least interesting and valuable feature of this most remarkable book is its record of human life in relation to God. As we read the stories from Adam to Joseph, we see various aspects of the Divine revelation in regard to personal life, and the various attitudes of human response to that revelation. The book is of preeminent value, because it has to do with the essential and abiding elements of God’s relation to man, and man’s relation to God. As we study point after point in individual history and character, we see abundant proofs of spiritual guidance, warning, encouragement, and cheer, and we become more and more convinced of the truth of the apostolic word, that “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.” In the foregoing remarks critical questions have been deliberately avoided, in order to concentrate attention on the importance of a study of the book itself. It is to be feared that there is often a good deal of knowledge about Genesis without too much auction, knowledge of the book itself. If only we would allow it to make its own impression by direct and prolonged study, apart from all authorities, it would go far to instruct us as to its own real character. Even so extreme a critic as Kuenen bears witness to the value of direct Bible study when he says:

“The Bible is in every one s hand. The critic has no other Bible than the public. He does not profess to have any other documents inaccessible to the laity , nor does he profess to see anything in the Bible that the ordinary reader cannot see. It is true that here and there he improves the common translation, but this is the exception, and not the rule.” And that great scholar, Dr M’Caul, gives a very valuable reminder to all Bible readers in the following words:

“No reader of the Authorized Version ought to allow himself to be mystified or silenced by an appeal to foreign critics, much less to be disturbed in his faith, as if he could not apprehend the general teaching of the Bible without profound knowledge of the Semitic dialects and the latest

results of German criticism.”

We cannot do better than close with a striking testimony to the value of Genesis from a scholar whose books on the Old Testament have proved so valuable and convincing during recent years, Professor James Robertson, of Glasgow:

“It may be a matter of criticism to discover the joinings of the narratives, and to trace the literary process by which the book took its present shape ; but it is of far deeper interest to note the existence of a pure light in the midst of the world’s darkness. It is our familiarity with it that makes us overlook the significance of the early testimony of the Hebrew people to the truth of the one God. But when we reflect that, at a time when the great nations of antiquity were stumbling in the dark on this subject, or groping their way towards it, the Hebrew race had it as their oldest tradition, we cannot but acknowledge that they received it from God Himself. And of far higher importance is it to our faith than the anticipation of the results of modern science would have been, to be assured that from hoary antiquity the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has been guiding our race and preparing it for the fullness of the times.” For the purpose of general study as distinct from critical questions two works may be mentioned: How to Read the Bible, vols. i. and ii, by the Rev. J. Urquhart, and Genesis, in the Pulpit Commentary, by Dr Whitclaw. Critical questions can be most conveniently studied in the following works: (1) From the standpoint of modern criticism, in Dr Driver’s Commentary. (2) From the conservative side, in Green s Unity of the Book of Genesis, Dr Redpath’s Modern Criticism and Genesis (a criticism of Dr Driver), and Dr Orr’s Problem of the Old Testament (see Index s.v. Genesis).

00A.02 The Creation Gen_1:1-31

The Creation Genesis 1:1-31 Of all the chapters of this remarkable book the first has probably given rise to more thought, discussion, and controversy than any other. Nor is this surprising, remembering its contents and the place it occupies at the beginning of the Book of God. And assuredly it will repay the fullest and minutest attention, study, and meditation. In order to arrive at a right conclusion as to its meaning and object, it will be necessary to bring into view several considerations.

I. What is its Character? The first essential is that we try to discover what the chapter really is. Is it history? This were obviously impossible, since no one was present to observe and record for posterity the events here stated. The contents clearly refer to prehistoric events and times. Is it science? This at any rate can hardly be the primary purpose of the writer, for the Bible is a book of religion, and this is its introductory chapter. Besides, science is continuous and incomplete, and we are learning more and more of its secrets every day. In any case this chapter could only be scientific in the broadest and most summary meaning of the term. Is it myth? If by this is meant that which is inaccurate, untrustworthy, legendary, and, in modern phraseology, “mythical” we naturally ask whether such inaccuracy and untrustworthiness are likely to be found in a book of religion. But if by myth is meant a form of picturesque teaching suited to the childhood of the world, it may be said that even if it be a myth in form, its underlying teaching and details must be true to fact. Even parabolic teaching presupposes facts which correspond to the symbol used. When we compare other cosmogonies, such as the Babylonian, we notice at once some remarkable agreements and some equally remarkable contrasts. All cosmogonies, for instance, have traces of a primeval chaos, yet their moral atmosphere is entirely different from that of Genesis, and they have nothing corresponding to the great statement of Genesis 1:1 : In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Moreover, the Babylonian cosmogony is, as is well known, religiously impure, with materialistic and polytheistic elements. Is it invention? By this is meant, is it the work of man’s imagination, the record of what some early writer thought must have happened or did happen? If so, we naturally ask why it appears in a book purporting to be the Word of God? Is it revelation? That is, is it to be regarded as an integral part of the Book which has come down to us as (in whatever sense) the inspired Scriptures of God? The precise method of revelation we know not, and it does not concern us to know; but the fact of revelation, and the place of this chapter in the book and in the Bible generally, seems to compel the inquiry, is it invention or revelation? Is it in any sense trustworthy in what it says? Can we use it in confidence in reading and teaching? Its place in Scripture must be accounted for as also its position in a book whose characteristic is truth, and whose purpose is to reveal the God of truth.

There are two usual explanations of the points contact between the Hebrew and Babylonian cosmogonies. (1) Some urge that Genesis is to be traced from Babylonia, but was afterwards purified, the Hebrew writer using the best of sources available, and making them the vehicle of religious teaching. Apart from the likelihood or unlikelihood of any direct borrowing from so impure a source, we may fairly inquire whether this view is adequate in the light of any true theory of

Divine inspiration. And even though we limit the idea of inspiration to the arrangement and use of materials, to what has been called the inspiration of selection, the prior question still remains as to the source of those materials, and also their reliableness and accuracy. Surely we need some guarantee at this initial point. (2) Others say that the Babylonian cosmogony is the corrupt version of which Genesis is the pure record received from primal revelation. Is not this view much more likely to be true, and also much more in keeping with the idea of a Divine inspiration? When we remember the longevity of the human race up to the time of Abraham, there is nothing insuperably difficult in the view that this pure cosmogony may have been preserved among the antediluvians, and brought from Mesopotamia by Abraham without any corruption. At any rate, we have to account for the fact that this pure cosmogony is found among the Hebrews, while an impure cosmogony is found in Babylonia. Surely Divine inspiration is the only adequate solution of the problem. If the substance of this chapter is not revelation it must be, in whatever sense, invention or fiction; and in the latter case it really matters not whence it came or by what process it has arrived at its present state. In view, therefore, of the uniqueness of the Hebrew race, the place of this chapter in the Bible, and the general idea of Divine inspiration associated with the Old Testament, it seems much easier and truer to believe that we have in this chapter the record of a primeval revelation. The following remarks from Lange's Commentary on Genesis (p. 147) seem to sum up the truth on this subject:

"Holiness, sublimity, truthfulness these are the impressions left upon the mind of the thoughtful reader of the First of Genesis. There is meant by this its subjective truthfulness. It is no invention. The one who first wrote it down, or first spoke it to human ears, had a perfect conscious conviction of the presence to his mind of the scenes so vividly described whether given to him in vision or otherwise and a firm belief in a great objective reality represented by them. It is equally evident, too, that it is the offspring of one conceiving mind. It never grew like a myth or legend. It is one total conception, perfect and consistent in all its parts. It bears no evidence of being a story artificially made to represent an idea, or a system of ideas. There is, in truth, nothing ideal about it. It presents on its very face the serious impression of fact believed, and given forth as thus believed, however the original representation may have been made to the first human soul that received it. Myths and legends are the products of time; they have a growth; we can, in general, tell how and whence they came, and after what manner they have received their mythical form. Thus other ancient cosmogonies, though bearing evidence of derivation from the one in Genesis, have had their successive accretions and deposits of physical, legendary, and mythological strata. This stands alone in the world, like the primeval granite of the Himalaya among the later geological formations. It has nothing national about it. It is no more Jewish than it is Assyrian, Chaldaean, Indian, Persian, or Egyptian. It is found among the preserved Jewish writings, but there is nothing, except its pure monotheistic aspect, which would assign it to that people rather than to any other. If the Jews derived it from others, as is often affirmed, then is it something very wonderful, something utterly the reverse of the usual process, that they should have so stripped it of all national or sect features, and given it such a sublime aspect of universalism, so transcending, apparently, all local or partial history."

II. What is its Purpose?

We must never forget that a chapter like this, as indeed every chapter like this, as indeed every chapter of the Bible must be judged primarily from the standpoint of those for whom it was

originally intended. What did the first readers understand by it? Still more, what were they intended to understand by it? It must have had an intelligible message for them, however imperfectly and incompletely they grasped it. If, therefore, this chapter had been written in scientific language it would have been almost entirely unintelligible until the nineteenth century of our present era. Indeed, we may go very much further and say that many of the scientific books in our own language written a century ago are not only superseded, but practically unintelligible in the light of modern research. We are, therefore, justified in regarding this chapter as giving a simple, popular account of creation from the religious standpoint, and intended to be understood by people who lived in the time of the world's childhood. Its elementary character and religious purpose are the twofold key to its true meaning, and if this is continually borne in mind it will not be difficult to see its continued value up to the present day. The great fundamental yet elementary principles connected with the creation need to be taught to succeeding generations of people of various ages and capacities, and it is one of the most remarkable features in the experience of Christian teaching that this chapter is found to be adapted to intellectual and moral childhood in all ages and countries, and at the same time not inappropriate to mature minds and fuller knowledge.

III. What is its Plan?

There are those who think that Genesis 1:1 refers to the original creation, and that then between Genesis 1:1-2 room is left for the vast geological ages with their catastrophes which are thought to be described by the phrase the earth was without form and void. This is urged more particularly because we read in Isaiah 45:18 that God did not create without form (same word in Hebrew). According to this view, Genesis 1:2 to the end of the chapter gives the story of the earth being fashioned for man's life and habitation just prior to the historic period. This view, though not generally accepted, is interesting and suggestive, and has not a little to recommend it, even though it does not solve every problem.

Taking the chapter, however, just as it stands, without any such break, we read it through, and are at once impressed with two things: (1) There is only one species mentioned in the entire chapter, And God created great whales (Genesis 1:21). Everything else is generic. Why this exceptional reference? Why are these water monsters singled out in this way? Is it possible that we have here a hint of the writer's purpose? Was he striking at the root of some ancient worship of sacred animals? Is it impossible that if the materials for the composition of Genesis were associated with Egypt this has reference to the worship of some sacred animal like the crocodile? (See Miracles, by Dr S. Cox.) (2) Then in Genesis 1:16 special reference is made to the creation of the sun and moon. Is it possible that we have here another blow to a prevalent form of Eastern worship of the heavenly bodies? These two hints at any rate possibly suggest the religious purpose of the writer.

It is noteworthy that in the Hebrew of Genesis 1:2 the adjectives formless and empty seem to be the key to the literary structure of the chapter. The record of the first three days refers to the heaven and earth receiving their form, and the record of the last three days to the filling-up of their emptiness. An outline will show this clearly:

"FORMLESS" "EMPTY"

First Day. Light. Fourth Day. Lights.

Second Day. Air, Water Fifth Day. Fowls, Fish Third Day. Land, Plants Sixth Day. Animal, Man

Thus, the first and fourth days correspond, the second and fifth, and the third and sixth. First comes form, and then fullness. The literary structure of the chapter is clear, and is one of many proofs of Hebrew parallelism and love of parallelistic structure.

Above all, the keynote of the chapter is “In the beginning God.” The word God occurs no fewer than thirty-two times; God created four times; God said eight times; God saw seven times; God made three times; It was so (God’s purpose) six times. So also we find God called, God set, God blessed, God divided. Are we not right, then, in thinking that this chapter was intended as an account of creation from the religious point of view, and written for the instruction of mankind in all ages?

IV. What is its Relation to Science?

It is Relation to inevitable that this question should be asked, since on the assumption that religion and science both come from God there should be at least some general agreement or points of contact between them. At the same time the truest method of comparison is not between this chapter and the results of modern science, but rather between this chapter and all other ancient cosmogonies. It is when Genesis is compared with such other ancient accounts of creation that its immeasurable superiority is seen (Waggett, The Scientific Temper in Religion, pp. 160 ff). Nevertheless, in view of natural questionings, and bearing in mind the evident purpose of the chapter as an account of creation from the religious standpoint, the following inquiries with reference to its relation to science may rightly be made. Does the chapter contain any scientific error? On the authority of the greatest masters of geological and biological science we may say that this has not yet been proved. There was a time when the statement of the creation of light before the sun was regarded as a scientific inaccuracy, but this charge has long been dropped, for modern science has shown that light existed before and independent of our present sun. In entire keeping with this the Hebrew distinguishes between light (Genesis 1:3) and luminaries, or light-bearers (Genesis 1:15). Is the chapter written in sufficiently elastic and pliant language to admit of the inclusion of continuous scientific discoveries? It must be obvious to every thoughtful reader that this early chapter could not be expected to be in exact agreement with the latest details of scientific research, since science is continually changing and is ever incomplete. If it had been written in strict scientific language it would, of course, have been unintelligible for centuries. As the Speakers Commentary rightly says:

“If the wisest geologist of our days could show that there was an exact agreement between geology and the Bible, it would rather disprove than prove its truth. For, as geology is a growing science, it would prove the agreement of the Bible with that which is receiving daily additions, and is constantly undergoing modification; and ten years hence the two would be at hopeless variance.”

Yet there are indications that the very language of Genesis is pliant enough to allow of not a little scientific discovery being inserted. Thus there are two words used for creation. One, Bara, is used three times only in the chapter (1) at the beginning (Genesis 1:1); (2) at the commencement of life (Genesis 1:21); (3) at the creation of man (Genesis 1:27). Bara is thus reserved for marking the first introduction of each of the three great spheres of creation the world of matter, the world of life, and the spiritual world represented by man (Green). The other word, “Asah”, is found throughout the rest of the chapter, and is used of God making or molding from already created materials.

Surely in this we have at least a hint of the modern scientific ideas of primal creation and mediate creation. In a fascinating book, The Conflict of Truth (by Mr. F. H. Capron), the author refers to the five factors which Mr. Herbert Spencer regards as the most general forms into which the manifestations of the Unknowable are re-divisible. These forms are said to be: Space, time, matter, motion, force. Mr. Capron calls attention to the suggestive and even remarkable analogy between these forms and the early verses of Genesis 1:1-31.

(a) Time = “In the beginning.”

(b) Space = “The heavens.”

(c) Matter = “The earth.”

(d) Force = “The Spirit of God.”

(e) Motion = “Moved.”

Even though we may think it too ingenious to be true, there is ample proof, apart from this, to lead to the conclusion that there is at any rate, up to the present nothing in the chapter which conflicts with any assured results of science. Has the chapter any anticipations of science as revealed by modern research? We may reply by calling attention to the fact that there is the same general order of events. The steps of the creation of vegetation, reptiles, mammals, and man are essentially true to modern science. Professor Romanes admitted that -

“The order in which the flora and fauna are said by the Mosaic account to have appeared upon the earth corresponds with that which the theory of evolution requires and the evidence of geology proves (quoted in M’Cosh, The Religious Aspect of Evolution, p. 99).” And Sir William Dawson, whose scientific eminence and authority no one can question, states still more definitely that-

“The order of that vision of the creative work with which the Bible begins its history is so closely in harmony with the results worked out by geological investigations that the correspondences have excited marked attention, and have been justly regarded as establishing the common authorship of nature and revelation.” Has the chapter any indications of development and progress answering to the great modern theory of evolution? A very superficial reading of the chapter shows that development, progress, and change are among its leading ideas. The term day is regarded by some high authorities as expressive of the ages or epochs of science. They urge that the term “day” does not, and was not intended to mean a period of twenty-four hours, since it is applied to the first three days before the sun and moon our present means of measurement are introduced into the narrative. And, further, that in Genesis 2:4 the term day is used for the whole period of creation. There are certainly many places in Scripture where the word day refers to other periods than that of the rotation of the earth. [1]

[1] Another view which has much to recommend it is that in the six days God pronounced all the laws upon which the production of phenomena depends, that those laws thus pronounced were “the only operative agencies of production,” and that nothing remained to be done but to allow the laws to take effect and bring into existence the various phenomena which they have produced and arc still producing to-day. On this interpretation an interval is to be understood between God said and it was so, an interval as to which the Bible is silent, but which may have extended for ages. (For a full statement of this view sec Capron, Conflict of Truth, Gen. 11 and 12., especially p. 193.)

Has the chapter any points of contact with contact with modern biological and anthropological teaching about man's nature? The answer is plain. On the one hand the chapter teaches clearly an essential unity of man with animate and inanimate nature, and at the same time it teaches with equal clearness man's separateness from nature and his transcendence in view of his creation in the image of God. Thus modern science and ancient Genesis are at one as to the complexity of man's nature, and also as to its unity at once with earth and heaven.

Reviewing the relations of this chapter to modern science, we again call attention to the definitely religious aim and object of Genesis, and may say that while the chapter is scientifically incomplete it is not scientifically inaccurate. On the other hand, religiously, it is both accurate and complete. Nor can we fail to ask how this correspondence between Genesis and science is to be explained.

How are we to account for such anticipations of modern science in this early book? Even Haeckel admits that:

"two great and fundamental ideas, common also to the non-miraculous, meet us in the Mosaic hypothesis of creation with surprising clearness and simplicity the idea of separation or differentiation and the idea of progressive development or perfecting…In this theory there lies hidden the ruling idea of a progressive development and differentiation of the originally simple matter. We can therefore bestow our just and sincere admiration of the Jewish law-giver's grand insight into nature (quoted by M 'Cosh, The Religious Aspect of Evolution, pp. 99, 100)." May we not rightly see in this record a clear proof of Divine inspiration? There is surely nothing in all these correspondences which could have Gen. 1 come into the ken of Moses by purely natural means. To quote Sir William Dawson again:

"All these coincidences cannot be accidental. They are the more remarkable when we consider the primitive and child-like character of the notices in Genesis, making no scientific pretensions, and introducing what they tell us of primitive man merely to explain and illustrate the highest moral and religious teachings. Truth and divinity are stamped on every line of the early chapters of Genesis, alike in their archaic simplicity, and in that accuracy as to facts which enables them not only to stand unharmed amid the discoveries of modern science, but to display new beauties as we are able more and more fully to compare them with the records stored up from old in the recesses of the earth. Those who base their hopes for the future on the glorious revelations of the Bible need not be ashamed of its story of the past."

V. What is its Religious Teaching? The primary its and fundamental truth of this chapter is, "In the beginning God created." It teaches that the world is not self-originated, and thereby declares, what science compels us to demand, the fact of a First Cause. The nebular hypothesis of Laplace is the best scientific account of the solar system, and yet it is obvious that this hypothesis only accounts for the second verse of Genesis 1, not the first. Laplace's theory presupposes a central sun and an atmospheric envelope, but Genesis 1:1 goes behind this nebular hypothesis and gives the explanation of its revolution in the creative fiat of God. This simple thought of creation is very familiar to us to-day, but, as is well known, it was not so evident to all the thinkers and all the nations of the old world. Some of the earliest peoples had no idea of absolute creation, and most assuredly it never was so clear and unmistakable in any part of the world as it was among the Hebrews. In view of the fact that the notion of creation is one which had not dawned on the ancient Greek mind, and was never securely attained in the thought of Greece/ we can perhaps realize a

little of the immense benefit the world has derived from this chapter (Waggett, The Scientific Temper in Religion, pp. 165 f.). The chapter also teaches us that man is the crown and culmination of creation, that he is the earthly end for which creation has been made and developed, and that in his life there is the promise and potency of God-likeness. Nothing could be clearer than the teaching of this chapter as to the spiritual nature of man and the spiritual purpose for which he was made. Again to quote Sir William Dawson:

“In man there are other and higher powers, determining his conscious personality, his formation of general principles, his rational and moral volitions and self-restraints. These are manifestations of a higher spiritual nature, which constitute in man the image and shadow of God.” The chapter also declares that matter is not eternal; it teaches clearly that absolute dualism, that refuge of many ancient Eastern thinkers, is entirely impossible and foreign to the whole idea of true religion. Not least significant is the simple but conclusive way in which this chapter deals with some of the most characteristic errors of ancient and modern thought. In opposition to Atheism it proclaims God; in opposition to Polytheism it emphasizes one God; in opposition to Pantheism it declares the separateness of God and the world; in opposition to Materialism it reveals the spirituality of God and man. And thus we find ourselves coming back again and again to the first verse, “In the beginning God,” and we rest both mind and heart on the familiar words. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God. Let us mark this expression with great care. Through faith we understand. Faith is the great secret of true perception. Never do we find any opposition in Holy Scripture between faith and understanding, between faith and reason, but only between faith and sight. Faith is the greatest perceptive power in the world. Through faith we see. And as we contemplate God’s creation in the light of this early chapter as well as in the later chapters of modem science, we come back to the old word which declares that Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created (Revelation 4:11). In the study of this chapter with special reference to modern science the following authorities will be found of service: M ‘Cosh, The Religious Aspect of Evolution; The Scientific Temper in Religion (chapter viL), by Waggett; The Conflict of Truth, by F. H. Capron ; The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture, by W. E. Gladstone ; article by Sir J. William Dawson, Expositor, third series, vol. iii. p. 284.

00A.03 The Foundations of Human Life Gen_2:1-25

The Foundations of Human Life Genesis 2:1-25

Genesis 2:1-25 is the natural sequel of the first, and nowhere is the purpose of the book more clearly seen. After the consideration of creation as a whole our attention is concentrated on man his formation, his relation to God, and his earthly life. The introductory purpose of Genesis 1:1-31 is thus evident, and we now proceed to that which is the predominant purpose of the book the record of human life in relation to God and religion. The thought of creation is now no longer dominant. In the first chapter man comes at the end as the crown of creation; here he comes at the commencement as the starting point of human history. At the same time this chapter is preparatory to the next, for it deals with some of the fundamental facts and experiences of human life which find their expression and development along the lines recorded in later chapters. We are again reminded that Genesis is a book of beginnings, for this chapter is essentially a chapter of geneses, and is best looked at from this point of view, since it deals with some of the primary essentials of human life on earth. It is hardly too much to say that there is a great law connected with the first mention of anything in Scripture which is afterwards treated or recorded in other parts. It will frequently, if not always, be found that the very first words on any subject on which the Holy Spirit is going to treat are the keystone of the whole matter (B. W. Newton. Quoted in The Bible and Spiritual Criticism, by Dr Pierson, p. 41). There are several things mentioned for the first time in this chapter, and they deserve the closest possible attention.

I. The Sabbath for Man (Genesis 2:1-3).

Strictly, this section should be placed in close connection with chapter 1 as the crowning point of the record of the days of creation. As the Sabbath is mentioned here for the first time we are justified in inquiring as to its fundamental purpose and principles. The Sabbath should first be considered in its primary meaning. In the light of God’s creative work the fundamental and primary idea of the Sabbath is twofold: cessation from work, and satisfaction after work. The Sabbath should then be noticed as a divine institution. The very familiar term sanctify occurs first here, and we are enabled to see that its root idea is separation or consecration. God separated i.e. set apart the Sabbath to be consecrated to a special purpose. The Sabbath should be emphasized as of permanent obligation. The institution of the Sabbath is evidently grounded in creation, and is therefore pro-Mosaic, and not at all to be limited to the Jews. It is noteworthy that the fourth Commandment calls attention to the Sabbath as an already existing fact (Remember the Sabbath day, Exodus 20:8). There are many indications, both in Genesis and in Babylonian records, that the Sabbath was part of the primeval revelation which received fresh sanction under Moses. Only in this way can the universality of the tradition and the precise wording of the fourth Commandment be explained. The Sabbath should be carefully understood as to its essential elements. God’s rest after creation is put forth as the reason and model of man’s weekly rest. It involves the special consecration to God of a portion of our time. While it affords physical rest and recreation of energies, it also calls for the worship of God. Nor are we to lay any stress on the day,

since no one can now say for certain that any particular day of the week is, literally, the seventh day from the close of creation. It is the institution, not the day, that must be emphasized. Whether we think of the physical, or the mental, or the spiritual results of the observance of the Sabbath Day, we are face to face with one of the fundamental facts of human life. The law of God and the needs of man combine to make the observance of the Sabbath an absolute necessity.

II. The Formation of Man (Genesis 2:4-7). At this point a new section of Genesis commences extending to Genesis 4:20 and described as these are the generations of the heavens and of the earth. This phrase, as we have already noticed, is always at the beginning of a section, and has a prospective view, not a retrospective. It is a superscription, not a subscription, and deals with some new unfolding of the record. It suitably describes the section that follows, for it describes the offspring or generations of the heavens and of the earth in the person of man. Man is at once the offspring of earth and heaven. It would be impossible to regard this phrase as suited either to the end of chapter 1 or as introductory to it, since that chapter deals with the heavens and the earth themselves, not with their “generations” or offspring.

It is sometimes urged that this section introduces a new and second account of creation, but this is only true in the sense that we have here a more circumstantial account of what is given in summary form in Genesis 1:1-31. The differences are not contradictory, but complementary, and are explained by the different standpoint. The second account presupposes the first in several particulars. Thus in Genesis 1:27, we have both male and female referred to as created (cf. Genesis 5:1-2), which prepares the way for the detailed statement of Genesis 2:1-25. So also the herb of Genesis 3:18 implies Genesis 1:29. Genesis 2:1-25 says nothing as to the relative priority of man or plants, and only refers to the trees of Eden (Genesis 2:8-9). Plants and man are necessarily associated here in connection with husbandry and tillage, and the association is one of thought, not of chronology. Man could hardly have been created before there was a home and provision for him (Green, Unity of the Book of Genesis, in loc.). The Divine The change in the Divine Name (“Lord God” instead of “God”) is also very noteworthy. Elohim is the God of Creation, with special reference to His power and might. Jehovah is the God of Revelation and Redemption, with special reference to human life and the Divine covenant. The combination of the two names (Lord God, Jehovah Elohim) shows the association of the God of Revelation with the God of Creation, and the discrimination of the usage of these two Divine Names in the whole section (Genesis 2:4; Genesis 4:26) is very striking and suggestive. So far from this usage being a proof of different documents, there are, on the contrary, clear indications that they are used with precision and spiritual meaning.

These verses (Genesis 2:4-7) tell us of the special preparation made for man’s life, and they describe the appearance of the earth at the time of man’s formation. The terms descriptive of man’s physical creation need careful attention. The word formed is the Hebrew “Asah,” not “Bara,” and refers to molding or fashioning out of already existing materials. As these existing materials are described as the dust of the ground, we see at once how true to scientific fact the statement is in man’s point of contact with material creation. If, therefore, we are inclined to hold that so far as man’s bodily structure is concerned he is a product of evolution, having come upwards from below, we may find in the story in Genesis a possible suggestion of this point.

Equally clear and definite is the statement as to man's spiritual nature- breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. Thus, whatever may be true of man's bodily frame, there was a point of departure from material creation in regard to man's moral being which is characterized in this verse as a Divine act differentiating man from nature. Once again we are in the region of scientific fact, for, in spite of arguments to the contrary, there is at any rate up to the present no real proof of the evolution of man's moral and spiritual nature. Personality has never yet been expressed in terms of evolution, and requires a Divine creation to account for it. Three great facts stand outside the realm of evolution as it is now understood human speech, human conscience, and human individuality.

III. The Home of Man (Genesis 2:8-14).

Human life requires a locality, a home for its proper expression and development, and consequently we read of God's provision for this great necessity. As is well known, the exact locality of man's first home has been a subject of great discussion, and the result is as uncertain today as ever. Three solutions of the problem practically sum up the known conditions (1) At the head of the Persian Gulf; (2) Armenia; (3) Babylonia. The weightiest authorities seem to favour the last-named locality. The two elements of man's home call for our attention the characteristics of beauty ("pleasant to the sight"), and utility ("good for food"). As it was with the first home, so should it ever be, in the possession and proportion of these two requirements. The beautiful without the useful, or the useful without the beautiful, will fail in that which is essential to a true home. The tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil seem to be symbols of spiritual realities. We may set aside the unworthy and unnecessary literalism which thinks of the fruit of these trees as capable of conveying life and knowledge. They are in keeping with the pictorial and symbolical character of the narrative as expressive of great spiritual realities.

IV. The Service of Man (Genesis 2:15). From the very first man was intended for work, and the necessity of service is one of the fundamental principles of man's existence. Moreover, this necessity will be realized in enjoyment under normal conditions, for there is nothing which is so full of genuine satisfaction as the performance of the work which God has given us to do. Work which is not toil and trouble always gives pleasure. In the Garden of Eden "man was to dress it and to keep it." May not this latter phrase give us some hint of already-existing danger? May not defense as well as preservation be included? If so, man was not only to do the work of the gardener in dressing it, he had also to safeguard it, presumably from foes. Again we seem to be in the realm of spiritual realities in this hint of the existence of evil on the earth.

V. The Probation of Man (Genesis 2:16-17). For the first time we are reminded of the possibility of human understanding, human speech, and human language in this communication from God to man. Man had this primeval revelation from God, giving full permission of freedom in the garden with one simple, but significant, limitation. There was one thing, and one only, that he was not to do. Again we notice the underlying spiritual reality involved. The narrative gives in a pictorial form the concrete fact of human responsibility and probation. Man's life was to be limited by obedience, God's law being the standard of his life. There is nothing unworthy in the form of the probation. The principle of obedience can be emphasized as easily one way as another. The result of disobedience is stated to be death, and the precise meaning of this term will come before us later. Suffice it to say, as we have it here for the first time in Scripture, the root idea of death seems to be

that of separation, not annihilation.

VI. The Authority of Man (Genesis 2:18-20).

We are here taught in detail what is mentioned briefly in Genesis 1:26 man's original dominion and lordship over nature. In a very true sense God intended man to be the crown of creation, and this naming of the creatures of the earth and sky is the Scripture method of emphasizing a fact which all scientific research during the centuries has gone to confirm more and more. Man was intended to be supreme, the culminating point of God's creation. Hints of this are found in various parts of Holy Scripture (cf. Psalms 8:1-9), and it is not altogether speculative to attempt to imagine the precise forms that this dominion would have taken had sin not come into the world. In any case that lordship will one day be resumed (Isaiah 11:6; Hebrews 2:6-10).

VII. The Companion for Man (Genesis 2:21-25).

We are now to read the detail of that creation of the female already barely mentioned in Genesis 1:27. The words of Genesis 2:18 express a profound truth which can be proved from various points of view. It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. It is not good whether we consider man's character and its development, or his need of fellowship, or his position as head of the race. It is curious that from this verse, by an error of reading, the English language has been supplied with the term help meet. The Hebrew phrase is a helper suited for him, or, quite literally, a helper as his counterpart. This is the true idea of woman's relation to man, his counterpart, his complement, and whenever this is realized in marriage, God's purpose is being fulfilled. For woman is not undevelopt man, But diverse: Not like to like, but like in difference.

Yet in the long years liker must they grow;

Till at the last she set herself to man, Like perfect music unto noble words;

Distinct in individualities, But like each other even as those who love. The narrative continues to be pictorial and picturesque, though we must ever take caro to avoid the idea that it is purely allegorical. The pictures have distinct realities corresponding to them, and are expressive of actual facts. The question of sex is one of the problems still unsolved (and perhaps insoluble) by the science of to-day, and it may perhaps be asked whether science could ever have given a more religiously fitting and helpful account of the physiological facts as they are now known to us.

Matthew Henry quaintly says that woman was taken out of man's side to suggest her equality with him; not out of his feet to imply inferiority, or out of his head to suggest superiority, but out of his side, implying companionship and equality. Not only the formation of woman, but the great primary ordinance of marriage, is brought before us in this section, and so the chapter ends with this account of one of the essential facts and factors in human life and history.

Once more let us call attention to the real value of this record both as to its pictorial form and the underlying facts suggested and implied. As the Editor of Lange's Commentary, referring to these early chapters, says:

"Great truths, great facts, ineffable truths, ineffable facts, are doubtless set forth. We do not abate one iota of their greatness, their wonderfulness, by supposing such a mode of representation. It is

not an accommodation to a rude and early age, but the best language for every age. How trifling the conceit that our science could have furnished any better! . . . Her language will ever be more or less incorrect; and therefore, a Divine revelation cannot use it, since such use would be an endorsement of its absolute verity. The simpler and more universal language of the Scripture may be inadequate, as all language must be; it may fall short; but it points in the right direction. Though giving us only the great steps in the process, it secures that essential faith in the transcendent Divine working, which science our science, or the science of ages hence might only be in danger, to say the least, of darkening. It saves us from those trifling things commonly called reconciliations of revelation with science, and which the next science is almost sure to unreconcile. It does so by placing the mind on a wholly different plane, giving us simple, though grand, conceptions as the vehicle of great ideas and great facts of origin in themselves no more accessible to the most cultivated than to the lowliest minds. There is an awful sublimity in this Mosaic account of the origin of the world and man, and that, too, whether we regard it as inspired Scripture or the grandest picture ever conceived by human genius. To those who cannot, or who do not, thus appreciate it, it matters little what mode of interpretation is adopted whether it be one of the so-called reconciliations, or the crude dogmatism that calls itself literal because it chooses to take on the narrowest scale a language so suggestive of vast times and ineffable causalities (p. 211)."

Suggestions for Meditation

We see in this chapter some of the essential elements of human life. They call for earnest thought and definite personal application. They cover almost everything of importance in life and experience, and are a constant reminder of God's purpose for humanity and for each individual.

(1) Man's kinship with God (Genesis 2:7).

(2) Man's worship of God (Genesis 2:3).

(3) Man's fellowship with God (Genesis 2:16).

(4) Man's service for God (Genesis 2:18).

(5) Man's loyalty to God (Genesis 2:17).

(6) Man's authority from God (Genesis 2:19).

(7) Man's social life from and for God (Genesis 2:24). When these ideas are realized in personal experience, God's purpose in creating man and man's perfect life are being fulfilled.

00A.04 The Fall Gen_3:1-24

The Fall Genesis 3:1-24

IT is hardly too much to say that this chapter is the pivot of the Bible, for if we take it away the rest of Scripture becomes meaningless. With the exception of the fact of Creation, we have here the record of the most important and far-reaching event in the world s history the entrance of sin. The record in this chapter, like that of the Creation, is variously interpreted. Many speak of it as mythical, by which is often meant that which is unreal, untrue, and impossible. Others use the term myth as indicating an elementary method of conveying moral and spiritual truth, even though the narrative itself is not historical in form. The former view is naturally to be set aside by all who believe in the fact and veracity of a Divine revelation. The latter interpretation of myth does not seem to be quite satisfactory on any intelligible principle of Divine inspiration. The truest method of interpretation is that which regards these narratives as pictorial records of actual fact; solid history in pictorial form. It is inadequate to speak of the narrative as poetic or merely symbolical, lest we should give the impression that the story is not concerned with actual fact. Allegory, too, is identical with the truth illustrated, and does not necessarily presuppose any historical basis. What we must insist upon and ever keep in view is that, whether allegorical or pictorial, the narrative is expressive of actual fact. The chapter is so full of spiritual truths that it is impossible to deal with everything in detail. It must suffice to call attention to four great realities of the spiritual life which are here brought before us for the first time in the Word of God.

I. Temptation. -- Consider its source. The practical character of the narrative is clearly seen in the reference to the serpent as the immediate cause of human sin. Inasmuch as Satan is not actually mentioned in the chapter, we are surely right in regarding this reference to the serpent as a pictorial and symbolical reference to Satan himself, a view which is confirmed by later passages of Scripture, such as 2 Corinthians 11:14 ; Revelation 12:9; Revelation 20:2. There is no reference to the problem of how and when Satan sinned. The one point of stress is laid upon sin in relation to man, and we are taught very unmistakably two great truths: (1) That God is not the author of sin, and (2) that sin came to man from without, and was due to a power of evil suggestion and influence other than that which came from man’s own nature. Even though we fall short of identifying the serpent of this chapter with the personal Satan of later Scripture, we may still regard the teaching of the Fall story as suggesting the personification of an evil principle from without, which in later times is seen to be more than a personification, and nothing less than an actual being (Orr, Image of God in Man, pp. 219 ft.).

Mark its subtilty. The stages of the temptation should be carefully noticed: (a) The serpent first of all excites the woman’s curiosity by speaking to her; (b) then lie raises a suspicion of God by the question that he puts to her (Genesis 3:1); (c) then he proceeds to inject a threefold doubt of God of His goodness, by reason of the restriction (Genesis 3:1); of His righteousness, in the assurance that they shall not die (Genesis 3:4); and of His holiness, in the assurance that, so far from dying, they shall be as gods (Genesis 3:5). (See Candlish’s Lectures on Genesis, in loc.) (d) Thus he

incites the woman to unbelief, and (e) leads her eventually to disobedience. It is very noteworthy that the temptation is associated entirely with doubt of God's Word: "Hath God said?" This is characteristic of sin at all times; the doubt, the denial, and the disbelief of God's Word. First Satan distorts the Word, and then he leads the woman to doubt it, and last of all he denies it. It is also significant that Satan and the woman in their conversation use the term God and not Lord God. This inadequate and defective reference to God was doubtless part of the explanation of the temptation and the Fall. It would not have served Satan s purposes to have introduced the specific covenant term Jehovah when raising questions about the veracity and faithfulness of God's Word.

Observe its success. The stages of the woman's attitude have often been pointed out: (a) She heeded the temptation, and listened to Satan's questioning of God's Word and his new interpretation of that Divine utterance. In her reply to his question, she perverted and misquoted three times the divine law to which she and Adam were subject: (1) She disparaged her privileges by misquoting the terms of the Divine permission as to the other trees. (2) She overstated the restrictions by misquoting the Divine prohibition. (3) She under rated her obligations by misquoting the Divine penalty. And thus she was easily exposed to the temptation to question, doubt, and deny God. (b) Her curiosity was roused, perhaps, by Satan demonstrating before her the apparent futility of heeding God, for we are told that she saw that the tree was good for food as well as pleasant to the eyes, (c) Then sprang up physical craving, and she desired to disobey, with the result that (d) she took and ate, and gave also unto her husband and he did eat. Her fall was consequently due to dalliance with temptation. She did not repel, but yielded to it. Had she resisted at the very outset she would not have fallen; for it is a universal law that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us. Nothing is more remarkable in the whole history of man's moral life than the powerlessness of the devil to overcome us apart from our own assent and consent if we resist, he flees; if we yield, he wins. It is this simple fact that constitutes man's ultimate responsibility for his actions. He never can say, I was overpowered in spite of myself. All that he can say is, "I was overpowered because of myself."

II. Sin. The reality of sin is undoubted. The chapter is clear as to the fact of a Fall. There is such a thing as moral evil in the world. Human nature, with its constant tendency to retrogression and degeneration, clearly proves this. However and whenever it has come about, we know the universality and persistence of evil to-day, and the world has never had any other adequate explanation than that which is afforded by this chapter. Traditions of the Fall are almost as numerous as those of creation (Pulpit Commentary, p. 59). There is scarcely any part of God's Word which is more in accord with the known facts of history and science than the story of this chapter. We have recently been told that the doctrine of a Fall from original righteousness is only found in this chapter and in the theology of St Paul, and yet it is surely obvious that the facts of sin and its universality are presupposed in every part of the Old Testament.

If a Fall were not narrated in the opening chapters of Genesis, we should still have to postulate something of the kind for the Bible s own representations of the state of man (Or, ut supra, p. 201). We may also add that the same postulate is necessary to account for the tendencies to evil seen in the natures of little children throughout the whole world. The root of sin should be understood. The foundation of all sin lies in man's desire for self-assertion and his determination to be independent of God. Adam and Eve chafed under the restriction laid upon them by the command of God, and it was in opposition to this that they asserted themselves, and thereby fell. Man does

not like to be dependent upon another, and subject to commands from without. He desires to go his own way, to be his own master; and as a consequence he sins, and becomes lord of himself, that heritage of woe. The responsibility of sin needs constant emphasis. The possibility of sin is involved in the fact of personality. Unless man was to be an automaton, with no opportunity for character, there must be granted the possibility of sin. It is at this point we realize the solemn fact of personal accountability. Whatever may be true of environment and heredity, they never can blot out the distinction between right and wrong, or rob man of his responsibility. Nor must we for a moment suppose that sin was any inherent tendency or primal necessity of human life. Adam had liability, but not a tendency, to sin. Our Lord had neither liability nor tendency, though of course His temptation was real, all the more so because of His sinless nature (Hebrews 4:15 R.V., not A.V.). We today, as fallen, have both liability and tendency. Any modern theories of evolution which make sin a necessity of human development tend thereby to blot out the eternal distinction between good and evil. In view of certain aspects of modern evolutionary thought, man had no alternative but to fall; and to add to the confusion of thought and morals, we are also told that this failure was not a fall, but a rise a fall upwards so that we must now, it is said, speak of the ascent, not of the fall, of man. In opposition to all this the Bible teaches us that sin was not a necessity, and there never will be any clear Christian thinking until this necessitarian theory is entirely banished from our minds (Orr, ut supra, pp. 158 and 298).

III. Punishment. Be sure your sin will find you out is the great principle written clearly and deeply on this record of the first sin, as, indeed, of every other since that time. What was the punishment associated with the sin of Adam and Eve? The narrative shows this plainly.

They soon had a sense of guilt. At once their eyes were opened, and they became conscious of the shame associated with their wrong-doing. The reference to nakedness and clothing indicates the profound shame that actuated them, and at once they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. Fear was the result of their guilt; the old experiences of innocence and fellowship were at an end, and now they were guilty before God. Conscience, that element of the Divine image and likeness, was already at work, and their sin was indeed finding them out.

Then followed a sentence of condemnation. God soon dealt with this wrong-doing, and there was a threefold condemnation. All subterfuges (Genesis 3:10) and all cowardly attempts to blame others (Genesis 3:12-13) were unavailing, and man stood face to face with the holy God, conscious of guilt and unspeakable shame, (a) The serpent was first dealt with, and judgment passed upon him (Genesis 3:14-15); (b) the woman was next judged, and condemned to sorrow and subjection (Genesis 3:16); (c) the man last of all was dealt with, and sorrow, hardship, toil, and death were made his portion (Genesis 3:17-19).

Last of all came an act of separation. It was impossible for man to remain in the garden, and in a state of fellowship with God. Sin and Paradise were incompatible, and so the Lord sent them forth, driving them out, and placing the guard with the sword that turned every way. Mark the significance of this phrase. There was no possibility of a return to the old life. Paradise was lost, and by no human effort could it ever be regained. Separation is always the result of sin. “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God (Isaiah 59:2). And thus the threefold punishment of guilt, condemnation, and separation accrued to man because of his sin. The chapter, however, does not end with sin and its punishment, and we pass on to consider the fourth

great reality.

IV. Redemption. The announcement of enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between her seed and his seed, is the first message of Divine redemption in its antagonism to, and victory over sin. This is indeed the Protevangelium, and is the primeval promise which is taken up again and again henceforward in Scripture, until He comes Who destroys him that has the power of death, and casts him into the lake of fire.

Redemption is not only promised in word, it is also pictured in deed. Man attempted to cover his shame by the leaves of the fig-tree, but this was far too slight a covering for so deep a shame. No human covering could suffice, and so we are told with profound significance that the Lord God made coats of skins and clothed them. This Divine clothing took the place of their own self-made clothing, and now they are clothed indeed. The mention of skins suggests the fact and necessity of death of the animal before they could be used as clothing, and it is more than probable that in this fact we have the primal revelation of sacrifice, and of the way in which the robe of righteousness was to be provided for them.

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress.

Looking on to the New Testament, we cannot but associate with this chapter the great Pauline chapter, Romans 8, which ends very significantly with three questions triumphantly asked by the Apostle, and it should be carefully noticed that these questions exactly correspond to the three aspects of punishment mentioned above.

(a) “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” (Romans 8:33). That is, there is no guilt.

(b) “Who is he that condemneth?” (Romans 8:34). That is, there is no condemnation.

(c) “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Romans 8:35). That is, there is no separation.

Thus, where sin abounded grace did super abound, and as by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, so now grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Suggestions for Meditation

God’s question to Adam still sounds in the ear of “every sinner”; “Where art thou?” It is the call of Divine justice, which cannot overlook sin. It is the call of Divine sorrow, which grieves over the sinner. It is the call of Divine love, which offers redemption for sin. To each and to every one of us the call is reiterated, “Where art thou?” The answer to the question must be either: in Adam or in Christ. These are the only two places where we can be. If we are still in Adam, we are still in sin, and therefore in guilt, condemnation, and in danger of eternal separation. If we are in Christ, we are already pardoned, accounted righteous, subjects of His grace, and heirs of eternal glory.

Note. For all modern evolutionary and philosophical questions connected with this chapter attention is earnestly called to the very able and scholarly book by Dr Orr, already quoted and referred to.

Chapter 23

00A.05 Cain and Abel Gen_4:1-15

Cain and Abel Genesis 4:1-15 FROM the origin of sin (Genesis 3:1-24) we pass to the consideration of its progress. Sin in the individual is now seen to develop and express itself in the family. This chapter, like the three preceding it, is full of “geneses” for we have brought before us the first motherhood, the first birth, the first family, the first murder, the first martyrdom, the first indications of human development. Not least of all we have in it the record of the first conflict between the two seeds (Genesis 3:15), and this in connection with religions worship.

It is a necessary and useful reminder that only a few things are touched upon in this chapter, and that many things are left unexplained. The writer calls attention to the mountain peaks only of human history and experience as he passes from one fact to another. Thus there is no statement of the time that elapsed between Genesis 3:24 and Genesis 4:1; no explanation of the origin of sacrifice, of blood revenge (Genesis 4:14), of the method of Divine acceptance of sacrifice, of the sign appointed for Cain, and of the growth of the population implied (Genesis 4:15-19). Whatever views we may hold upon these subjects must necessarily be problematical in the absence of clear teaching. Turning now to the record of the two brothers and all that the story implies, we notice:

I. The First Home.

We have here brought before us those home relationships, conjugal, parental, brotherly, that constitute the foundation of all social life. The parents, although expelled from Eden, are evidently still influenced by the consciousness of their relation to God, and by the thought of a Divine promise of a seed (Genesis 3:15). The words of Eve at the birth of her first-born son are to be noted. She called the child Cain i.e. possession evidently thinking that in him would be fulfilled the promise to her seed. It is possible that the literal rendering of her words, I have gotten a man, even Jehovah, suggests a more definite belief and knowledge than are warranted. At the same time, to render the words, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord” seems unduly to weaken the Hebrew phrase. Probably we are to understand some such rendering as I have gotten a man in relation to Jehovah, pointing definitely to a conviction that somehow or other this new-born son was related to the Divine promise and purpose. Eve must have been quickly undeceived in this respect, for when her second child was born there was no reference whatever to any relation to the Lord, and the fact of his name meaning vanity seems to show clearly that the mother had already become disappointed in her hopes of her first-born son.

II. The Two Brother. Their work is first of all brought before us the one being a shepherd, the other an agriculturist. Thus early in the history of the world are we reminded of the necessity and dignity of work as one of the essentials of human life and progress.

They not only worked, however, but they also worshipped. “To labour” is not “to pray” in the literal meaning of the phrase. Man must pray as well as labour. Their worship took the form of offerings, and this must always be the case. Worship is giving, not getting; ascribing, not appropriating. It is evident from the phrase, in process of time, that this worship was regularly rendered as some thing

habitual in their life. Man is never more truly man than when he is worshipping God; for it is only then that lie finds, realises, and expresses his true relationship of dependence.

III. The Divine Response.

One offering was accepted, the other was not. It is noteworthy that the Divine respect is stated in both cases, not merely with reference to the offerings, but primarily with reference to the offerer. Unto Abel and to his offering; unto Cain and to his offering. The value of the offering is seen to depend upon the character of the offerer. Not costliness, but character, constitutes true worship.

We naturally ask why it was that God had respect to Abel and to his offering, and not to Cain and his? According to Hebrews 11:4, the explanation is to be found in the words, “By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” Faith always presupposes a Divine revelation to which it is the response, and in the light of the New Testament it would seem clear that one was an offering of faith, and the other an offering without faith. Why should faith be emphasized by the Epistle to the Hebrews more than gratitude or prayer? May it not be because of a prior revelation from God as to how He was to be approached? We must never forget that while death is very familiar to us now, it was not so in those early days, and it might well have been asked why it was necessary to destroy the life of a lamb when it was not needed for food. In what respects are we to think of death as making a sacrifice acceptable to the Creator? Is it not possible, and even probable, that Abel’s sacrifice, involving death, was his response to an already existing revelation of God as to this method of sacrifice? May we not see in the coats of skins (Genesis 3:21) a hint of the revelation of sacrifice through death as the way of approach to God? This view at any rate makes it intelligible why Abel can be said to have offered by faith, while Cain offered a sacrifice which did not involve death, and which was therefore, on this interpretation, not in accordance with the Divine revelation. At any rate we may fairly say that these two aspects represent two attitudes today the attitude of the man who responds to God’s revelation and submits to His will, and the attitude of the man who will only come to God on his own terms, refusing to do what does not suit him or commend itself to his judgment. It does not seem unjust to Cain to say that his was a sacrifice which, however good in itself, was not prompted by a faith that rested in and responded to God’s revelation of His will. In this connection the works of Professor Curtiss (Primitive Semitic Sacrifices, and Expositor, 1904, 1905) on the primitive Semitic ideas of sacrifice should be carefully studied, since they indicate very clearly that the root idea of sacrifice among the Bedouin tribes is propitiation rather than communion.

IV. The Divine Expostulation.

Cain’s anger Divine clearly shows that his worship was only a form of godliness without the power. If his offering had been made in the right spirit, there would have been no anger and no lowering of the countenance. The Lord meets this wrath with a very definite inquiry and an equally definite reminder. Genesis 4:7 has long been a crux interpretum. The following rendering seems worthy of attention: If thou doest well, will there not be acceptance for thee? And if thou doest not well, sin is lying at the door like a crouching beast, ready to spring upon thee, and unto thee is sin s desire, but thou shouldest rule over it. (See R.V. margin) It is very evident from these words that Cain had not been doing well previously to this, and hence the necessity of this solemn warning of the bitter consequences of continued sin. Sin is personified as a lurking beast of prey ready to spring upon its victim, and against this enemy Cain is warned, and commanded to rule over it. (See Murphy,

Conant, and Lange in loc.) For another view see Note, p. 04.

V. The First Murder. The warning went unheeded, and the jealousy and hatred found expression in anger and murder. Thus, in connection with religious worship, the first murder was committed. Could anything be more tragic?

If you want to find out Cain's condition of heart you will find it after the service which he pretended to render; you know a man best out of church; the minister sees the best side of a man, the lawyer the worst, and the physician the real. If you want to know what a man's religious worship is worth, see him out of church. Cain killed his brother when church was over, and that is the exact measure of Cain's piety. And so, when you went home the other day, you charged five shillings for a three-shilling article, and told the buyer it was too cheap: and that is exactly the value of your psalm-singing and sermon- hearing. You said you enjoyed the discourse exceedingly last Thursday; then you filled up the income-tax paper falsely ; and you will be judged by the schedule, not by the sentiment (Parker's People's Bible, Genesis, p. 147).

VI. The Divine Condemnation.

Very soon comes God's inquiry, "Where is Abel thy brother?" for sin cannot possibly be hid. There is a solemn significance in the repetition of his brother and thy brother in these verses. The Divine rebuke immediately follows (Genesis 4:10), which in turn is succeeded by the Divine sentence of unrequited toil and wandering. Thus once again we are taught in most unmistakable terms of the Divine holiness and righteousness, which will not for an instant tolerate human sin.

VII. The Divine Judgment.

Cain now realises something of what he has done, though it would seem that his thought is more of his punishment than of the sin that led to it. In mitigation of the results of his sin the Lord gives him a pledge of protection from vengeance. The phrase "set a mark upon Cain" should be rendered "appointed a sign for Cain" the same word being used as in Genesis 1:14; Genesis 9:12, and elsewhere. There seems no reason to think of a mark or brand upon his body, but some pledge or sign in regard to the question of vengeance. Then the judgment was executed, and Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, realising now to the full the separating character of sin, and the fact that when a man does despite to the Spirit of grace in rejecting God's will there can be only spiritual solitariness and misery.

Suggestions for Meditation The two men, Cain and Abel, are brought before us in several passages in the New Testament. They were both worshippers, for Cain was not a profane man; and yet how different was their worship, by reason of the difference of their lives! Two New Testament phrases sum up the practical lessons:

1. Righteous Abel.

Abel teaches us very clearly that (1) God is to be worshipped.

(2) God is to be worshipped through sacrifice.

(3) God is to be worshipped through atoning sacrifice.

(4) God is to be worshipped through an atoning sacrifice responded to by faith.

(5) God is to be glorified by a life of faith.

(6) God is to be glorified by a life of faith which expresses itself in righteousness. (Cf. 1 John 3:12; Hebrews 11:4; Hebrews 12:24.) 2. The way of Cain. In the life of Cain we see (1) Human thought as opposed to Divine revelation.

(2) Human wilfulness as opposed to the Divine will.

(3) Human pride as opposed to Divine humility.

(4) Human hatred as opposed to Divine love.

(5) Human hostility as opposed to Divine favour.

(6) Human loneliness as opposed to Divine fellowship.

NOTE ON Genesis 4:7.

Another interpretation which has much to recommend it is: But if thou doest (or offerest) not well, even then there is a sin-offering ready at hand for use as a propitiation. And not only so, but Abel, thy brother, will submit himself to thee as the first-born, and thou shalt exercise thy right of authority over him (rf. Genesis 3:16). The word rendered sin is translated sin-offering a large number of times in the Old Testament. This view regards the verse as at once a divine expostulation and an offer of grace. It is further argued that as the word for sin in the Hebrew is feminine, and the verb and pronouns in the last clause are masculine, the desire must refer to Abel and not to sin.

00A.06 Human Progress Gen_4:18-26; Gen_5:1-32; Gen_6:1-8

Human Progress Genesis 4:18-26; Genesis 5:1-32; Genesis 6:1-8

WE have now to follow the development of humanity along two lines that of Cain and that of Seth. This progress is first seen in the family, and then it extends to society in general. The entire section now before us has completeness all its own, even though it forms parts of two of the original sections of Genesis. Thus (a) Genesis 4:16-24 gives the line of Cain; Genesis 4:25-32 the line of Seth; and then (c) Genesis 6:1-8 the blending of these two lines, culminating in the Flood on the one hand and the preservation of Noah on the other. The entire section thus calls for careful study, both in connection with what precedes and with what follows. The section Genesis 2:4-25 Genesis 3:1-24, Genesis 4:1-26 had recorded a constant descent from bad to worse the sin of our first parents, their expulsion from Paradise, the murder of Abel, Cain's descendants reaching in Lamech the climax of boastful and unrestrained violence. That the section might not be suffered to end in unrelieved gloom a brighter outlook is added at the close, precisely as is done at the end of the next section in Genesis 6:8. Seth is substituted for Abel, whom Cain slew; and instead of piety perishing with murdered Abel, it reaches a new development in the days of Enos. The whole arrangement bears evidence of adaptation and careful thought, and is suggestive of one author, not the combination of separate compositions prepared with no reference to each other (Green, The Unity of the Book of Genesis, p. 48). The characteristics of Cain and his line must be carefully followed.

I. The First Stream Irreligion (Genesis 4:16-24).

Cain went forth from the immediate neighborhood of Eden and dwelt in the land of Nod. The precise locality is, of course, unknown, though it is probable that it was the country of Elam. As to the perennial question of Cain's wife, it is sufficient to say that she was either his sister or some other relative. In the absence of any law there would, of course, have been no sin in the marriage of a sister, and it is worthy of mention that within historic times the marriage of brother and sister was in practice in the royal family of Egypt, in order to secure unquestioned royalty of blood in the descent; and this was the case when the civilization of Egypt was at its highest. The suggestions of the narrative with regard to Cain show no trace of the influence of God's mercy upon him, and no indication of penitence on his part. He is still godless and reckless. His sacrifice showed that while he was prepared to recognize God as the God of providence, he had no conception of Him as the God of grace. There was no trace of real homage of heart; and as there had been no thought of sin and salvation in his offering, so now there is no indication of real devotion to God.

One characteristic of the line of Cain was the settled life they lived. The birth of a son was followed by the building of a city, to which Cain gave the name of his son, Enoch. This indication of a settled abode and a new line of descent seems to show that Cain was now going his own way, regardless of everything else. Nothing more is said of his line until the fifth generation.

It was in the line of Cain that the terrible evil of polygamy was first experienced, and the way that it is mentioned in the narrative by contrast with Genesis 2:24 shows the impression that it was intended to convey. From the sons of Lamech come the founders of agriculture (Genesis 4:20), music (Genesis 4:21), and manufacture (Genesis 4:22). This development of earthly civilization in connection with Cain's line is very suggestive and significant. In Lamech we have the culmination of Cainite irreligion. Whatever his song may mean, it seems on the face of it to suggest the glorification of two great evils polygamy and murder. If heredity accounts for anything, we may see in Lamech the intensified form of those evil tendencies which were evident in Cain.

Thus we have the Cainite race in six generations, and with an entire absence of all indications of religion, unless we interpret the name of Cain's son to mean Consecrated. This line was devoted to things earthly and lived absolutely apart from God. Natural ingenuity characterized the race. There was art and civilization, but no religion. Not that they were all necessarily flagrantly sinful, but just living without God (Ephesians 2:12). Is it not suggestive that the first time art, trade, and manufactures are mentioned they are associated with godlessness? Is it, or is it not, an accident that art has often flourished most when religion has been at its lowest? Is it not a fact that there is that in music, art, and civilization which easily panders to the very lowest in man? And while these things should be, and can be, devoted to the highest interests of human life and the glory of God, the possibilities of evil which they contain must never be overlooked. As for regarding them as substitutes for God, this is utterly impossible. This vivid picture of human society without God should be carefully pondered, and the message for society to-day clearly understood and proclaimed.

II. The Second Stream Godliness (Genesis 4:25-32). By contrast with the line of Cain we are now introduced to the new line of Seth, his brother. The points of contrast are many and significant. The first is the birth of Seth. The death of Abel had left an indelible mark on the soul of Eve, and now with the birth of her third son her Seth hopes of the fulfilment of the primeval promise again spring up, and she calls him Seth, and recognizes in his birth a Divine appointment and providence. It is noteworthy that when Cain was born she associated his birth with the Covenant God of Grace (Jehovah). With Seth's birth she associates the God of Creation and Power (Elohim). This distinctness of usage of the Divine names should be carefully noted at each stage of the narrative, for it is full of spiritual significance and cannot be satisfactorily accounted for in any other way.

Another point of emphasis is associated with the son of Seth. It is interesting that in the same chapter we have the record of the birth of Cain's son and also the son of Seth. Still more interesting is the fact that with the birth of Seth's son there came what may very fairly be called a revival of true religion, for then began men to call upon the Name of Jehovah. This may mean, as in our A. V., a revival of prayer; or it may mean still more than this (see margin), and indicate consecration to Jehovah, calling themselves by His Name, and thereby separating themselves from all those who were not prepared to take the same action. They realized that they were in covenant with the God of their father, Who had promised victory over sin.

Then follows the record of the line of Seth. Once again we have a reference to Adam which comes in naturally at the head of the line of Seth. Ten generations are given, and the monotony of the chapter has often been remarked. It is a simple record of living and dying, only broken by the

references to Enoch and Noah. We know nothing more of the names here mentioned a reminder, however, that human history is not necessarily to be judged by the outstanding names that every one knows:

“The best part of human history is never written at all. Family life, patient service, quiet endurance, the training of children, the resistance of temptation; these things are never mentioned by the historian (Parker, People’s Bible, Genesis, p. 155).” The three breaks in the whole narrative from Seth are associated with Enos, Enoch, and Noah, and they seem to represent three typical aspects of religious life. (1) Separation (Genesis 4:26, margin); (2) fellowship (Genesis 5:22); (3) service (Genesis 5:29). No inventions, art, or civilization are connected with the line of Seth. There is simplicity about the record, perhaps indicative of the quiet, simple religion that characterized most, if not all, of them. The witness of Enoch is given to us as an oasis in the chapter, and he is one of only two men of whom it is recorded in the Old Testament that they walked with God (Genesis 6:9).

(a) The fact of fellowship with God is suggested by this phrase. Several aspects of our “walk” are emphasized in Scripture. “Walk before Me” (Genesis 17:1), implying sincerity; “Walk after the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 13:4), suggesting obedience; “Walk in Him” (Colossians 2:6), telling of union; “Walking with God, meaning fellowship. This is life’s ideal and the culmination of God’s purpose for man.

(b) The commencement of this fellowship is suggested (Genesis 5:22). Enoch is not said to have walked with God until the birth of his son. May it not have been the coming into his life of that little life, God’s gift to him that led to this close fellowship?

(c) The continuance of fellowship. It lasted three hundred years. This was not easy. Enoch was no dreamy sentimental idealist. His life had in it the real difficulty of testimony against evil (Jude 1:14-15). The judgment on the line of the Cainites had to be proclaimed, and this is never anything but an irksome and trying task. Like the rest of mankind in later days, Enoch did not find it easy to walk with God.

(d) The culmination of fellowship. He was not, for God took him. The life of faith was thus crowned by entrance upon the life of perfect fellowship above. They shall walk with Me in white. The chapter suitably closes with a reference to Noah. Lamech showed his faith in connection with the naming of his son, and all through the story of Noah we see the secret of a living faith in God (Hebrews 11:7).

III. The Streams Blended (Genesis 6:1-8). This section is closely connected with the preceding and following sections as their necessary and adequate explanation. We observe the sad marks of human apostasy. Genesis 6:1 takes up the story laid down in Genesis 4:24, and deals with the growth of the Cainites. Genesis 6:2 speaks of the union of the two lines by inter-marriage. Some writers regard the phrase sons of God as referring to the angels, and it is urged that in other passages e.g. Job 1:6; Psalms 29:1; Daniel 3:25 and, indeed, always elsewhere in Scripture, the phrase invariably means angels. According to this view, we have here what has recently been called an “aetiological myth,” though the same view is held by those who regard the story not as mythical, but us absolutely historical, seeing in it a reference to the sin of the angels mentioned in Jude 1:6-7 and 2 Peter 2:4-6. The former view, which makes it mythological, is clearly to be set

aside, since on this interpretation it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the value of the story as part of the Word of God. The latter interpretation is also unnecessary on other grounds; and the view that regards the passage as the union of the Cainites and the Sethites is at once the most natural and the most Scriptural. The idea of the phrase sons of God was used in connection with Israel (Deuteronomy 14:1; Hosea 1:10; Hosea 11:1), and the teaching of subsequent Scripture is perfectly clear against the inter-marriage of Israel with the Canaanites. Besides, this verse Genesis 4:16 accounts for the universality of the sin which led to the catastrophe of the Flood, and Genesis 6:3 declares God's sentence upon man only for the sin recorded in Genesis 6:2. Surely angels would have been included in the judgment and in the record if they had been involved in this sin. Further, the Nephilim of Genesis 6:4 are not said to be due to what is recorded in Genesis 6:2, but are spoken of as existing previously and subsequently. It is therefore in every way better and truer to the context to explain the passage of the two lines of Seth and of Cain, and as giving the explanation of the judgment and the Flood (Green and Lange in loc.). As a natural result comes the Divine warning God's (Genesis 6:3). The interpretation of this verse is difficult. Probably the Hebrew word rendered "strive" would be better expressed by "dwell". In either case it is a warning of the limitation of mercy, and it is generally thought that the term of 120 years refers to the time yet to be given to mankind before the Flood should come upon the earth. Thus God in mercy warns while declaring His certain judgment upon evil.

Nothing could well be more pitiable than this delineation of human sin (Genesis 6:5). What a contrast we have here to the "God saw" of Genesis 1:31! Instead of everything being very good, all things were now evil. Mark carefully the phrases every imagination, only evil continually. Could anything be more solemn in its unrelieved gloom? No redeeming feature appears. Everything is evil in human life. It is also a solemn fact that most of the unholiness in human history has been due to the same cause as is mentioned here, the relations of men and women (Genesis 6:2, Genesis 6:4).

We are now bidden to note the Divine Sorrow (Genesis 6:6-7). The statements here are startling in their directness and definiteness. We are accustomed to speak of them as anthropomorphic; but so far from this being an objection, anthropomorphic language is our highest and best method of expression concerning God. It is no disrespect or derogation from infinite holiness to speak of God in this way. A very great deal of the objection to anthropomorphism really involves utter agnosticism and the impossibility of finding any expression for God at all (Dods, Genesis, pp. 60-62).

There was one exception to the universal prevalence of sin. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8). He and his alone were to be preserved amidst surrounding destruction.

Three subjects seem to call for particular attention from students.

1. The Longevity of the Antediluvians. The longevity attributed to the antediluvians has been declared to be inconsistent with physiological laws; but in our ignorance of the extent to which the conditions affecting human life may have been modified, such an assertion is unwarranted (Green, Unity of the Book of Genesis, p. 43).

2. The Authenticity of the Chronology. It should be remarked that no computation of time is ever built in the Bible upon this or any other genealogy. . . . This genealogy could only afford a safe

estimate of time on the assumption that no links are missing, and that every name in the line of descent has been recorded. But this we have no right to take for granted. The analogy of other Biblical genealogies is decidedly against it. Very commonly unimportant names are omitted; sometimes several consecutive names are dropped together. No one has a right, therefore, to denominate a primaeval chronology and set it in opposition to the deductions of science, and thence conclude that there is a conflict between the Bible and science (Green, Unity, pp. 49.).

3. The Two Genealogies. It is sometimes urged that there has been a confusion between the genealogy of the Cainites and that of the Sethites, owing to a certain similarity of names, six of them being nearly identical; yet the distinctness of the two genealogies is clearly stated, and in reality only two names are exactly the same in both. If it be said that the editor of Genesis evidently intended the Lamech of chapter 4 to be regarded as the Lamech of chapter 5, it may perhaps be replied that centuries of readers have clearly recognized the distinction between them (Green, p. 45; Redpath in loc.).

Suggestions for Meditation In this section we have in sharp contrast two classes of men who are still to be found upon earth, and whose characteristics take pretty much the same form as in those early days.

Man living without God. In the line of Cain we have cleverness, culture, and civilization; and yet with all these manifest advantages everything was purely earthly, selfish, and sensual. God was ignored, and they lived their life entirely apart from Him. Self-contained, occupied with their own intellectual and social pursuits, they simply ignored the claims of God, and lived and died without Him. Today the same spirit is abroad in many quarters. Men have everything that this world can give of education, refinement, culture, pleasure, art, civilization, and yet there is nothing of God or His Christ in their lives.

Man walking with God. The elements of true living in relation to God are evident in the line of Seth.

(1) Devotion to God (Genesis 4:25).

(2) Consecration to God (Genesis 4:26).

(3) Fellowship with God (Genesis 5:22).

(4) Testimony for God (Hebrews 11:5).

(5) Service for God (Genesis 5:29).

(6) Grace from God (Genesis 6:8).

Let us therefore keep the avenues open towards God and a constant communication between us and the sky. The house of life assuredly needs its kitchen (physical), its library (intellectual), its parlor (social); but it also needs, above all, its drawing-room that is, its withdrawing room where the soul retires from all else to seek and meet with God. Only then do we come to our true life and realize the Divine end of existence. Our cleverness becomes devoted to the highest objects, our culture becomes transformed into a true cultus or worship, our civilization is fraught with blessing to those around, and God is in all things glorified.

00A.07 Before the Flood Gen_6:9-22

Before the Flood Genesis 6:9-22 A NEW section of Genesis commences here. The period from Adam to Noah is almost entirely passed over, probably because there was nothing to record as to the progress of the Kingdom of God. Instead of such a record we have, by contrast, only the solemn and significant summary of the awful progress of sin. We have already seen the development of wickedness which culminated in the awful sins referred to in the previous verses. There is no indication in the Bible of man's steady rise from a lower to a higher level, developing out of barbarism into holiness. On the contrary, the race is seen to tend downward in proportion as it is left to follow its own way. This view of man's proneness to evil, with the consequent results, is in exact keeping with the facts of history, and with all the best and most accurate anthropological knowledge of the present day (Orr, Image of God, passim). The entire section dealing with the generations of Noah (Genesis 4:9-26, Genesis 5:1-32, Genesis 6:1-22, Genesis 7:1-24, Genesis 8:1-22, Genesis 9:1-29) should be looked at as a whole, and its completeness noted:

1. Noah and his Sons (Genesis 6:9-10).

2. The Sinfulness and Condemnation of the World (Genesis 6:11-13).

3. The Divine Command (Genesis 6:14-21).

4. The Obedience of Noah (Genesis 6:22-29; Genesis 7:1-9).

5. The Flood (Genesis 7:10-24).

6. The Divine Preservation of the Ark (Genesis 8:1-22).

7- The New Covenant (Genesis 9:1-17).

8. The New Start (Genesis 9:18-29). In studying this material in detail it is important to notice the combination of formal phraseology with the vividness and detail e.g., Genesis 6:17-20 and Genesis 8:20-22. The dignity of the narrative is also noteworthy. There is nothing grotesque or unworthy, everything is sober and in keeping with the solemn realities involved. The simplicity and genuineness of Noah s character, the simple and righteous motives ascribed to God, the sobriety and purity of the promise made to Noah, should all be observed. Not least of all it will be noticed that the story of the Flood, as such, is quite incidental to the spiritual realities that arise out of the events. The narrative leads up to the covenant in chapter 9, which carries with it the new start of the human race after the failure between Adam and Noah.

It is impossible to dwell in detail on the entire narrative of the Flood: it must suffice to follow mainly the pages of our English Bible, and look at the spiritual truths associated with (1) the period immediately preceding the Flood, (2) the time of the Flood itself, and (3) the early days of the new era after the Flood. We now dwell first of all upon the verses at the head of this section. The contrast between the sin recorded in Genesis 6:7 and the character of Noah in Genesis 6:8-10 is very striking, especially as it is followed by another contrast in the verses now before us.

I. The Divine Purpose (Genesis 6:9-13) The divine purpose is now clearly stated to be a judgment upon sin. Its cause is due to the awful character of mankind (Genesis 6:11). The two words, “corrupt and violence” give us respectively the character and expression of the sin, the cause and the effect. The corruption has led to violence, for badness always leads to cruelty in one form or another. A life that is wrong with God necessarily becomes wrong with its fellows. The Divine Scrutiny is also stated in simple but solemn terms (Genesis 6:12). God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt. How great is the contrast here with a former occasion: God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good (Genesis 1:31). God is not indifferent to human life, and the fact of sin necessarily compelled Him to take action. His decision to destroy the earth was at once an expression of His justice and His mercy; the end had come, and there was no alternative. Moral putridity can only be destroyed by a Divine judgment.

II. The Divine Plan (Genesis 6:14-17). The method of deliverance was the Ark of Safety about which God now proceeds to speak. The instructions are given in full detail. The ark is to be made of gopher wood, by which is probably to be under stood some resinous wood like that of the fir or cypress tree. The vessel was in no sense a ship intended for a voyage, but a kind of covered raft or floating house, sufficient for buoyancy and protection during the flood. Into the details of shape and space it is unnecessary to enter, except to notice the minute care shown by these details and the indications they afford of the Divine thought for the inmates of the ark. With great solemnity God announces his intention of bringing a flood upon the earth to destroy all life. “Behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth.” Thus solemnly does God call His servant’s attention to what is to happen and also to the fact that the flood is His own divine act.

III. The Divine Provision (Genesis 6:18-22). In contrast with the announcement of the flood comes this declaration of the divine covenant. It is noteworthy that we have the word establish in connection with the covenant. Noah was already in covenant with God (Genesis 6:8), but in view of the special need of assurance of divine protection God now declares that He will establish His covenant. This is the first occasion on which we have this word “covenant” one of the great outstanding expressions of Holy Scripture as indicative of God’s relations with man. It is particularly interesting to notice that the covenant was with Noah only, his family being included because of their connection with him. It is worth while observing that in Holy Scripture the family rather than the individual constitutes the true unity. The race, as we well know, fell in Adam, and here in like manner Noah’s family was saved for his sake. Other instances like those of Abraham and Cain confirm this view of what is now usually described as the solidarity of mankind. The Apostle Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, seems to recognize the same principle when he says; the promise is to you, and to your children. What a responsibility this places upon parentage and guardianship and every other position involving the lives of others.

God’s care of the animals is not to be overlooked in the study of these verses. Two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive (Genesis 6:20). To all this Noah made a fitting response (Genesis 6:22). Twice over we are told simply and suggestively that he did according to all that God commanded him.

Suggestions for Meditation In these verses we have some of the essential elements in the life of a true believer as illustrated by Noah.

1. His Position (Genesis 6:8).

“Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” This was the foundation of his life as it is the foundation of every true life today. By grace are ye saved. Grace, in the Bible sense of the word, means God’s unmerited favour, and it was this alone that gave Noah his spiritual position before God. He was saved by grace alone.

2. His Attitude (Genesis 6:9).

“Noah was a righteous man.” From grace comes righteousness, and whether we think of its Old Testament meaning of genuine ness and sincerity, or of its New Testament fuller meaning of being right with God, we can see its necessity and importance for every one of us.

3. His Character (Genesis 6:9).

“Noah was…perfect.” The original word means upright, genuine, and has no reference to the absence of sin. Uprightness in turn is the result of being righteous before God through grace. Our personal character must necessarily be the proof of our true position in the sight of God.

4. His Testimony (Genesis 6:9).

“In his generations.” Here we have brought before us the thought of Noah’s life in relation to his contemporaries. He lived a life of witness to God among those with whom he was associated. As the Apostle Peter tells us, he was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). His life as well as his words bore testimony to God and thus condemned the world of his day (Hebrews 11:7).

5. His Fellowship (Genesis 6:9).

“Noah walked with God.” He is one of two men of whom this is recorded (Genesis 5:22). The idea is that of friendship and fellowship with God, and it is note worthy that such a position was possible amidst the very difficult, practical, every-day life that Noah had to lead. It meant courage and independence, for no one else was walking in that way. When a man walks with God it necessarily means that he cannot walk with any of his fellows who are going in the opposite direction.

6. His Conduct (Genesis 6:22).

“Thus did Noah.” His spiritual position, attitude, character and fellowship were expressed and proved in practical obedience. Nothing can make up for this. All our privileges and opportunities of grace are intended to be manifested in daily obedience. Conduct is three-fourths of life.

7. His Thoroughness (Genesis 6:22).

“According to all that God commanded him.” This was the standard by which Noah lived, the Word of God and everything that that Word had declared. He did not pick and choose among God’s commands but did according to all that God had said. It was this Word of God that led him to prepare the ark, being warned of God of things not seen as yet (Hebrews 11:7).

What a splendid figure this man makes; a picture of solitary goodness! He was the one saint of that day. It is possible, therefore, to be good even though we have to stand alone. It is possible to be right with God even amidst surrounding iniquity. God is the same to-day as He was to Noah, and if only we are willing to fulfill the conditions we too shall walk with God and please Him.

Chapter 26

00A.08 At the Flood Gen_7:1-24

At the Flood Genesis 7:1-24 IN view of the brief and summary character of the first five chapters of Genesis it cannot but be noticed how full of detail these chapters are in their record of the Flood. Bearing in mind the constant spiritual purpose of the book it would seem as though we are intended to study as carefully as possible every detail in order to learn the lessons God would teach us.

I. The Record of the Events. This chapter is noteworthy for the point of time mentioned. The details can best be studied along these lines.

First, we have the last week preceding the flood (Genesis 7:1-6). During this time God gave the final invitation to Noah, and announced to him the coming of the flood within seven days.

Then we have the day on which Noah entered into the ark (Genesis 7:7-10). It requires very little imagination to realize the solemnity of the occasion, and the procession and the entrance of all those who were to be preserved from the Flood.

Next comes a record of the forty days of rain (Genesis 7:11-17). Together with the rain we are told of the movements of the great deep, both combining to bring about the Divine judgment. The chapter closes with the statement of the one hundred and fifty days during which the waters prevailed upon the earth (Genesis 7:18-24). The word prevailed is the keynote of this section, and may suggest not merely a physical prevalence of the Flood, but a spiritual prevalence of Divine judgment, irresistible, irretrievable, irrevocable.

II. The Facts of the Flood. The evidence for the destruction of the human race except one family is very strong apart from Genesis. It seems impossible that so widespread and persistent a tradition can be regarded as an invention or myth. There is nothing mythical or unworthy about the Bible account, and it is perhaps worth while observing that the proportions of the ark are not essentially different from those of ships of corresponding size now sailing between here and America. It is scarcely likely that the proportions given in Genesis could be mere guess work.

Further, the tendency of recent geological discoveries is to render the account in Genesis more credible than it was even twenty-five years ago. There are clear proofs of a widespread catastrophe to animals and plants immediately preceding the period of man’s appearance on the earth, and it is urged by some geologists that these changes suggest that man was introduced into the world before the instability of the glacial period had given way to the apparent stability of the present order of affairs. All this, while it is, of course, no proof of the genuineness of Genesis, is distinctly in keeping with the narrative there given (Geology’s “Witness to the Flood, by Dr G. F. Wright, American Sunday School Times, July 6, 1901).

III. Was the Flood Universal?

It is essential, in considering this question, to view it from the standpoint of the writer of Genesis. Then we at once realize that to an eye-witness, or to one dealing with the subject from the

standpoint of human sin and Divine judgment, the universality of the Flood would be certain, even though the area was quite local. The description of the Flood, so far as the destruction of human life is concerned, would be much the same, whether local or literally universal. The one and only purpose of the writer seems to be the record of the destruction of man. The universal tradition of the Flood is no necessary proof of its universality, since the tradition, as handed down, would be necessarily carried wherever men went. At the same time there are geological facts in different parts of the world which seem to suggest something more than a local flood in Western Asia. The narrative in Genesis has been aptly likened to a sea captain's log-book (Wright, ut supra), and certainly all the universality demanded is that which was necessary for the destruction of the human race. The spiritual purpose of the narrative, which is, of course, the predominant factor, would be perfectly realized by supposing that the Flood was confined to the locality then inhabited by the human race (Pulpit Commentary, Genesis, pp. 119 f.: Urquhart, New Biblical Guide, vol. i., chapters xi., xii., xiii.; Howorth's Mammoth and the Flood).

IV. The Flood in Tradition.

According to Lenormant the story of the Flood is a universal tradition in all branches of the human family, with the sole exception of the black race. The Babylonian tradition is remarkably like the Hebrew account, and at the same time remarkably unlike. The coincidences suggest a community of origin, while the divergences show that there cannot have been any direct influence of Babylonia on the Hebrew account. It is hardly likely that the Jews would have copied it from any exilic records possessed by their inveterate foe. As is well known, the Babylonian account is grossly polytheistic, while the Hebrew is as purely monotheistic, and no theory Genesis 7:1-24 of their relationship will ever be satisfactory unless the divergences as well as the coincidences are accounted for. It is much more natural to believe that the Hebrew preserves for us the pure spiritual version of the tradition, and that the Babylonian account is a corrupt version. The antecedents of Abraham are ample to account for the Hebrew tradition, and if we may assume that he brought it with him to Canaan we can quite understand how the purer account was preserved. Civilization in the days prior to Abraham shows that this view is perfectly reasonable and even likely.

V. The Flood in Genesis.

It is urged that two, if not three, accounts are united, not by the blending of excerpts, as in previous sections, but by close interweaving. This is argued on the grounds that each account is complete in itself and that only thus can the repetitions and alternations of the Divine names be accounted for. It may, however, be pointed out that each account is not complete, for if the sections attributed to each source respectively are read continuously, it will be found that there are gaps of great importance, and no real continuity of the narrative. The story as it stands has a unity, and certainly was intended by the compiler to be regarded as a whole. If we allow the recognized thirty days to the month, and commence with Noah's six hundredth birthday as in Genesis 7:11, we shall find that there is no inconsistency in the chronology. The use of the Divine names gives us the two aspects of the Flood in relation to the God of Judgment (Elohim) and the God of Grace (Jehovah). Both titles are used, and that with remarkable discrimination, while on the partition theory the differences of use are inexplicable. It is admitted by one leading critic that other phraseological criteria, apart from the use of the Divine names, are slight; while another critic holds that the theory

of a division of the narrative based upon this distinction of usage of Divine names is now manifestly exploded, and the disproof is absolute and irrefragable.

Above all, the theory of two documents entirely fails to account for the Chaldaean narrative of the Flood, which contains the characteristics both of the alleged author who uses Elohim and of the one who uses Jehovah. There are at least twenty-five items of the story of the Flood common to Genesis and the Assyrian tablet; and as these items cover nearly the entire story they necessarily include nearly all the literary characteristics upon which criticism bases its claim of two documents. As this tablet is said to be as old as 3000 B.C. (Hastings Bible Dictionary), it is difficult to understand how we are to account for the separate narratives of the two authors, who are said to have lived more than a thousand years later. The story in Genesis undoubtedly appears before us as a unity; and even if there were originally two Genesis 7:1-24 stories they have been remarkably well blended into one. Certainly contradictious only arise when the attempt is made to dissect the narrative as it now stands (Green, Unity of Genesis, in loc.; Everts, Homiletic Review, vol. xl. p. 124; Sayce, Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies).

Suggestions for Meditation

If in Genesis 6:1-22 we find we have a portrait of the servant in relation to God, in Genesis 7:1-24 we have a number of statements concerning God in relation to His servant.

1. The Divine Invitation (Genesis 7:1).

“Come thou.” This is the first time that the familiar word Come occurs. It is found some six hundred times in the rest of the Bible. It is noteworthy that God said “Come into the ark,” not “Go.” Surely we have here the suggestion that in some sense God would be with him there. His presence is salvation. The personal character of the invitation is also noteworthy, Come thou. Yet again, the inclusion of his family in the invitation should be observed, Come thou and all thy house.”

2. The Divine Observation (Genesis 7:1).

“Thee have I seen.” The thought of God watching His servants is at once a joy and a responsibility, an inspiration and a warning. When the life is wholly surrendered to God and lived in genuine sincerity the thought of Thou God seest mo in a delight. Not seldom in Holy Scripture have we expressions telling us that God is well pleased with His faithful servants. The thought that our life can give pleasure to God is one of the greatest incentives to holy living.

3. The Divine Requirement (Genesis 7:1).

“Righteous before Me.” This practically sums up everything that God demands from man. Article 11 of the Church of England defines justification as accounted righteous before God. Somewhat similar in idea is the description of Zacharias and Elisabeth. They were both righteous before God (see Genesis 17:1; 1 Kings 9:4; 2 Kings 20:3; Job 1:1; Acts 23:1; Php 3:6). The Old Testament is necessarily concerned only with the divine requirement of righteousness. It remained for New Testament times to reveal the provision of a perfect righteousness in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:20-26).

4. The Divine Testimony (Genesis 7:1).

“Righteous before Me in this generation.” Once again we have the thought of Noah s contemporaries brought before us, but this time from the divine side. God here proclaims His servant s righteousness, and bears witness thereto. Like Abel and Enoch before him, he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his life (Hebrews 11:4-7). When a man’s ways please the Lord God always lets other people know it.

5. The Divine Commandment (Genesis 7:5).

“The Lord commanded him.” The Word of God is brought constantly before us in connection with Noah (Genesis 6:13, Genesis 6:22; Genesis 7:5, Genesis 7:9, Genesis 7:16; Genesis 8:15, Genesis 8:21; Genesis 9:1, Genesis 9:8, Genesis 9:12, Genesis 9:17), as indeed it is all through the Bible. God speaks, man listens; God commands, man obeys. The Word of God is at once the standard and the guide of life, and no life or service is possible unless it is ever subject thereto.

6. The Divine Protection (Genesis 7:10). The Lord shut him in. This suggests that he was not dependent upon himself for safety, but upon the Lord. It was a divine, not a human fastening that guaranteed his perfect shelter. Those whom God protects never need have any fear.

7. The Divine Preservation (Genesis 8:1).

God remembered Noah. The servant was not forgotten by his Lord, and this point, which is the culminating thought of the section, shows the constant divine care of Noah and his family. There is only one thing that God forgets with reference to His children, that is, their sins. “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” As for God’s people themselves, the words are blessedly and eternally true, “They shall not be forgotten of Me.”

00A.09 After the Flood Gen_8:1-22

After the Flood Genesis 8:1-22

AGAIN we are impressed with the remarkable detail of the history. Yet human history, as such and in itself, has no real place in the Old Testament. It is only human life, as seen in the light of the divine purpose that is recorded in the Word of God. The divine and the human elements are here blended and contrasted, and along these lines the chapter will best be studied.

I. The Lord's Action (Genesis 8:1-5). The divine judgment is now drawing to its close. The servant is remembered by God and the covenant established is now to be carried out in full. The waters from above and below were restrained, and the ark now rests in safety upon the mountains of Ararat. The place of rest seems to have been the territory known by the name of one of the peaks (cf. 2 Kings 19:37, R.V.).

II. The Servant's Attitude (Genesis 8:6-14).

It was an attitude of Faith. Noah was on the alert and responsive to the divine movements. Having opened the window, he sent forth a raven, which wandered hither and thither and did not return. Then he sent forth a dove, but the dove found no resting-place and returned to him in the ark.

It was also an attitude of Hope. Having waited seven days more, again he sent forth a dove, and the dove came back with an olive leaf, so that Noah now knew that tire waters were abating.

It was also an attitude of Patience. He waited seven days longer before sending out the dove a third time, and when the dove did not return, Noah must have known that the day of deliverance was at hand. When God pledges His word and establishes His covenant, His servants have a strong foundation for their faith, hope, and patience.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word! What more can He say, than to you He hath said to you, who for refuge to Jesus have fled.

III. The Lord's Command (Genesis 8:15-17). At last the time had come for Noah to leave the ark, and the Word which had so clearly told him to enter, now with equal clearness tells him to come forth with his family, and to bring forth with him everything that he had taken in. God never commands before the time required for obedience. Step by step He makes known His will. He is never too soon and never too late.

IV. The Servant's Obedience (Genesis 8:18-19). The servant had obeyed implicitly, accurately, and immediately before the Flood, so he does now. He went forth at once at the command of God. Obedience to be real must be prompt and full. This is one of the supreme tests of genuine living.

V. The Servant's Consecration (Genesis 8:20).

Noah's first act on landing upon the earth was to build an altar and to offer sacrifices, (Genesis 8:20). Thereby he testified at once (a) to his gratitude to God for deliverance, (b) to his need of

sacrifice in approaching his God, and (c) to the consecration of his life to the service of God as symbolized by the burnt offering.

VI. The Lord's Revelation (Genesis 8:21-22). In response there is a twofold movement of God. First there is the acceptance of the sacrifice, "The Lord smelled a sweet savour." Quite literally the phrase is, a savour of rest, the word apparently being a play upon the meaning of Noah (Genesis 5:29). God thus signified His acceptance of what His servant had done in offering "a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour" (Ephesians 5:2).

Following the acceptance of the sacrifice was the divine assurance with special reference to the future of the earth. There was to be no more curse in the form of a flood, and there was to be an absolute guarantee of the permanence of the seasons, year by year, as long as the earth remained.

Thus the Lord and His servant revealed their attitudes towards each other all through this chapter, and we have in it one of the most suggestive pictures of God in relation to man, and of man in relation to God.

Suggestions for Meditation

Let us now review these three chapters and read them afresh in the light of New Testament teaching. In view of the words of the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 3:20), it is not wrong to regard the story of the flood as a great pictorial and symbolical lesson full of spiritual truths. It is sometimes said that history never repeats itself, but there is a sense in which it does in relation to spiritual and moral realities. Our Lord distinctly tells us that the history of Noah will repeat itself in the day of His coming (Matthew 24:37-42). What were the days of Noah, and what will be the days of the Son of Man?

1. Days of sin.

(a) God's Way was abandoned. The earth had become corrupt through sin, and man's heart was only evil continually.

(b) God's Word was speaking. The Ark was the Divine protest against sin; while Noah, a preacher of righteousness, ever witnessed to the certainty of retribution and the limited time of God's Spirit among men (Genesis 6:3).

(c) God's Will was unheeded. For 120 years Noah preached without obtaining a single convert. This shows the awful extent of man's depravity, and the certainty of that wrath of God which is the manifestation of the Divine holiness against sin. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God."

2. Days of sorrow.

We think of the people at the time of the Flood, and our thought goes on to those who will be living similarly in the days of the Son of Man.

(a) God's Message was neglected. Every nail driven into the ark was like an appeal from God, and yet all the testimony was fruitless year after year.

(b) God’s Refuge was rejected. There was no other way of salvation except the Ark; no human device was sufficient. They might get up to the highest peak of the highest hill, and yet there would be no salvation.

(c) God’s Gift was lost. They had the offer of salvation and life. They neglected and then rejected it, and as a consequence they lost it.

3. Days of salvation.

(a) God’s grace was working. Noah was the solitary saint of those days, and this shows that goodness is possible, even amidst the most adverse circumstances. He lived as well as preached; his life testified as well as his words to the reality and opportunity of the grace of God.

(b) God’s Love was planning. The instructions about the Ark, the invitation to enter, the protection within the Ark, the cessation of the Flood, and the deliverance of Noah and his house, all testify to the reality of God’s love in providing this way of salvation.

(c) God’s Power was keeping. How significant it is to read, The Lord shut him in! There was ample room and perfect provision in the Ark. No anxiety, no possibility of leakage or wreck; one door of entrance, and that protected by Divine power. The Ark was a home for saved people. So far as we know, there was no sail, no mast, no rudder; only God! And that was enough!

Thus, as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. Days of evil and yet of good. Amid the evil days an opportunity for salvation and an invitation to partake of the Divine mercy. Days of peril and of loss; and yet the opportunity of pardon, peace, protection, preservation. Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.

Chapter 28

00A.10 The New Era Gen_9:1-17

The New Era Genesis 9:1-17

NOAH now takes his place as the second head of the human race. There was to be a new beginning, a fresh start, full of hope and with every Divine guarantee of blessing. Sin had been punished, grace was working, and God was ready to guide and bless those through whom the earth was to be peopled and ruled.

I. The Elements of a New Commencement (Genesis 9:1-7). The new start is made at the only possible point, that of the Divine blessing (Genesis 9:1). God blessed Noah and his sons; just as God blessed

Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28), so it was necessary that the same Divine blessing should rest upon the new progenitors of the human race.

Divine exhortation naturally follows Divine blessing (Genesis 9:1). “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.” Again we are reminded of the primeval command (Genesis 1:28). God thereby took the necessary steps for the propagation of life. The Divine promise appropriately follows (Genesis 9:2). Noah is assured that fear and dread should be upon everything on the earth for his sake. Into his hands they were all to be delivered, thereby assuring him of protection and power.

Divine provision was also assured to him (Genesis 9:3). Food and sustenance were thus assured. It would seem from a comparison of this verse with Genesis 1:29, that it was only after the Flood that animal food was permitted to man.

Divine prohibition is included in this new commencement (Genesis 9:4). The sacredness of life is taught by this prohibition about the eating of blood, and still more the thought of what that blood was to symbolize in atonement is probably here first brought before us (Leviticus 3:17).

Divine warnings are another element in this passage (Genesis 9:6). Noah and his sons are told still more about the sanctity of life. Blood shed will be required, and this great principle is based upon the highest sanction, for in the image of God made He man.

Divine expectations fitly close the section (Genesis 9:7). God again exhorts and encourages Noah and his sons to fruitfulness, thus indicating that He expected them to fulfill the conditions of life and blessing, and to realize thereby the Divine purpose.

II. The Establishment of a New Covenant (Genesis 9:8-17).

It is often said that God never gives a command without providing the grace needed to obey, and we have a striking illustration of this great principle in the passage before us. Following naturally and appropriately after the Divine counsels given in the preceding section we have the assurance of needed grace in connection with the Divine covenant. The Source of the covenant naturally comes first (Genesis 9:9). Its author was God. Human covenants were entered into mutually

between two parties, but here the entire initiation was taken by God. “I, behold, I” (Genesis 9:9); “I will” (Genesis 9:11); “I make” (Genesis 9:12); “I have established” (Genesis 9:17). The significance of this is due to the fact that it was of God’s free grace alone that the covenant was made. His blessings were to be bestowed even though nothing had been done by man to deserve them. Everything is of grace from first to last. The Scope of the covenant is also noteworthy (Genesis 9:9-10). It comprehended Noah and his seed, and not only these, but every living creature. Thus the blessings of God were to be extended as widely over the earth as they could possibly be. This is not the only place in Scripture where the destiny of the lower creation is intimately connected with that of man (Isaiah 11:6-8; Romans 8:19-22). The Purpose of the covenant should be carefully noted (Genesis 9:11). It was associated with the assurance that human life should not be cut off or the world destroyed any more by a flood. The appropriateness of this revelation is apparent, for at that time it must have been a real perplexity to know whether there would be any repetition in the future of what they had experienced in the Flood.

Everything connected with their relations to God had been altered by that catastrophe, and now God does not leave man ignorant, but, on the contrary, pledges Himself not to bring another similar judgment upon the earth. The Sign of the covenant is specially emphasized (Genesis 9:12-13). The rainbow is now given a specific spiritual meaning, and nature for the first time becomes a symbol of spiritual truth. We know from subsequent passages what a great principle is brought before us in this way. It is what is known as the sacramental principle. In one of the Homilies of the Church of England, Sacraments are defined as visible signs to which are annexed promises, and the rainbow was the first of such visible signs illustrative of spiritual truths. We think of the Passover Lamb, the Brazen Serpent, Gideon s Fleece, and especially of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as illustrations of this Divine method of revealing and assuring us of spiritual truth. As Lange beautifully says, God’s eye of grace and our eye of faith meet in the Sacraments. Our faith lays hold of the promise annexed to the sign, and the sign strengthens and confirms our faith that God will fulfill His word. At the same time it must never be forgotten that if there is no faith in the promise there can be no assurance in the sign. The word and the sign necessarily go together, and can never be separated. This revelation of the spiritual meaning of the rainbow was God’s response to Noah’s altar. Divine faithfulness thus answered to human faith, and it is of real interest that in the symbol of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:28), and of the Apocalypse (Revelation 4:3; Revelation 10:1), the rainbow is again brought before us. The Message of the covenant should be carefully pondered (Genesis 9:14-15). It was an assurance of God’s faithfulness. He was prepared to carry out all His promises, notwithstanding all the previous failures of mankind. The emphasis upon My covenant and My bow should be noted (cf. Genesis 6:18), and it is specially to be observed that the sign of the covenant is associated with God’s remembrance rather than man’s. I will remember (Genesis 9:15). I will look upon it, that I may remember (Genesis 9:16). The Duration of the covenant is also revealed (Genesis 9:12, Genesis 9:16). “For perpetual generations.” “The everlasting covenant.” The unconditional and permanent character of the covenant is thus emphasized. God did not demand any pledge of obedience in response to the covenant, but assured Noah of the unconditional Divine faithfulness to His word throughout all generations. The Guarantee of the covenant is not to be overlooked (Genesis 9:17). God said unto Noah, “This is the token of the covenant.” The covenant is thus based upon the Divine word. It is God’s character and word that guarantee the fulfilling of His promises. “Two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie” (Hebrews 6:18). Here is our strong and invincible

assurance, the unchanging faithfulness of the word of the living God.

Suggestions for Meditation The word covenant is one of the great Bible words. It means a coming together (co-venant, con-venire). As used of a human transaction, it implies a bargain, one party giving and the other receiving. It also sometimes partakes of the nature of a voluntary undertaking or pledge, with out any expectation of a return. This latter view is its characteristic in the passage before us, for we read only of God's covenant with Noah, not Noah s covenant with God. God binds Himself, and lays down the line of His relationship to man. It was for Noah simply to receive this, to reckon upon it, and to rely upon its blessings. It was essentially a covenant of grace, and like the New Covenant of the Gospel, the essence of it is a gift.

1. The Contents of the Covenant.

It declared God's mercy in relation to the past. It told Noah that there would not be another flood of judgment.

It declared God's power in relation to the present. It reminded the patriarch and his sons that they could depend upon the regular order of nature not being disturbed, and not being subject to chance and mere caprice.

It declared God's faithfulness in relation to the future. It bid them look forward, and rest quietly in the assurance, that as each day came, all would be well with their life.

It declared God's grace in relation to man. There is a clear distinction between mercy and grace. Mercy partakes largely of the element of pity and compassion for those who are in need. Grace is much more than this, and is Gods attitude of unmerited, undeserved favour towards those who are not merely negatively non-deserving, but also to those who are positively undeserving. The covenant of grace is at the foundation of everything which God bestows upon us.

It was intended to elicit faith. This was to be the human response to the Divine faithfulness. Man's trust was to answer to God's truth, and in this confidence man would find peace and strength.

It was intended to elicit hope. Hope differs from faith in this respect, that it looks onward to the future rather than being limited to the present. Faith accepts a present gift, hope expects a future gift. Faith looks upward to the Promisor, hope looks forward to the thing promised. Faith appropriates here and now, hope anticipates the coming blessing. Day by day Noah and his sons were intended to exercise hope as they rested upon the covenant of God.

It was intended to elicit love. Just as the altar expressed Noah s gratitude, so we may be perfectly sure that this renewal and establishment of the covenant would stir him to grateful and adoring love. We love, because He first loved us.

2. The Characteristics of the Covenant.

Let us dwell on the rainbow as illustrating the Divine Covenant.

Consider its naturalness. A temporal feature was used to express and symbolize spiritual truths. God definitely associated nature with grace. This is but one out of many instances in which nature is a symbol of the supernatural.

Consider its conspicuousness. All could see the rainbow, and the covenant of God in like manner was intended to be seen by all without difficulty or hindrance.

Consider its universality. As the rainbow in the heavens so was the universal scope of the covenant. All the earth was included in it, not one of God's creatures was exempted.

Consider its uniqueness. The rainbow has been rightly described as the joint product of storm and sunshine. It comes from the effects of the sun on the drops of rain in a rain-cloud. So is it with the covenant of God. On the one hand it is due to the cloud of human sin, on the other to the sunshine of Divine grace.

Consider its beauty. There is scarcely anything more exquisitely beautiful than the rainbow, and assuredly there is nothing in this universe more beautiful than the grace of God. The term "grace" has for one of its meanings that of beauty, and the Apostle Peter speaks of the variegated grace of God (1 Peter 4:10). John Wesley aptly writes of the Victorious sweetness of the grace of God.

"Grace, tis a charming sound, Harmonious to the ear."

Consider its union of earth and heaven. As the rainbow spans the sky and reaches the earth, so is it with the covenant of grace. Like Jacob's ladder, it is set up on the earth and the top reaches to heaven.

Consider its permanence. Mr. Eugene Stock (Lesson Studies in Genesis) calls attention to the fact that while we do not always see a rainbow owing to the clouds hiding the sun, yet if we could get above the clouds we should see the rainbow on them. Thus there is never rain without a rainbow being visible if we could only get to the right spot to see it, but God is always above the clouds and He always sees it. This is exactly what is taught us. The bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it. It is not our sight of the rainbow, but God's, that constitutes the power and peace of this covenant.

"The clouds may go and come, And storms may sweep my sky This blood-sealed friendship changes not: The cross is ever nigh. My love is oft-times low, My joy still ebbs and flows; But peace with Him remains the same No change Jehovah knows.

I change, He changes not, The Christ can never die; His love, not mine, the resting-place, His truth, not mine, the tie."

Chapter 29

00A.11 A Believer's Fall Gen_9:18-29.

A Believer’s Fall Genesis 9:18-29. THE events recorded in the preceding section might well suggest that henceforth everything would be well with Noah and his sons. A new start had been made amid great hopes, with perfect provision and a Divine assurance. Yet here comes the record of failure. As we read it our hearts are full of disappointment, and yet, if we may use human language, what must the Divine disappointment have been. As God afterwards said about Israel, What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it (Isaiah 5:4)? It is evident that the Divine judgment at the Flood had not extirpated the evil in human nature, and as we ponder this solemn lesson, we should take care to apply it to ourselves. It is much easier to feel sad about Noah than to be on the watch about our own life.

I. The Sons (Genesis 9:18-19). The names of Noah’s sons have been given before (Genesis 5:32; Genesis 6:10; Genesis 7:13); they are given again here because the narrative specially concerns them. In the reference to Canaan we have an anticipation of Genesis 10:6, in order to prepare for what is recorded of him in Genesis 9:25 of the present section. The three sons of Noah are described as the heads of the three divisions of the human race (Genesis 9:19), and it is by reason of their importance in this connection that the incident now recorded finds its full significance. Their action is soon seen to affect others.

II. The Sins (Genesis 9:20-21). The occasion of the sins of Noah, it should be observed, was his daily occupation. They were committed in the course of his ordinary work. It was a perfectly legitimate calling as a husbandman to plant a vineyard, and no blame is attached to him in this respect. It is a point worthy of careful notice, that legitimate occupations may easily become the occasions of wrong doing. The first of Noah’s sins was that of drunkenness. Now whatever views Christian men may hold as to the lawfulness or wisdom of moderate drinking, there is no question whatever about the fact and heinousness of the sin of drunkenness as revealed in the Scriptures. It is writ large on all parts of the Word of God. Warnings and denunciations abound in the Old Testament, while in the New, drunkenness is included in St Paul’s catalogue of the works of the flesh with all the nameless and most shameful of evils (see Proverbs 23:20; Isaiah 5:11, Isaiah 5:22; Isaiah 38:1-7; Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:11, and 1 Corinthians 6:10; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:8). The story of Noah is the first recorded instance of a sin that has since become well known and even prevalent almost all over the world.

Associated with drunkenness was the sin of immodesty. The Hebrew clearly indicates a deliberate act, and not a mere unconscious effect of drunkenness. The two sins of intemperance and impurity have often been associated, and indeed the association has become proverbial. Of the unutterable sadness of this sin of a servant of God it is quite unnecessary to speak.

III. The Shame (Genesis 9:22).

Although the narrative does not mention the shame that accrued to Noah, it is not difficult to realize what it must have been. To think that one who had passed through the thrilling and unique

experiences of the Flood and the associated events should have been guilty of such conduct was a fact full of unspeakable shame. The corruption of the best is always the worst thing possible.

Still more shameful was the conduct of his son, Ham. He had no sense of filial love or even of common decency. We seem to see depravity here, of no ordinary degree. Not only was he guilty of the plain sin of omission in failing to shield and hide his father's shame; he was guilty also of a sin of commission in calling attention to the circumstances, and endeavoring to get his brothers to share in his sin. It has been pointed out that Noah's sin must surely have been a solitary act, for Ham would not have done this to his father if the circumstances had been familiar. Candlish suggests that in the light of Canaan's probable association with his father, the act was a token of a deliberate opposition to Noah on religious grounds. Be this as it may, the sin against filial respect and honour is sufficiently heinous.

IV. The Sorrow (Genesis 9:23-24). The two brothers refused to share in Ham's sin. With filial love, true purity, and, as we can believe, profound sorrow, they took immediate steps to cover their father's shame. After all, he was their father, they owed everything to him, and however deeply he had fallen, it was not for them to do anything but hide his and their unspeakable sorrow and shame. They restored him in the spirit of love and meekness (Galatians 6:1), perhaps not unmindful of the possibilities of sin in themselves. And what must Noah's sorrow have been when he awoke and knew all. When he realized what he himself had done, and when he discovered what his son had done to him, we can well imagine the profound sorrow and sense of shame that filled his heart. He who had "found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8), he who had been testified of by God as the only upright one in that age (Genesis 7:1), he who had been the honored instrument of declaring and doing God's will in circumstances such as would never happen again he it is who had now awoke to a consciousness of awful sin in himself and his home.

V. The Retribution (Genesis 9:23). The curse pronounced on Canaan was not the result of any personal feeling on the part of Noah, for Ham the father is not mentioned as included in the curse. Noah is here, as it were, among the prophets, and foresees the future in which the curse of Canaan shall be realized. It is a real difficulty how to explain the connection of Canaan with the sin that is attributed to his father Ham. It is perhaps best to understand the matter according to the old Jewish tradition that Canaan was somehow involved in the sin and was associated with his father in the mockery of Noah. It has been well said that Ham sinned as a son and was punished in his son. This is the third curse mentioned in Genesis (Genesis 3:14-17; Genesis 4:11). The servitude of Canaan here foretold was subsequently seen in the course of history. Servant of servants is the Hebrew superlative for greatest possible servitude, and we know how true this has worked out. Canaan was to be a slave both to Shem and Japheth. The land of Canaan was subjugated by Israel, and the Canaanites became the servants of the Semitic race. In a still wider sense the descendants of Ham in Africa have for centuries been the slaves of the Japhetic races.

VI. The Reward (Genesis 9:26-27). The supremacy of Shem is foretold with reference to their religious privileges. Jehovah is to be their God, and, if the Hebrew may thus be rendered, it is Jehovah Who is to dwell in the tents of Shem. The truth of this is readily seen when we think of the preservation of Monotheism amongst the Jews amidst all the false religions that surrounded them. Above all, Christ belonged to the race of Shem, and Christianity was first proclaimed and spread abroad by Semites. The prophecy about Japheth indicates great prosperity and the multiplication

of descendants. “God shall enlarge Japheth.” If the rendering of the English versions is correct that Japheth is to “dwell in the tents of Shem,” we know that as a matter of fact the Christian Gentile nations have indeed superseded the family of Shem in religious privileges, and have entered upon their inheritance of spiritual blessing and earthly power. It is at least striking that the political control of human affairs is now in the hands of the Japhetic line. It is impossible to say how long after the Flood this sad event took place, but inasmuch as Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the Flood we may rightly assume that he lived long after this fall, and did not repeat his terrible sin. His fall is never mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, and we may fairly believe in his complete restoration. Still, the memory must necessarily have remained to cloud the glory of his former days.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. A Believer is never immune from sin.

However far we may advance in the Christian life, however rich and deep our experiences, the evil principle still remains, and may at any time gain the upper hand. The infection of sin remains in the regenerate, and this is a fact that needs to be faced day by day.

2. A Believer often finds small temptations the most dangerous.

It was in his ordinary duty that Noah found the occasion of his fall. Many a man can meet a great crisis who fails before a simple duty. The little things of life frequently constitute the most searching test.

3. A Believer is always liable to experience entirely new temptations. As the days go on evil often takes entirely novel forms. A man may have had a special weakness in youth and fought against it for years, only to find other weaknesses breaking out and new sins coming upon him in mature and old age.

4. A Believer may be the occasion of sin in others.

How sad to think of the influence of Noah on his sons. It is only one solitary instance of the great law that no one ever sins alone. The solidarity of human life is such that others are inevitably affected by the evil that we do.

5. A Believer will suffer most bitterly for his backsliding.

We may be perfectly certain that Noah was never without the shadow of his sin, although his life might have been wholly bright. The Spirit of God makes the repentant believer more and more sensitive, and he does not cease to grieve over aberrations from the pathway of right.

6. A Believer is always conscious of the utter impartiality of God. No vice or sin is ever hidden or extenuated. The sins and faults of the men of God are dealt with with perfect frankness and impartiality in the Word of God, and so it is in daily experience. God has no favorites.

7. A Believer need never fall into sin.

Although the evil principle remains with us to the end of this life, the provision of grace is such that sinning is absolutely unnecessary. The promise stands absolute and universal in its application. Sin shall not have dominion over you (Romans 6:14), and the explanation is accordingly given, “Ye are under grace.” The grace of God is more than sufficient to meet every need. The Spirit of God

dwelling in the heart and possessing it is able to counteract the strongest force of the evil nature; and while, according to Romans 7:1-25 the evil nature, in and by itself, will always assert itself, the true full Christian life is that which is depicted in Romans 8 which commences with “No condemnation,” and ends with “No separation,” since “we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”

Chapter 30

00A.12 A Wide Outlook Gen_10:1-32

A Wide Outlook Genesis 10:1-32 AT first sight this chapter seems quite remote from the spiritual character of the preceding and following sections, but further consideration shows that it is in direct line with the religious purpose of Genesis. In Genesis 5:1-32 we have a list of the descendants of Adam ending with Noah, and in this chapter there naturally follows a list of Noah's descendants, until we reach Terah, the father of Abraham. In Genesis 10:1 the sons of Noah are mentioned in the familiar order, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, but in the remainder of the chapter their descendants are taken in the opposite order, Japheth, Ham, Shem. This is an example of the characteristic, already mentioned, of dealing with collateral branches first, and only after that considering the main stream in the descendants of Shem. The religious purpose of the chapter must therefore be continually kept in view. This table of nations shows their kinship with the chosen race, out of which all spiritual blessing is to come. Then the nations are dismissed from the Scripture record, and attention concentrated on the Semitic line. Saphir (The Divine Unity of Scripture) truly says, "The tenth chapter of Genesis is a very remarkable chapter. Before God leaves, as it were, the nations to themselves and begins to deal with Israel, His chosen people from Abraham downward, He takes a loving farewell of all the nations of the earth, as much as to say, "I am going to leave you for a while, but I love you. I have created you: I have ordered all your future"; and their different genealogies are traced."

It is impossible to enter in detail upon the classification of this chapter. It must suffice to call attention to its ethnological, genealogical, geographical, and biographical aspects. The four words (Genesis 10:31), families, tongues, lands, nations, show the varied character of the classification. The precise principle of classification must thus include all these elements; the personal aspect is sometimes individual and sometimes tribal.

It is also to be carefully observed that there is no attempt at completeness in the list. Several of the more modern nations which came later into close contact with Israel, as Moab, Ammon, Edom, Amalek, find no mention here, while on the other hand not all the most ancient of the nations are included. The names of seventy nations are found here, fourteen associated with Japheth, thirty with Ham, and twenty-six with Shem. This number seventy is familiar from other parts of Scripture (Genesis 46:27; Exodus 24:1-9), and is evidently symbolical. Lange rightly speaks of the high antiquity of the chapter, and this is confirmed by Professor Sayce in his Archaeological Commentary on Genesis. There is no reference in the chapter to the time posterior to Abraham. For the purpose of detailed study of the many interesting and important points which arise out of it, reference may be made to Sayce's Archaeological Commentary on Genesis (Expository Times, vol. viii. p. 82 ff.); Cave (Inspiration of the Old Testament, Lecture iii.); Lange (Commentary on Genesis, p. 346 ff.); Urquhart (The Bible and How to Read It, vol. ii. p. 2ff.). It is only possible to call attention to a few of the outstanding features with special reference to the spiritual meaning of the chapter.

I. The Family of Japheth (Genesis 10:2-5).

Here it is unnecessary and perhaps impossible to identify the names with those of subsequent races and countries, but attention should certainly be concentrated on Genesis 10:5 with its reference to Gentiles. Viewed from the standpoint of the Jews it is clear that the Gentile nations arose from Japheth. This early reference to the nations, to use the Hebrew phrase of later books, is very significant, and shows that amid all the Jewish exclusiveness the Old Testament never loses sight of the great fact of universality and God's purposes for all the world. It was the crowning sin of the Jews in later ages that they forgot this and concentrated attention upon themselves as the chosen people of God stopping short of the great truth of their revealed religion that they were chosen only for the purpose of being the instrument and channel of God's mercy and grace to the nations of the whole earth. Even to-day there is a great deal of ignorance among Christian people as to the note of universality that is struck so often in the Old Testament. A study of the Psalms and the Prophets in the Revised Version, with special reference to the phrase in the plural, the nations, would do much to correct this.

II. The Family of Ham (Genesis 10:6-20). The first point that stands out with prominence in regard to the family of Ham is the reference to Nimrod (Genesis 10:8-9), and the word mighty in these verses is the same in the Hebrew as that used in Genesis 6:4. It would seem as though Nimrod represented a revival of the antediluvian spirit of independence and rebellion with its disregard of God and His authority. Nimrod, however, is specially associated with the founding of Babel, or Babylon, and this first mention of a word which is so familiar elsewhere should be specially noted. Babylon henceforward stands for every thing that is godless, and for the great opponent of the people of God. It was a Babylonish garment (Joshua 7:21) that led to the first sin in the promised land, and it was Babylon in one form or another that caused most of the trouble to the nation of Israel. In the Old Testament Babylon is a godless city and empire, in the New Testament it is a godless system and it would form a study of the greatest possible significance and value to look at all the passages where Babylon is mentioned, until at length we come to its destruction as recorded in the Apocalypse (Genesis 28:1-22). The other point in this section is the prominence given to Canaan and his descendants (Genesis 10:15-19). This is doubtless because of the connection of Canaan with Israel in the light of subsequent history. Sayce (ut supra) says, "The age to which the chapter takes us back is indicated by the position given to Canaan. It is a position that was true of it only during the age of the eighteenth and nineteenth Egyptian dynasties. . . . After that age no one would have dreamed of coupling Canaan and Egypt together."

III. The Family of Shem (Genesis 10:21-31).

Shem is described as the father of all the children of Eber, and this prominence given to Eber seems to bear out the suggestion that Hebrew comes from Eber.

Eber is also mentioned (Genesis 10:25) as having two sons, Peleg and Joktan. It was in the time of the former that the earth was divided, the reference probably being an anticipation of the confusion of Babel recorded in detail in the next chapter.

Thus we have this brief and suggestive account of the families of Noah, and the division of the earth by means of them. The authenticity and genuineness of the chapter may be seen from the simple fact that as late as the date of 1 Chronicles nothing more was known of the origin of the nations, and consequently the writer of Chronicles followed this list, for with only slight variations it is repeated there (1 Chronicles 1:1-54). Canon Rawlinson remarks that these lists have extorted

the admiration of modern ethnologists, who continually find in them anticipations of their greatest discoveries. Up to the present moment ethnology cannot get behind the division of mankind into three primary groups. It remains to be added that archaeological studies have gone to confirm the facts recorded here.

Suggestions for Meditation

Keeping in view the religious and spiritual purpose of the chapter when read in the light of the entire book of Genesis, we notice several spiritual lessons.

1. All Nations are of one blood. Or as the R.V. reads, “He made of one every nation of men.” This is surely one of the most remarkable facts arising out of this chapter. Such representative critics as

Dillmann, and the Bishop of Winchester, call attention to the spiritual significance of this chapter in the Hebrew Scriptures. “It reminded the Israelite that God had made of one blood all the nations of the earth, and that the heathen who knew not Jehovah were nevertheless brethren of Israel. It reminded him that his own nation was only one among the nations of the earth by origin, and in no way separated from them, but only by the grace of God selected and chosen to be the bearer of His revelation to the world” (Kyle, Early Narratives of Genesis). Dillmann is equally clear as to the uniqueness of this feature. The fundamental idea of the survey is to point out the ultimate relationship of all these peoples. This idea is important . . . not much attention was paid as a rule to foreigners, unless national or trade interests were at stake. Often enough they were despised as mere barbarians, and in no case were they included with the more cultured nations in a higher community. It is otherwise in our text Here, many with whom the Israelites had no sort of actual relationship are taken into consideration…All men and peoples are of the same race, of the same rank, and with the same destiny, brothers and relatives of one another (Dillmann, Genesis, vol. i. p. 314). When it is remembered that no other nation ever taught the brotherhood of man, but on the contrary despised and opposed it, we can surely see marks of divine inspiration in the way in which all nations are mentioned in this chapter. Kanke says of this chapter, It is impossible to read it without seeing that there is something here different from all other history, and that the national pride and separation which we see everywhere else has been entirely subjugated by the religious idea, that all the different tribes of the earth are related to one another by their common descent from Shem, Ham, and Japheth. There is also a practical lesson for ourselves. There is no such thing as foreign missionary work. “All souls are Mine,” and no one can say where home missions end and foreign missions begin. Here, then, is our great charter of world-wide evangelization. “Go ye, and teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19). “Before Him shall be gathered all nations” (Matthew 25:32). “All nations” (Revelation 7:9).

2. All Nations have one need. The thought of sin is clearly implied throughout this chapter, as indeed throughout the book. Common trouble and disease rest upon all. There is no difference, for all have sinned. Amid every variety of race, circumstance, place, and temperament, this one great fact of sin, deep-seated, ineradicable by human means, is experienced by all. It is this thought that gives point to the proclamation of the Gospel everywhere, that it meets one and the same great need.

3. All Nations have one way of salvation.

God’s method of redemption, while working through Shem, is intended to include in its beneficent scope the descendants of Ham and Japheth as well. The Jewish Messiah is the world’s Saviour, and the blessing of Abraham is intended to come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:7-14). All workers for missions will find not a little of their warrant and inspiration as they ponder this chapter in the light of the subsequent teaching of the Word of God.

Chapter 31

00A.13 The Tower of Babel Gen_11:1-9

The Tower of Babel Genesis 11:1-9 THE events of this section apparently happened earlier than some of those recorded in Genesis 10:1-32, for it is probable that this gives us the detailed account of that division of the earth which happened in the days of Peleg (Genesis 10:25). Dispersion may have been divinely intended, and notified to the sons of Noah, and this episode of Babel may have been the human response of unwillingness to follow the divine command. It should be observed that there is no trace of Babylonian origin in this story, and no indications of its being based upon Babylonian myth, the mythical element being entirely absent I. Human Life (Genesis 11:1-3).

Mankind is described as possessing at the time oneness of language, whatever that language was. There was also a natural nomadic element, for they were journeying from place to place. The conditions of agricultural life would doubtless necessitate a great deal of movement In their journeyings they at last arrived at the land of Shinar, the plain in which Babylon was afterwards situated (Genesis 10:10). The fertility of this plain would be of special value, and we are not surprised to read that they dwelt there.

They soon conceived the plan of a prolonged stay and definite association, for they proposed to one another to make brick and build a city and a tower. The alluvial soil of the plain would give them facilities for clay and brick making, thereby providing materials for building. This was quite natural, because of the absence of stone in that region. The primary motive in building the city, apart from the story of the tower, may well have been the innocent desire to remain associated, and to be protected by means of the city. At any rate, unless there had been a Divine revelation, it is difficult at this stage to charge them with any breach of a known law of God.

II. Human Sin (Genesis 11:4).

Before long their objects (if innocent) degenerated into evil. To have a rendezvous might not in itself have been wrong, though there may have been associated with this desire a wish to remain together which possibly conflicted with the purposes of God for mankind at that stage. Whether this was so or not, the desire for a tower whose top might reach to heaven seems to have been prompted by some thing like pride and self-sufficiency. It is thought by some authorities that a religious question was involved in this tower, and that it was intended for an idolatrous temple. At any rate it is certainly true that Babylon afterwards became one of the worst and most terrible strongholds of idolatry and false religion.

One thing, however, is perfectly clear they were filled with a godless ambition. Let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad. In view of the fact that the Hebrew word for name is “shem,” it is not altogether impossible that the suggestion to make a “shem” had in it some covert sneer against the family of Shem, which had been assured of the Divine presence and blessing (Genesis 9:26); and the fear lest they should be scattered abroad is fairly chargeable with distrust in God, Whose purpose it was that they should be dispersed and people the whole earth. He who

commanded them to scatter abroad would not leave them unsafe and unprotected. Altogether, this is a revelation of human sin in the form of rebellion against God, and it has not been wrongly described as the first organization of the scheme of godlessness and irreligion.

III. Divine Consideration (Genesis 11:5-6). The description of God's attitude here recorded is striking in its simplicity. "The Lord came down to see." Man had just attempted to go up in his sin. God now comes down in judgment. Again we have what has been already seen several times in these early chapters, the revelation of the Divine scrutiny and examination, showing that God is intent upon His people's ways and cannot be indifferent to their attitude to Him. The result of this scrutiny is that God anticipates what the people will do, and He decides that nothing will restrain them from that which they have purposed to effect. The fact of their oneness of language would give them this remarkable power of united effort on a large scale. It was necessary, therefore, to face the problem and deal with it in the best possible way.

IV. Divine Action (Genesis 11:7; Genesis 11:9). The method employed was that of the confusion of their language, and their subsequent dispersion. We are told that they left off to build the city, and it is not known whether or not they finished the tower. Into the question of the identity of the tower ruins found on the site of Babylon it is unnecessary to enter here.

Dr. Dale thinks that dissension among the workmen was the first step leading to dispersion and that the confusion of language came as the necessary consequence of this dispersion, the language being modified by separation from one another. It is worth noticing that history and archaeology bear clear testimony to the fact of confusion of languages. Bunsen (quoted in Lange's Commentary] says: "Comparative philology would have been compelled to set forth as a postulate the supposition of some such division of languages in Asia, especially on the ground of the relation of the Egyptian language to the Shemitic, even if the Bible had not assured us of the truth of this great historical event. It is truly wonderful, it is a matter of astonishment, that something so purely historical, something so conformable to reason, is here related to us out of the oldest primeval period, and which now, for the first time, through the new science of philology, has become capable of being historically and philosophically explained." The memorial of their confusion remained in the city that they had built, and Babel from this time forward occupies a definite, not to say prominent part, in the record contained in the Scriptures. Babylon is never long out of sight, until at length it finds its complete and final overthrow in the Apocalypse.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The danger and disaster of life without God.

It is very striking, that in connection with Cain we have the first elements of human civilization, and here again we have the building of a city connected with those who were evidently indifferent to God. At first it was not so much iniquity as simple indifference. God was not in their life, but from indifference soon came rebellion, as is always the case. Whenever a religious system glorifies humanity and makes man everything, it is not long before it minimizes God and makes Him nothing. Culture, civilization, intellect, cleverness, progress, are all among the natural gifts of God to human life, and there is no reason what ever why they should not all be consecrated to the Divine service. When they are thus yielded to Him they become doubly powerful, and are the means of blessing on every hand. When, however, they are not handed over to God who gives them, but are kept in man's own power and authority, they lead men farther and farther from God, and are the means of nothing but trouble on every hand.

2. The danger and disaster of all false unity.

These people attempted to keep themselves together by means of the outward and visible tie of a common dwelling-place and rallying-point. They had nothing in common except the city which they built. This, however, proved fatal, and always will prove fatal to real unity. Unity must come from within. When outward unity is attempted the result will be, as in this case, separation, dispersion, confusion. What a lesson we have here in connection with all attempts at church unity. How often churches have attempted to keep Christians together by means of outward elements only or mainly. Sometimes it has been unanimity of opinion, and this has proved impossible. Sometimes it has been uniformity of observance and ceremonial, but this has proved equally futile. Sometimes it has been a unity of organization, but this has never once succeeded. Unity must be a unity of life, of love, of interest, of intention, of spirit, of service, and this unity can be obtained and maintained amidst a great variety of organization, of opinion, of ceremonial. Our Lord speaks of the Jewish fold, and then of the unity of a flock including other than Jews (John 10:16, R.V.), the latter being far the more important, for it is possible to have one flock consisting of very different kinds of sheep and in many folds, yet all belonging to the one Master.

3. The blessedness of true unity.

There are three pictures in God’s Word which ought always to be considered together. The confusion of tongues in Genesis 11:1-32; the real unity amid diversities of tongues as the result of the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-47; and the magnificent picture of all nations, and kindreds, and tongues in Revelation 7:1-17 as they stand before the throne. With the Babel of earth we set in contrast the Jerusalem that is above. To the city of man we oppose the city of God. True unity is always primarily the result of an organism, and only secondarily of an organization. It is based upon God and upon spiritual life in Him. “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

00A.14 The Call of Abraham Gen_11:10-32; Gen_12:1-9.

The Call of Abraham Genesis 11:10-32; Genesis 12:1-9. WITH this section the Book of Genesis takes a new and very distinct departure. From Genesis 12:9 the consideration of the entire human race (Genesis 10:1-32 and Genesis 11:1-32) our attention is directed to one family and one man as the chosen channel of the Divine purpose of redemption for the race. The earlier chapters are but a preface, though a necessary explanatory preface, to the remainder. They cover at least two thousand years, and yet we seem to be, as it were, hurried along, until we reach the fullness of the narrative about Abraham and his seed. The first eleven chapters are the foundation of which the other thirty-nine are the superstructure. They trace back the Divine redemption until its cause is found in the sin of the human race, and its scope is shown to embrace all mankind. This done, we are now free to consider the precise method whereby God accomplished His purpose, and redeemed mankind through the instrumentality of one man, his family, and his nation. It is the importance of Abraham in this connection that gives its meaning and importance to Genesis 12:1-20. As the root to the stem so are chapters 1-11 to 12-50, and as the stem to the tree so is Genesis to the rest of the Bible. It is the foundation, the explanation, the preface, the key to the rest of the Word of God.

Abraham: There is only one man of those whose lives are recorded in the Old Testament who has the high privilege of being called the friend of God. Isaiah 12:8, Abraham, My friend; 2 Chronicles 20:7, Abraham, Thy friend; (cf. James 2:23). To this day Abraham is known among the Arabs as El Khalil (Friend of God). The study of his life is one of the deepest interest on two grounds: (1) Personal: he is one of the noblest and most heroic figures in ancient history; (2) Spiritual: he was God’s chosen instrument for the realization of the divine purposes of redemption. The importance of Abraham can readily be seen by the space given to him in the record, nearly fourteen chapters out of fifty being devoted to him. It may be well to summarize the record of his life for the purpose of obtaining a general view of its history.

(a) Genesis 12:1-20, Genesis 13:1-18, Genesis 14:1-24, the Call given and accepted.

(b) Genesis 15:1-21, Genesis 16:1-16 the Covenant made and received.

(c) Genesis 17:1-27, Genesis 18:1-33, Genesis 19:1-38, Genesis 20:1-18, Genesis 21:1-34, the Confirmation of the Covenant.

(d) Genesis 22:1-24, the Crowning Event.

(e) Genesis 23:1-20, Genesis 24:1-67, Genesis 25:1-10, the Closing Years. We now commence by studying the circumstances of his early days and the Divine call as recorded at the head of this chapter.

I. Abraham’s Early Life.

Abraham lived at Ur of the Chaldees, usually identified with Mugheir, near the Persian Gulf. The coast-line, however, was at that time about one hundred and forty miles north of the present line.

He comes of the line of Shem. His father was Terah (Genesis 11:24), and he had two brothers (Genesis 11:20). His wife was Sarai (Genesis 11:29), and she was childless (Genesis 11:30). Most probably Abraham was the youngest, not the eldest son, the names not being given in the order of their birth, but in the order of importance, since Abraham was God's chosen instrument. Similar circumstances are found in Genesis 5:32 with reference to Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and in Genesis 10:2, where Japheth comes first in the order of genealogy (cf. 1 Chronicles 1:5, 1 Chronicles 1:8, 1 Chronicles 1:17). The analogy of God's choice of the younger of the sons of Adam, Isaac, Joseph, Jesse, suggests the probability that Abraham was Terah's youngest son.

Abraham evidently belonged to a family of shepherds accustomed to move about as pasture was needed.

Either Terah or his ancestors were idolaters (Joshua 24:2, Joshua 25:15). Four hundred years had elapsed since the Flood, and there had thus been time for the degeneration of the sons of Shem.

Possibly Abraham himself may have been an idolater (cf. Isaiah 51:1-2).

II. The Divine Call. A third start is made with humanity. Adam had failed, Noah's descendants had failed, and now another attempt was to be made. The former attempts were made with the race, but this one was made by means of an individual as the founder of a nation which should in turn bless the race. Abraham, as the founder of the Jewish nation, was intended by God as (a) a witness to him to the rest of mankind (Isaiah 44:8), (b) a depository of God's revelation (Romans 3:2), (c) a preparation for the Messiah and Saviour (Isaiah 53:1-12), (d) a channel of blessing to the world (Romans 15:8-12). The first call came at Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:2-4). The God of Glory called him. This unique title of God is very noteworthy. It was doubtless due to this call that Terah left Ur (Genesis 11:31). Then came a second call to Haran after Terah's death (Genesis 12:1). Some authorities consider Genesis 12:1 to refer to the first call at Ur, and this is why the Authorized Version and the Revised Version render the Hebrew words "the LORD had said." As, however, there is no pluperfect tense in the original, it seems better to regard Genesis 12:1 as referring to the second call, especially in the light of Acts 7:2-4. The Lord said, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house."These were very searching and pressing demands upon one who was the youngest son. Yet God's call to separation was a necessary condition of blessing. Separation was the keynote of Abraham's life from first to last, and in that separation to the will of God he found all his peace and blessing.

God never places burdens on his people's shoulders without giving them power to respond. God's biddings are His enablings. He encouraged Abraham with a threefold promise: (a) A land (Genesis 12:1), (b) a seed (Genesis 12:2), (c) a world-wide blessing (Genesis 12:3).

III. The Human Response.

Nothing is more striking than the immediate response made by Abraham. At the outset he manifests that faith which characterized him almost the whole of his life. The following aspects of his faith are worthy of consideration: The Confidence of Faith (Genesis 12:4). "So Abraham went, as the LORD had spoken unto him." He took God at His word without hesitation and without questioning. The Obedience of Faith (Genesis 12:4-6). In leaving Ur and staying at Haran his obedience was only partial, whatever may have been the precise cause and explanation. Perhaps Terah lacked spiritual sympathy with Abraham, or else age and infirmity may have prevented him

going further than Haran. In any case, Abraham did not obey fully until after his father's death. Then came entire and prompt obedience in his departure from Haran with all that he possessed. It is evident that the stay in Haran was a protracted one (Genesis 12:5). The souls refer to the persons of the slaves and other dependents. The Influence of Faith (Genesis 12:5). Abraham's response to the Divine call evidently led Lot to join his uncle and journey to Canaan. There was no compulsion on Lot; he might have stayed where he was. The influence of Abraham's faith constrained him to go. True faith in God often inspires others and leads them to blessing. The Confession of Faith (Genesis 12:6-7). Abraham came to Sichem (Sychar, John iv.), the later Shechem. The oak may be the terebinth, or turpentine tree, whose leaf is very similar to that of the oak. Moreh may be the name of the owner of the terebinth, or, according to some, it means a soothsayer, implying that under this tree the art of divination was practiced among the Canaanites. In Genesis 12:7 we have the first visible appearance of God to man. Hitherto only the Divine voice had been heard. Now there was a manifestation of the Divine presence, probably in the form of the Angel of the Covenant (Genesis 18:22; Joshua 5:13; Judges 13:3). To this revelation of God Abraham at once responded by building an altar. This was his acceptance and acknowledgment of the Divine revelation, the revelation being thus followed by his personal response. At the same time the altar was a testimony to the Canaanites who were then in the land. The Endurance of Faith (Genesis 12:8-9). Notwithstanding the promises of God, Abraham had to wait He had no seed, though one had been promised; he had no abiding place, pitching his tent, not building a home; and the Canaanites in the land prevented him from possessing an inch of the country. All this was a renewed call to continued faith.

Suggestions for Meditation In this opening episode of Abraham's life we have clearly brought before us some of the most frequent experiences of the believer's early days.

1. The Divine Call. To us also comes the call for absolute trust, the faith that takes God simply at His word, feeling assured that it cannot fail. Like Abraham, we are to trust in the dark (Hebrews 11:8).

2. The Divine Claim.

Separation is still the believer's duty. Sometimes it involves separation from dearest kindred, sometimes from congenial surroundings, and always from sin and self-will. Separation thus tests the reality of our life, and at the same time strengthens our spiritual fibres. The nearer to heaven the steeper the mountains.

3. The Divine Consecration.

Abraham responded by building an altar and pitching his tent in place after place. By the altar he confessed himself a worshipper and by the tent a stranger and a pilgrim. Thus as his life wholly surrendered to his God. The altar and the tent together sum up the believer's life.

4. The Divine Cheer.

How beautifully God meets those who respond wholly to Him. They are assured of His presence (Genesis 12:7), of His promises (Genesis 12:2-3), of His power, and of His peace. No life has ever had any demand made upon it without receiving the Divine cheer and encouragement which enables the soul to abide in the Lord and go forward with joy and courage.

Chapter 33

00A.15 The Testing Gen_12:10-20; Gen_13:1-4.

The Testing Genesis 12:10-20; Genesis 13:1-4. THE young believer's life is soon tested, especially after seasons of communion (see 2 Chronicles 32:1 and 2 Chronicles 31:20-21, R.V.). It was so with the Apostle Peter (Matthew 16:17-23), and even with our Lord (Luke 3:22; Luke 6:1). We now see this great principle in the life of Abraham.

I. The Special Circumstances (Genesis 12:10).

One of the frequent famines arose. As there was no artificial irrigation, Palestine necessarily depended on the annual rainfall and the heavy sea mist that came up from the Mediterranean at certain times of the year (the "dew" of the Old Testament). This was a very real test to Abraham. Not withstanding the recent revelation of God with all its promises (Genesis 12:7), there was actually a famine in the land of promise. Doubtless Abraham remembered the rich alluvial plains of Mesopotamia and Syria. Thus he was soon tested, and his faithfulness put to the proof. We are sometimes apt to identify the peace and calm of outward circumstances with the peace arising from a consciousness of the Divine presence. It was to make this distinction clear that Abraham was tested.

II. The Long Journey (Genesis 12:10). This journey is the first point of contact between Israel as represented in Abraham and Egypt. We well know the baneful influence exercised in later ages. The famine was, of course, the sole cause of Abraham's journey, and in itself the most obvious and natural thing for him to do.

It was the natural thing for him to do; but then Abraham's position was not merely natural, for he had supernatural relationships. The right way is not always the easiest, and the easiest is not always the right way. Difficulties do not necessarily indicate that we are out of the pathway of God's will. It would certainly seem that Abraham was now thinking solely of the land and its famine, and forgetting God and His promises.

III. The Proposal (Genesis 12:11-13).

Abraham suggested that Sarai should say that she was his sister instead of his wife. This was a half-truth (cf. Genesis 12:12). Verbally it was correct; but really it was a lie.

It is to be observed, too, that the proposal was clearly actuated by selfishness; there was no regard for Sarai, but only for his own safety. How strange this is! He had journeyed all the way from Ur of the Chaldees, and yet could not trust God with his wife or with his own life. How small great people can be! How weak strong men can be! How bad good people can be!

IV. The Result (Genesis 12:14-16).

What Abraham anticipated came to pass; Sarai was taken into the King's harem. Abraham's very precaution led to Pharaoh's action. The patriarch's life is thus saved, and gifts are showered upon him, doubtless as the recognized dowry on the marriage of his sister with Pharaoh.

Yet what must have been his thoughts as he was alone in his tent! He had gained his end, but at a very great cost to Sarai and himself. Thus Abraham fell at the point where he was supposed to be strongest his faith. So it was with Moses, the meek man (Numbers 20:10).

V. The Divine Displeasure (Genesis 12:17).

Serious illness came upon Pharaoh and his house, showing them clearly that some extraordinary meaning was in it. God could not allow His promises to

Abraham to be frustrated or His will unfulfilled. It was therefore necessary to save Abraham from himself and rescue Sarai.

VI. The Rebuke (Genesis 12:18-20).

We can picture Abraham's surprise at Pharaoh's expostulation. The Egyptians, with all their sins, seem to have laid great store by truth and abhorred all kinds of lying. The King thereupon ordered Abraham to take her and go out of the land, Pharaoh's servants being charged to see them both safely out of Egypt.

VII. The Restoration (Genesis 13:1-4).

We can imagine Abraham's feelings as the caravan slowly wended its way out of Egypt, and as he came back to the land of Canaan. Note the phrase at the beginning (Genesis 13:3), and unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first (Genesis 13:4), and called on the name of the Lord (Genesis 13:4). We read of no such altar or prayer in Egypt. Abraham seems to have been out of communion there. Now, however, he does the only possible thing he returns to where he had been at the commencement; he came back to the true surrender and simple worship of his earliest days in Canaan.

Whenever we backslide there is nothing else to do but to come back by the old gateway of genuine repentance and simple faith (Psalms 23:3; 1 John 1:9).

Suggestions for Meditation 1. A Believer's false step.

Abraham went aside out of the path of God's will; he was occupied with circumstances instead of with God. He only saw the famine, not the Divine faithfulness. He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool (Proverbs 28:26). "A crust with God is better than a feast without Him."

2. A Believer's definite backsliding. The possibilities of a true child of God wandering into sin and unfaithfulness are very clear from Scripture. This is one of the saddest and most mysterious facts of spiritual experience. In Abraham's case it manifested itself first in fear due to forgetfulness of God, then in selfishness, and lastly in hypocrisy and deceit. There is nothing more solemn than the well-known fact that through sin a believer can be out of touch with God for a long time.

3. A Believer's sad experience.

One part of this was the knowledge that his wrongdoing had brought ill effects on others. Both Sarai and Pharaoh's house suffered through Abraham's sin. Another element in his bitter cup was the plain rebuke from the heathen Pharaoh. We have truly touched the depths of spiritual unfaithfulness when a believer has to be openly rebuked by the ungodly.

4. A Believer’s only safeguard. This preservative is twofold trust and truth every moment. Abraham was taught three lessons about God in relation to trust: (1) That God was essential to his every step, and that nothing can be done apart from Him (John 15:5); (2) that God was able notwithstanding the famine God could have provided for Abraham; (3) that God was faithful: He had not forgotten His promises to His servant (Genesis 12:1-3). Thus Abraham came back with a deepened idea of God and a louder call for simple, absolute, continual trust.

He was also taught the lesson of truth. The child of God is to be straightforward in all his attitude, and to go straight forward in all his actions. The end does not justify the means, whatever men may say. Even though our objects may be perfectly right, our means to attain those objects must be without blemish. This has special application to methods of Church work, ideas of social status, aspects of family life, and objects of personal ambition. Not only must the end we seek be true, the means we use must also be true.

Chapter 34

00A.16 The Separation Gen_13:5-18

The Separation Genesis 13:5-18

GOD teaches His children new lessons at every step of life's pathway. We are now to gain a deeper insight into the reality of Abraham's life, as well as a fuller revelation of God's will concerning him.

I. A Serious Problem (Genesis 13:5-6).

Abraham and Lot were rich. The accessions which came to them in Egypt had increased their flocks and herds. This is the first instance of riches in the Bible (Genesis 13:2), and we also have here the interesting problem of wealth connected with the Believer's life. What is the teaching of Scripture about wealth as possessed by a child of God? A careful study of the entire Bible seems to show that there is no sin in being wealthy provided the riches have been honorably obtained, are regarded as belonging to God, and are being constantly used as in the sight of God. At the same time, wealth very seriously increases the responsibility of a believer, and his riches will soon become a sin if they are not used properly and with a sense of stewardship, not of ownership. Another experience of human life is seen in this story the danger of quarrels between relatives on account of wealth. How often this deplorable fact has been experienced since Abraham's day! The possession of such flocks and herds prevented the uncle and nephew from continuing to dwell together. The need of increasing pasturage, together with the need of water, must have been very acute, and the problem was intensified by the presence of the Canaanites with their pastoral requirements.

II. A Deplorable Strife (Genesis 13:7). The quarrel originated with the servants, and was limited to them. Doubtless each herd man endeavored to gain the best locality for his own flocks.

Very significantly we read that The Canaanite and Perizzite dwelled then in the land. This statement suggests not only the circumstance that accentuated the difficulty of obtaining pasturage, but also the fact that the heathen around must have seen and overheard this quarrel between the servants of God's children. Herein lay one of the saddest elements of the matter.

III. A Generous Proposal Genesis 13:8-9).

Abraham takes the initiative, and begs that there shall be no strife. The quarrel might easily rise above the servants to the masters, and Abraham speaks in time to prevent this, urging as the great reason, "We are brethren." Notice his large-hearted suggestion. Although he is older than Lot and chief of the tribe or clan, and although the land had been promised by God to him, he allows his nephew the first choice. The servant of God must not strive (2 Timothy 2:24). How beautifully Abraham had recovered from his fall in Egypt! While there he had learned the great lesson that no one needs to descend to deceit in order to obtain his desires. The true child of God can afford to be magnanimous, simply because he is a child of God.

IV. A Selfish Choice (Genesis 13:10-13).

Lot there upon took the generous Abraham at his word, and seeing that the plain of Jordan was well watered everywhere, he chose that region, and departed thither. This was the sole reason that prompted his choice. He saw the great advantage to him and his possessions in that most fertile of regions. The land was indeed fertile, but as he moved his tent as far as Sodom (Genesis 13:12, R.V.) it soon became evident what danger he was in. The material blessing was accompanied by moral blight. There are many modern counterparts to Lot's action; even professedly Christian people often choose their home in a locality simply for its scenery, or its society, or its other material advantages without once inquiring what Church privileges are there. The souls of their children may starve amid worldliness and polite indifference. The same disastrous choice is often made in connection with public schools, to which boys are sent simply for the position and reputation of the school, regardless of the moral and spiritual atmosphere of the institution. This was the great mistake of Lot s life, from which he ever afterwards suffered.

V. A Divine Revelation (Genesis 13:14-17).

"After that Lost was separated from him." Abraham was now alone, and perhaps in his solitude he began to wonder whether he had done right, or whether his offer to Lot was due to weakness and the lack of true assertion of rights. There is often a temptation to reaction after a great moral decision has been made. Just at this time, then, and when he was alone, God came to him with Divine assurances and blessed compensation. The revelation of the Divine purposes was fuller than any that preceded it (Genesis 12:1 and Genesis 12:7). Notice its three aspects:

(a) The prospect afforded (Genesis 13:14). Lot had lifted up his eyes (Genesis 13:10), and with remarkable force and significant emphasis God says to Abraham, "Lift up now thine eyes." How different the action is in each case! Abraham's prospect was not only wider, but infinitely more glorious, because of the Word of God behind it.

(b) The promise given (Genesis 13:15-16). For the first time God promises the land to Abraham himself. To thee will I give it; hitherto the land had only been promised to his seed (Genesis 12:7). Let us ponder these wonderful promises. They are to be interpreted literally and spiritually. They are already having their primary fulfilment in the Church of Christ as Abraham's spiritual seed (Galatians 3:7-9; Galatians 3:16), but there will surely be a literal fulfilment in the future to the Jewish nation (Romans 11:26-29).

(c) The possession enjoined (Genesis 13:17). Abraham is to "walk up and down," and, as it were, appropriate and claim for himself in detail that which God gives (cf. Joshua 1:3). The promises of God are to be appropriated by faith, and it is thus the purpose of God becomes realized in individual experience.

"Then Abraham moved his tent." Immediately he responded to God and pitched his tent at Mamre, which is in Hebron. Hebron means "fellowship" and we may spiritualize the thought by saying that prompt whole-hearted obedience always leads to fellowship with God.

"Built there an altar." Again we see the real man in this simple, whole-hearted testimony to the Divine presence and promises. His tent and his altar indicate the pilgrim and devout life of the true child of God.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. Differences in Believers.

What a contrast between Lot and Abraham! Except for 2 Peter 2:7-8, we should nave hardly credited Lot with any vital religion. Although “righteous” he is yet living by sight, seeking only his own advantages and pleasure; worldliness is his dominant characteristic, his one thought is the well- watered plains. He is a type and illustration of the Christian who is not fully consecrated one who is trying to make the best of both worlds, endeavoring to stand well with God, while pushing to the full his own earthly interests. Yet one part of his life must necessarily suffer; so it was with Lot, so it is always. Contrast Abraham with his large-heartedness of spirit, his simple acceptance of God’s promises, his whole-hearted obedience to God’s will, and his courageous testimony in the altar of worship. He is a type and illustration of the consecrated believer, the one who puts God first, and to whom God’s presence, God’s will, and God’s way are everything. These differences in believers are as striking and as puzzling to-day as ever, yet they ought not to exist in the Church of Christ.

2. Differences between Believers.

Even the children of God from time to time have their differences of opinion, which often lead to trouble and strife. If only they are met with magnanimity like Abraham’s, they will soon be resolved. Note the New Testament emphasis on mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5). The Christian paradox of everybody submitting to everybody else would soon heal all dissensions between believers. Magnanimity in Abraham was the result of his faith in God. He could afford to be large-hearted because God was so real to him. Those who put God first will never be bereft of their just rights. God is pledged on their behalf (Proverbs 3:5-6).

3. Differences for Believers. The results in the lives of Lot and Abraham were vastly different. Lot obtained what he wanted, earthly prosperity, but spiritually it may be questioned whether he was ever happy after making that choice. There was no witness for God, no real blessing on his home, and in the end came spiritual and social disaster. Abraham’s experience was very different; God became an increasing reality to him, there was a glory and power in his life, and we are sure that he never regretted his action in putting God first. God’s children always experience His Divine favour and blessing in proportion to their faithfulness, and if we are inclined to question and seek for the reason of differences in the spiritual experiences of the children of God we may find them in the difference of response to God on the part of His followers.

Chapter 35

00A.17 A New Emergency Gen_14:1-16

A New Emergency Genesis 14:1-16 THE life of restful fellowship with God (Genesis 13:18) is now to be disturbed by a new emergency issuing in new experiences. Communion with God is constantly found to be the preparation for new crises in the Believer's daily life.

I. The Great Battle (Genesis 14:1-11).

Clearly we have here a contemporary record of the events described. Elam is seen to be supreme over Assyria and Babylon, and it was of the utmost importance to Elam to keep the Jordan valley free and open on account of the trade route to Egypt, with all that intercourse in commerce meant to those Eastern lands. Five kings of Eastern Palestine (Genesis 14:2) had been subject to Chedorlaomer, the leader of the four kings of the East. Then came a rebellion on the part of the Palestine tributaries, followed by the expedition of Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him (Genesis 14:5-7). The vale of Siddim was the scene of the battle, with the result that the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were entirely vanquished.

It is well known that up to quite recent years certain schools of modern criticism rejected this chapter as wholly unhistorical. The discovery of tablets, however, has altered this view, and goes far towards demonstrating the essential historicity of the entire chapter. Chedorlaomer appears on the tablets as Kudur Lagamar and Amraphel as Hammurabi. The discovery of the code of Hammurabi during the last few years has given a further confirmation to the historical character of this chapter. (For a popular discussion on this subject, see Sayce's Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies, chapter IV.) II. The Significant Capture (Genesis 14:12).

Among the captures from the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah was Lot, who was taken prisoner, and carried off to the East. It is evident that Lot had overlooked the fact that others besides himself were thoroughly aware of the fertility of that neighborhood. It was not likely that he could expect to enjoy sole and unmolested possession of so advantageous a position. As he journeyed in the train of his captors we wonder what were his feelings and whether he thought of his uncle Abraham in perfect safety, although only a few miles off.

How was it that Lot was taken captive, for we read only that he pitched his tent towards Sodom (Genesis 13:12)? It is evident that this did not satisfy him, for now we read that he dwelt in Sodom (Genesis 14:12). The consequences of this false step were as disastrous as they were thoroughly deserved. No godly man can ever deliberately dwell in Sodom with impunity. An escaped prisoner came and told Abraham of what had happened, and for Abraham to hear that his brother was taken captive was to decide at once on his rescue. How very touching are the words when Abraham heard that his brother was taken (Genesis 14:14). There is no root of bitterness here. He does not say "It serves him right or Let him alone."

III. The Bold Undertaking (Genesis 14:13-14).

Abraham now appears before us in a new aspect, showing himself to be a man of thought and skill, and of bravery. There may also be a touch of patriotism in it in relation to Canaan, his adopted country. New emergencies call out new powers. Apart from these circumstances no one would have credited Abraham with these remarkable qualities. He arms his trained servants and sets off in pursuit, arriving quickly at the northern end of Palestine at Dan. The pursuit extended to 120 miles, and by a bold stroke of strategy, dividing his servants into separate companies, he smote the enemy from different directions, and pursued them far beyond the limits of Palestine, and nearly as far north as Damascus. The prompt action, the skilful leadership, and the brave, determined attack are interesting revelations of this new side of Abraham's nature.

Abraham was entirely successful, for he rescued Lot and all his household, besides the recovery of the goods belonging to the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. As they journeyed back, uncle and nephew, we again wonder what were Lot's thoughts. There is no record of any expression or even feeling of gratitude, and the fact that he deliberately went back to Sodom is another illustration of the essential shallowness and worldliness of his mind in contrast to the magnanimity and genuine spirituality of Abraham.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. Some elements of a godly life.

Looking closely at the narrative we cannot fail to see in it some essential features and most beautiful aspects of the life of a child of God.

(a) His Sympathy. Abraham showed no resentment, but with utter unselfishness he at once desires and determines to set out to the rescue of Lot.

(b) His Decision. We generally associate godliness with the passive rather than the active virtues, but in view of Hebrews 11:1-40 we must not forget the two sides of the Christian life. In Genesis 13:1-18 Abraham is seen manifesting the passive virtues of unselfishness, humility, and willingness to yield his rights. In Genesis 15:1-21 however, there is all the decision and initiative of the brave and fearless man. Courage is as real a Christian virtue as humility.

(c) His Capability. Abraham's strategy and skill show that he was "a man of parts." There is no necessary connection between godliness and in capacity. The Christian man should neither be a coward nor an incapable. The Spirit of God who equipped Bezaleel (Exodus 31:3) is able to give inventiveness, and intellectual and executive ability.

2. The explanation of these elements.

It is all slimmed up by faith in God. By faith Abraham was enabled to feel and show this sympathy, for the simple reason that God was all in all to him, and he could in the true sense afford to be tender-hearted and unselfish. By faith Abraham possessed and manifested decision, because he was in constant touch with the Source of all power, and was strong in his God to attempt and do great things. "By faith" Abraham was enabled to cultivate and reveal his capacity as a man of affairs because God is the God of all grace, and provides grace sufficient for all His servants in every emergency, and even when the Believer's life commences with only a partial capability in certain directions, it is wonderful how grace can cultivate this faculty and enable the man to do wonders for God. Faith thus purifies and instructs the mind, softens and stirs the heart, and strengthens and controls the will. This is the victory . . . our faith.

Chapter 36

00A.18 The Test of Victory Gen_14:17-24.

The Test of Victory Genesis 14:17-24. THE crowning hour of success is a good test of character. “If sweet are the uses of adversity, equally valuable in other directions are the uses of prosperity.” How a man behaves at the moment of victory often affords a supreme revelation of character and spiritual power. We shall see this in the case of Abraham as we study his interview with the two kings.

I. The Royal Recognition (Genesis 14:17-18).

Gratitude alone would suffice to prompt the king of Sodom to go out to meet Abraham after his return from the slaughter of the kings who had caused such havoc to Sodom and Gomorrah. The meeting was the natural and fitting recognition of the great services rendered. The other king (of Salem) who met the victorious patriarch was a very different personage, and in his capacity as priest of the Most High God brought forth bread and wine to greet the conqueror of the enemies of his country. It was another new experience to Abraham to be met by two kings and to be acknowledged by them before all their retinue as the savior of their country.

II. The Priestly Benediction (Genesis 14:18-20). Who is this personage suddenly entering patriarchal history? He seems to have been one of the faithful few; one of those who still retained the purity of their allegiance to the one true God. He was a link with the past age of Shem, and amidst the surrounding departure from God still witnessed to the reality of the Divine presence and its claim upon men. The title of God is very noteworthy, God Most High (Hebrew, El Ely on). This title is very rare in the Old Testament, though it is found no less than four times in the verses now before us. The idea underlying it is that of God as the Supreme Being who is above all local deities. We have its New Testament equivalent in the Highest (Luke 1:32; Luke 1:35), and the Most High God (Acts 16:17). Melchizedek was “a priest of God Most High” and the root idea of priesthood is access into God’s presence and the representation of man to God (Hebrews 5:1). His typical character will come before us at a later stage.

We are told very distinctly that Melchizedek blessed Abraham and prayed the blessing of God Most High upon him, at the same time blessing God for the deliverance of Abraham. This solitary figure of the king thus standing between God and Abraham is very striking, and shows that true religion was still possible and actual outside the Abrahamic relation to God. The twofold blessing of Abraham and of God is also to be noted. When God blesses us it is a blessing in deed, a benefaction. When man blesses God it can of necessity only be a blessing in word, a benediction. Here we have both.

III. The Loyal Acknowledgment (Genesis 14:20).

Abraham’s attitude of immediate willingness to receive blessing is a striking testimony to his consciousness of the spiritual position and power of Melchizedek. This Divine blessing was received before his spiritual testing in the interview with the king of Sodom, and doubtless played its part in preparing him.

Abraham further acknowledged the position of the king of Salem by giving him tithes of all that he possessed. This reference to tithing is exceedingly interesting as suggesting the pre-Mosaic observance of this acknowledgment of God's claim on our gifts.

If the principle of tithing was thus previous to the Mosaic economy there seems no reason to deny its essential fitness to-day in the economy of grace; the tenth being regarded as God's absolute right before any question arises about free-will offerings and other spontaneous gifts of the redeemed and grateful life.

IV. The Natural Proposal (Genesis 14:21).

It was natural and inevitable that the king of Sodom should forthwith acknowledge his indebtedness to Abraham. The patriarch was now a great man in the eyes of the king, and it was the monarch's obvious duty to show his gratitude and appreciation of Abraham's great services. He proposed to Abraham the retention of the goods rescued from the Eastern kings, and that the men and women of Sodom should be handed over to their rightful sovereign. This was a natural and customary method of dividing the spoil after a victory, and from the point of view of existing usage it was as natural for the king to make the proposal as it would have been simply natural for Abraham to accept it. But Abraham had other than natural principles to guide him.

V. The Noble Refusal (Genesis 14:22-24).

He would not take anything, even the smallest gift. He had not entered upon the expedition for his own advantage, and consequently there was now no question about the spoil.

It would seem from the words, I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, that Abraham had anticipated the possibility of this or some similar proposal and had provided beforehand for it. Having thus faced the matter quietly before God, he was able to decide at once as to his course of action. It is always of great spiritual value, whenever the opportunity is afforded us, to face probable contingencies beforehand, and decide in the sight of God what we shall do if and when the event takes place.

Lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abraham rich. His position in the sight of God was such that he could not endure the thought of being in any way dependent upon the king of Sodom. It is often found that when men rise in the world there are others who are only too ready to boast of the way in which they have helped these men in their upward progress. Very often this boasting is as natural as it is allowable, but it has its limits in any case, and sometimes it is very easily exaggerated. In Abraham's case help from the king of Sodom would have been help from a quarter to which he did not desire to be indebted. The worldliness of his nephew Lot had already shown the spiritual dangers of intimacy with Sodom. The only qualification that Abraham makes is with reference to the Canaanitish young men who had assisted him in the victory, and who naturally would not be guided by the principles that actuated him. On their behalf he is willing to receive some of the spoil. Spirituality is thus able to discern and distinguish between circumstances when we are called upon to act for self and on behalf of others.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The contrast of Abraham's attitude to the two kings.

How very remarkable is this difference! To the king of Salem the acknowledgment of dependence; to the king of Sodom the assertion of independence. To the king of Salem the admission of

inferiority; to the king of Sodom the attitude of equality. To the king of Salem the spirit of humility; to the king of Sodom the attitude of dignity. How striking and really wonderful is this perfect balance of qualities!

2. The explanation of this striking attitude.

Again we have to penetrate below the surface to discover the secret of Abraham's wonderful bearing. The explanation, of course, is faith and as we study the subject somewhat more closely we find a fourfold action and activity of Abraham's trust in God.

(a) Faith is able to recognize spiritual position. Melchizedek was God's representative, and Abraham's faith was quick to see this and to act accordingly.

(b) Faith is able to realize serious peril. Not always has a believer been able to see that success often means temptation and victory the possibility of danger. Abraham saw this, and hence his unflinching attitude.

(c) Faith is able to resist strong pressure. It takes a real man to withstand honour paid by a king. By faith Abraham endured as seeing the King of kings.

(d) Faith is able to rest on special provision. The offer of the spoil was as nothing to Abraham compared with God's promise of the land and the attendant blessings. Thus Abraham could wait, and his faith expressed itself in patience, as he put God first. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

Chapter 37

00A.19 The Great Encouragement Gen_15:1-6

The Great Encouragement Genesis 15:1-6

TIMES of spiritual reaction are not uncommon among the people of God. Elijah experienced a great reaction (1 Kings 19:1-21) after the eventful and critical day on Carmel (1 Kings 18:1-46). So it evidently was with Abraham. The new, remarkable, and in some respects exciting events connected with the rescue of Lot brought about the inevitable swing of the pendulum, as we can easily see in studying this chapter, which is closely connected with the preceding one.

I. The Divine Revelation (Genesis 15:1).

There were nine successive manifestations of God to Abraham, of which this is the fifth. The phrase “the word of the Lord came” is very noteworthy as occurring first in this passage. It is found frequently afterwards throughout the Old Testament (Cf. Exodus 9:20; 1 Samuel 3:1.) The revelation seems to have been in the form of a vision, not a dream (Genesis 15:5). When did it come? After these things. The reference is, of course, to the events of Genesis 15:1-21 and shows the direct and essential connection between the two chapters. God’s revelations to His people are always intimately connected with their needs, as we see in this case.

Why did it come? “Fear not, Abraham.” Then Abraham must have had some fear. What was this? Was it not a natural dejection after victory? May it not have been caused by inevitable physical, mental, and moral reaction after the strain involved in the recent events? Fear before battle is the characteristic of cowards; fear after battle is the mark of a hero. This is the first occurrence of the Divine “Fear not” which is afterwards found so often as God’s message to His weary and tried servants. Either “Fear not,” or its equivalent Be not afraid, occurs some eighty-four times in Holy Scripture. The silence of six centuries after Malachi was broken by the Divine Fear not (Luke 1:13), and the announcement of the Incarnation was made in the same way (Luke 1:30).

What was it? “I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” How appropriate to the need of the moment was this twofold revelation of God to His servant! (a) God as a shield against all foes. (Cf. Psalms 3:3; Psalms 17:2; Psalms 18:30; Psalms 84:9; Psalms 94:4.) (6) God as a reward after victory. Abraham had refused the spoil of Sodom and Gomorrah; but God would not allow Abraham to be a loser. He Himself would be His servant s exceeding great reward.

II. The Human Response (Genesis 15:2-3).

Notice his despondent inquiry. “What wilt Thou give me?” It is evident from this inquiry how over strained Abraham was. The long waiting and the spiritual loneliness had been making their mark, and now he almost complains as he asks what reward there can be for him.

Mark his disappointed hope. Seeing I go childless. Ten years had elapsed since his entrance into Canaan and, in spite of the promise of a seed, there was no sign of fulfilment. Sarah and he were so much older, and everything seemed against even the possibility of the realization of God’s promises.

Observe his discouraging prospect. One born in my house is mine heir. Abraham seems to have almost lost hope, and was settling down to the conviction that, after all, his steward would be his heir.

III. The Divine Assurance (Genesis 15:4-5).

Now we shall see how God dealt lovingly and faithfully with His tried and troubled servant. His faithlessness was corrected. This shall not be thine heir. God had not forgotten to be gracious. He was still mindful of His promises (Genesis 12:7; Genesis 13:16). His faith was instructed. “He that shall come . . . shall be thine heir.” Thus God particularized in a way that had not been done previously in connection with the promise, and taught His servant, by giving him new ground for trust. His faith was encouraged. Tell the stars . . . so shall thy seed be. Abraham was bidden to look toward heaven, and in so doing he would doubtless realize something of the wide sweep of God’s purposes for him and his seed. Notice the three metaphors connected with Abraham’s seed: The dust of the earth (Genesis 13:16); the stars of heaven (Genesis 14:5); the sand of the seashore (Genesis 22:17).

IV. The Human Acceptance (Genesis 15:6).

Now comes a wonderful change and a definite progress upwards in Abraham’s spiritual experience.

There was a prompt response to the Divine revelation. Abraham believed. He had faith before, but now it was prominent and emphatic, a clearer, stronger, fuller trust in God. The original Hebrew for believed comes from a root whence we derive our Amen, and we might paraphrase it by saying that Abraham said “Amen to the Lord.” Amen in Scripture never means a petition (“May it be so”), but is always a strong assertion of faith (“It shall be so,” or “It is so”). Faith is thus the only, as it is the adequate, response to God’s revelation. The word of the Lord comes, “and we believe.” Faith takes God at His word.

Then came an equally prompt rejoinder from God in answer to His servant’s trust. And He counted it to him. That is, God accounted Abraham’s faith as the channel for the reception of the gift of righteousness. Notice the Old Testament allusions to the doctrine of imputation, or reckoning (Leviticus 7:18; Leviticus 17:4; Numbers 18:27; 2 Samuel 19:19; Psalms 32:2; Psalms 106:31. (See also Rom 4 passim.) The spiritual result is described in one significant word, “righteousness.” This means the state or condition of being right with God, and we have here the first reference to this great word righteousness which is subsequently so characteristic of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament revelation. Abraham was originally destitute of righteousness, and is now reckoned as righteous through faith in God. God Himself is the Object of his faith, the Word of God is the ground of his faith, and righteousness is the result of his faith. It is to be noticed that the phrase counted it to him for righteousness is not to be confused with counted it to him instead of righteousness. It means counted or reckoned with a view to his receiving righteousness. In Romans 4:1-25 the preposition eis (for, unto) with righteousness cannot be equivalent to ws (as if) or anti (instead of). (See Haldane in loc.) This passage is noteworthy for its first occurrences of remarkable and subsequently well-known words and phrases: (1) The word of the Lord came; (2) Fear not; (3) Believed; (4) Counted; (5) Righteousness. It is hardly too much to say that all subsequent occurrences of these words and phrases find the key to their meaning here.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The Possibility of spiritual despondency. This is a well-known fact in the life of the believer. It is often due to a threefold strain which is partly physical, partly emotional, and partly spiritual. Great experiences make their mark upon us, and by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright. At any rate we do not.

2. The Peril of spiritual disheartenment.

We may explain, but we can hardly excuse, spiritual depression, and it is often used of Satan to lead us away from God into the paths of spiritual despair. And even though we never reach despair, our depression may easily bring discredit upon the name of God. Herein lies one of the most serious elements of the peril.

3. The Protection against spiritual discouragement. This is found first in God’s continuous revelation of Himself to our hearts, and then our continued response in whole hearted trust and confidence maintained through prayer and fellowship with the Word of God. God’s truth and our trust. His grace and our faith. These are correlative facts and will ever protect the soul.

4. The Preciousness of spiritual discipline.

God’s delays to Abraham were not denials. They lead him to depend more upon the Giver than on His gifts. Not what God gives so much as what He is, is the foundation and source of spiritual life, power and progress.

Chapter 38

00A.20 The Confirmation of Faith Gen_15:7-21

The Confirmation of Faith Genesis 15:7-21 IN response to Abraham's faith (Genesis 15:6) God entered into solemn covenant with him, assuring him of the certainty, while revealing still more of the meaning, of the Divine promises concerning him and his seed. In this section covenant is the key word.

I. The Foundation of the Covenant (Genesis 15:7). At the basis of the covenant was God's character and revelation to Abraham, and on this foundation everything else rested. The covenant was introduced by the solemn announcement of the Divine Name, "I am Jehovah."This was the bed-rock of all; God's unchanging and unchangeable presence and character.

Then came the significant reminder of what God had already done for him. That brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees. Abraham had already been redeemed, and this fact was the foundation of, and was intended to be a factor in, the rest of God's dealings with him.

Following this came the renewed declaration of the Divine purpose. To give thee this land to inherit it. God again reminds and assures Abraham of His object in bringing him out of his own land. The purpose is once more stated clearly and plainly.

II. The Desire for the Covenant (Genesis 15:8).

Abraham met this new assurance of God with an earnest desire for a proof. He makes his appeal for knowledge. This was what he needed; knowledge, certitude.

He also sought from God some assurance. "Whereby shall I know?" He desired some outward and visible guarantee and pledge. And yet it must be observed that he did not require a sign in order to believe, but after and on account of believing. It was not faithlessness, but a desire for confirmation. He fully believed God's Word, and yet wondered how and when it would be fulfilled. Contrast Mary's attitude (Luke 1:34) with that of Zacharias (Luke 1:18), though her words were practically the same. Abraham's attitude might well be summed up and illustrated by the words, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

III. The Preparation for the Covenant (Genesis 15:9-10). The Divine instructions are now given. "Take for Me an heifer," etc. The heifer, goat, and ram were to be three years old, signifying maturity in the offering. These, with the dove and pigeon, were afterwards found associated with the Mosaic aw (Exodus 29:15; Numbers 15:27; Numbers 19:2; Deuteronomy 21:3).

Then Abraham proceeded to fulfill the requirements connected with the solemnities of a covenant. "Took . . . divided." See Leviticus 1:6. Having divided the animals, he places the corresponding pieces opposite to each other, and the one bird opposite to the other, leaving a passage between. This was the usual form of agreement and contract, the two parties walking in procession along the pathway just made, and thereby signifying their agreement (Jeremiah 34:18). The idea underlying this was that of a covenant by means of sacrifice (Psalms 1:5). The blood-covenant was a well-known primitive method of ratifying solemn agreement.

We are now able to notice how Abraham prepared to receive God's assurance and further revelation.

IV. The Readiness for the Covenant (Genesis 15:11-12).

Faithfulness was the first and leading proof of Abraham's readiness. He had obeyed exactly according to the command of God, observing to the letter what God required. This is ever the true attitude for fuller teaching and deeper blessing.

Watchfulness was another feature of his attitude at this time. While waiting God's time he kept guard over the carcasses, and kept away the birds of prey. We see how spiritual attitude underlies this act. Nor are we wrong in thinking that receptiveness characterized him. The supernatural slumber (cf. Genesis 2:21) prepared Abraham for the reception of God's revelation by detaching him from all things earthly which might divert his attention, and prevent the full teaching having its effect upon his life. The dread that fell upon him was doubtless due to the consciousness of a Divine presence overshadowing him.

V. The Message of the Covenant (Genesis 15:13-16). A fourfold revelation now comes from God and Abraham is told of remarkable experiences which should accrue to his seed. His seed is to endure great privation (Genesis 15:13). Exile, bondage, and affliction are the three elements of this privation. He was to learn the meaning of heirship through suffering. (Cf. Romans 8:17.)

N.B. - The term of 400 years seems to be a round number for 430 (Exodus 12:40; Acts 7:6; Galatians 3:17). The 430 years may date from the birth of Isaac or from the death of Jacob, according to the computation chosen. His seed is to witness the display of great power (Genesis 15:14). The nation that would cause trouble to his seed would be punished, and his seed should come forth with abundant provision by God's help.

He himself is to experience great peace (Genesis 15:15). This is the first hint that Abraham himself was not to realize personally the fullness of God's purpose. God leads us step by step without revealing everything at once; and as revelation after revelation came to Abraham the horizon of God's purpose extended wider and wider. Abraham is to die in peace and be buried in a good old age. He is to be gathered to his fathers which means, as they were not buried in Canaan, that he would be with them in Sheol. And he is called to exercise great patience (Genesis 15:16). Another hint of the wide sweep of the Divine purposes. Other factors were at work, and many conditions had to be fulfilled before God's purpose could be completely realized.

VI. The Making of the Covenant (Genesis 15:17-21).

After the revelation of God's will comes the Divine assurance in the form of a covenant. The symbolical action is noteworthy (Genesis 15:17). A cylindrical fire-pot and a fiery torch combined to symbolize and express the Divine presence (Exod. 19), and in condescension to Abraham and his experience this symbol of the Divine presence passed along the pathway made between the birds and the animals, thus ratifying the covenant and giving God's servant a Divine guarantee.

Then comes a special assurance (Genesis 15:18-21). God now reveals to His servant the precise limits of the land promised to him. It seems pretty clear that the two rivers referred to must be the Nile and the Euphrates, thus giving those complete boundaries of the Holy Land which have never yet been fully realized. (Cf. 1 Kings 4:21; 2 Chronicles 9:26.) God's promises still await their

perfect fulfilment, for His covenant with Abraham is absolutely unconditional, and will be realized in His own time.

Suggestions for Meditation The study of the Divine covenants of the Bible is ful1 of the profoundest interest: (1) With Noah, (2) with Abraham, (3) with Moses and Israel, (4) the New Covenant. Each has its own characteristic features and elements; and only one, the Mosaic, is conditional, a covenant of works. The other three are covenants all of grace. Consider now the meaning and message of this Covenant.

1. The Divine Action.

It is noteworthy that God only passed through the pieces and not Abraham as well. This clearly shows that a Divine covenant is not a mutual agreement on equal terms between two parties, but a Divine promise assured and ratified by means of a visible pledge of its fulfilment. This at once takes the Divine covenant out of the category of all similar human agreements. It is divinely one-sided. God promises, God gives, God assures (Hebrews 6:17).

2. The Human Attitude.

What, then, is man’s part in this covenant? Simply that of a recipient. God gives; Abraham takes. What shall I render unto the Lord? ... I will take (Psalms 116:12-13). The attitude of the believer in response to this covenant of grace is fourfold: (1) A feeling of deep gratitude, (2) a response of whole-hearted trust, (3) an expression of hearty thanksgiving, (4) a life of loyal obedience.

00A.21 A False Step Gen_16:1-16

A False Step Genesis 16:1-16

IT might have been thought that after the experience recorded in chapter xv. Abraham would have been enabled to continue along the pathway of God's will without hesitation, mistake, or trouble. But we know by our own experience the proneness of the believer to blunder and fall into error and sin all through his earthly pilgrimage, no matter how far advanced his course or mature his experience. In the story of Hagar we come upon the record of another shadow which fell on Abraham's life. He is brought face to face with a specious temptation, and for lack of spiritual perception he falls into the snare, which leads to serious and very far-reaching consequences.

I. The Sad Mistake (Genesis 16:1-3). The temptation came originally from Sarah. Waiting had evidently told upon her, and this action was the result. Yet we must not overlook the fact that Abraham yielded even though the first suggestion came from his wife.

It had not yet been clearly revealed that Sarah was to be the mother of the promised seed, and probably this led to her impatience. Hagar, a "bond-slave," was her mistress's personal property, "a living chattel" and any child of the bond-slave would necessarily belong to the mistress, not the mother.

There was evident faith in God's promise in this proposal of Sarah's. She fully believed that Abraham was to have the seed promised by God. We can therefore understand that her suggestion meant a very genuine piece of self-denial. The practice was a common one, and Sarah was but the creature of her age in urging it on Abraham. Nevertheless, though Sarah s motive was good, genuine, and involved self-sacrifice, the proposal was wrong in itself, and, at the same time, wrong in its method of obtaining the end sought, it was wrong against God, Whose word had been given and whose time should have been waited. It was wrong against Abraham, leading him out of the pathway of patient waiting for God's will. It was wrong against Hagar, and did not recognize her individuality and rights in the matter. It was wrong against Sarah herself, robbing her of a high privilege as well as leading to disobedience.

II. The Sorrowful Results (Genesis 16:4-6). The outcome of Abraham's yielding was soon seen in the effects which came upon all. The first effect was pride (Genesis 16:4). Hagar's insolence was perfectly natural, and her reproach of her mistress, even though insolent, quite inevitable. Human nature is always human nature, and this reproach stung Sarah's pride to the quick, with the results that are well known. The next result was jealousy (Genesis 16:5). Now Sarah blames Abraham, a somewhat curious and very unfair attitude. My wrong be upon thee. This may be interpreted, "My injury belongs to thee as well," or, "May the injury to me return to thee!" It is a little surprising that Sarah's quick womanly perception did not forewarn her of these results of pride and jealousy.

Then followed misery (Genesis 16:6). This came upon Abraham with real force. He was, of course, powerless in the matter, as Hagar was her mistress's absolute property. He could not interfere, and was compelled to accept the inevitable, and say that Sarah must do as it pleased her. And not

least was the injustice (Genesis 16:6). This came upon Hagar, with whom Sarah dealt hardly. Hagar found herself once more a slave, and this time with personal maltreatment such as she had never experienced before.

It is easy for us to see as we read the story how inevitable these results were. Would that we ourselves realized beforehand all such inevitableness!

III. The Special Interposition (Genesis 16:7-12).

What a picture of real life is found in this in. The chapter! Man is seen blundering, sinning, and suffering, and then God intervenes with His overruling providence, wisdom, and grace.

We see the blessed truth of Divine interest in human troubles (Genesis 16:7). The angel found her. God had not overlooked what had taken place, and now He interposes in order to bring about the best possible results after the error and sin of His children. How often God has had to do this for His children since that day!

We observe, too, the Divine call for perfect submission (Genesis 16:8-9). The questions whence and whither recall Hagar to her position, and the slave woman tells the simple truth about her flight. The Divine command is that she should return and submit herself. It will be noticed that the quasi- marriage is not for an instant acknowledged. Sarah is still Hagar s mistress. This call for submission was the first step towards blessing in Hagar s life. The same is true to-day. If we have made mistakes which have led us into sin, the primary condition of restoration is complete submission to the will of God, whatever that may involve.

We have also the Divine assurance of definite blessing (Genesis 16:10). God accompanies His call for submission by the promise of blessing to her child. He never makes a demand without giving us a promise. Thus He encouraged and incited her to the very submission from which she doubtless shrank. And above all there is the Divine revelation of overruling providence (Genesis 16:11-12). God told her that she should have a son and also of his name and its meaning (Ishmael; God shall hear). Thus every time she mentioned his name she might be reminded of God’s promises. Her son’s character and relation to others were also revealed (Genesis 16:12), an additional encouragement to the poor creature in her misery and trouble. This interposition had its immediate and blessed effect on Hagar. It led to a realization of the Divine presence (Genesis 16:13.) She called the name. . . . “Thou God seest me,” or “The God of my vision.” The Divine Presence thus came into her life with its blessing and cheer.

It prompted a memorial of the Divine promise (Genesis 16:14). “The well was called Beer-lahai-roi.” See margin, “The well of Him that liveth and seeth me; that is, the well where life is preserved after seeing God.”

It elicited obedience to the Divine will. She returned to her mistress, accepted the position, and all things were fulfilled according to the Divine revelation.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The continuance of the old nature.

How Suggestions truly this fact of the spiritual life is proved by this chapter! Is it not also manifest in daily experience? The most deeply taught believer is not exempt from the temptations, weaknesses, and tendencies of the old sinful nature.

2. The occurrence of special dangers.

Here again we are face to face with a well-known fact of the spiritual life. Our life may be lived for days, and weeks, and months without anything exceptional occurring, and then suddenly a special temptation may arise which leads us into sin.

3. The unexpected sources of temptation.

Abraham's temptation came from the nearest and dearest in his life, the very source whence trouble might have been least expected. So it often in to-day. Satan uses even the holiest of relationships and the closest of ties to bring about sin, and we ought not to be ignorant of his devices.

4. The combination of high motives and wrong actions.

Sarah's motives were undoubtedly good, and we may fully believe that Abraham was actuated in the same way, and jet their actions were manifestly wrong. How frequently this remarkable combination of good motive and bad conduct occurs in history and daily life! The end does not justify the means, whatever people may say.

5. The far-reaching effects of a believer's sin.

Evil-doing on the part of a child of God is perhaps the very worst thing that can happen, and often has very widespread effects. It has been well pointed out by a modern writer that the existence of Mohammedanism to-day is really to be traced to Abraham's false step; Mohammedanism which is in some respects the deadliest opponent of Christianity. Isaac and Ishmael still struggle in fierce opposition.

6. The necessity of prolonged waiting on God.

God's will must be realized in God's way, and God's way often involves waiting God's time. The union of faith and patience (Hebrews 6:12) is one of the prime necessities of true spiritual life.

7. The supreme secret of all true living.

Abraham could hardly have been living in close touch with God, or his spiritual perception would have been keen enough to detect the danger lurking in Sarah's temptation. The only protection against error in thought and action is found in abiding with God, living in fellowship with Him, listening to His voice in His word, and keeping the pathway to His presence clear by prayer and alertness of attitude before Him. They that know their God shall be strong and do (Daniel 11:32, Heb.).

Chapter 40

00A.22 The Covenant Renewed Gen_17:1-27

The Covenant Renewed Genesis 17:1-27

GOD has always some fresh surprise of knowledge, grace, and blessing with which to delight His children. We see this again and again in the life of Abraham, and not least of all in the story recorded in the present chapter. This episode was a great step forward in Abraham's spiritual relationship to God, as well as in his personal experience.

I. The Fresh Revelation (Genesis 17:1-8).

Abraham was at this period ninety-nine years old. Thirteen years had elapsed since the trouble about Hagar (Genesis 16:16). Nothing is recorded of these years, and we may assume that there was no special or new revelation of God's will during the time. It was an opportunity of quiet waiting for, and waiting on God. Now once again the Lord appears to His servant. This fresh appearance of God brought with it a new message (Genesis 17:1). "I am the Almighty God." This was a new title of God (Hebrew: "El Shaddai"). The root idea seems to be that of power and ability, and is best rendered by the phrase the "Mighty God," the addition of "All" being no necessary part of the word. This special emphasis upon God's power was very appropriate to the new message about to be given.

New knowledge always carries new responsibilities and we are not surprised to note the definite claim (Genesis 17:1). "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (upright). God called upon His servant to live and move in the Divine presence, and to be sincere, genuine, and true-hearted. Is this a hint that Abraham was settling down, satisfied with Ishmael, and no longer anxious about the special seed promised by God? Something of this seems to have been the case, or we should have hardly had this very definite call. The personal result was soon seen (Genesis 17:3). "Abraham fell on his face." This attitude of reverence and of readiness shows that Abraham realized at once the solemnity of the occasion. And now for the first time we seem to become fully conscious of Abraham's high privilege (Genesis 17:3). God talked with him. Few of those whose lives are recorded in the Old Testament were on the same spiritual footing as Abraham. God once again shows His trust in His servant, and that He will not hide from him what He is about to do. How beautiful is the picture of this holy familiarity between the Mighty God and His servant! Nor are we surprised to find that God gives to His servant a specially strong assurance (Genesis 17:4). "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee." These words are evidently intended, by their emphatic reference to God Himself ("as for Me"), as a reminder to Abraham that, whatever he had forgotten, God had not been unmindful of His solemn promises. It is noteworthy that God reminds Abraham of an already existing covenant ("My covenant is with thee"), and then proceeds to tell him some of the forthcoming results of this existing fact. Not even the silence of thirteen years, still less the birth of Ishmael, can alter God's purposes or change His mind concerning Abraham. The detailed promises of this new revelation deserve the most careful study (Genesis 17:4-8). They deal with three great facts: (a) Abraham himself, (b) the land, (c) his seed. At this point a comparison should be made of the growth in the details of the revelation of God's purpose:

Genesis 12:1-20, a great nation; Genesis 13:1-18, as the dust of the earth; Genesis 15:1-21, as the stars of heaven; Genesis 17:1-27, many nations.

II. The Necessary Requirements (Genesis 17:9-14).

Abraham is now told his part in the matter, and it is very striking and suggestive to notice that all he has to do is obey God's word in the one respect mentioned in these verses. This is another illustration of the fact that God's covenant of grace is divinely one-sided. God is the Giver; man the receiver, not the equal. The conditions to be fulfilled (Genesis 17:10-14) are now stated. The ordinance of circumcision, already known widely in the East, is given a special meaning and deep sacredness. The truths connected with it seem to include at least four ideas: (a) designation, as belonging to God; (b) separation unto Him; (c) purity in Him; (d) possession by Him. It is also noteworthy that we are here brought face to face for the first time in Holy Scripture with young life in relation to God. God entered into covenant with little children, and as the covenant with Abraham was one of grace we see the true place of little children in the kingdom of God. Circumcision was not merely a mark of the Mosaic dispensation and Jewish covenant of works; it was, as here, pre-Mosaic, associated with the covenant of grace, and therefore independent of, and wider than, the Jewish national life (John 7:22). God is here seen in the attitude of Father to little children, and He has never altered that attitude.

III. The Further Revelation (Genesis 17:15-16). Not only Abraham's, but also his wife's name is now changed. This is another indication of God's purpose and a special assurance of blessing. And now for the first time Sarah is announced as the mother of the promised seed. Up to this moment everything had been couched in general terms as to seed, but without special reference to Sarah. God's promises become more definite and detailed as time goes on and need arises.

IV. The Immediate Response (Genesis 17:17-18).

Abraham receives the new revelation of God with reverence, and yet with a certain trustful astonishment. The laugh is evidently not the laugh of unbelief, but of a faith which, while taking God at His word, considers the news almost too good to be true. God's revelations to His people often seem to be too good to be true, and yet they are true! But there is one shadow over the scene. He is thinking of his growing son. How natural was this appeal on behalf of Ishmael! The boy had won his way to his father's heart, and it would have been surprising from the natural and human standpoint if Abraham had not desired Ishmael to be his heir. And yet, notwithstanding the naturalness of the appeal, there lies at the root of it a desire to have some substitute for God's promises. It is as though anything else would really do as well. God knows better than his servant, and we have His answer at once.

V. The Full Revelation (Genesis 17:19-22). Not even the intense appeal can stand before God's purposes. God will maintain His own way, and so He assures Abraham that Sarah is indeed to be the mother of the seed, that the son s name shall be Isaac ("Laughter"), and that the covenant which is to be everlasting is to be realized through Isaac, and not through Ishmael.

Nevertheless Ishmael shall not be forgotten. He is Abraham's seed, and as the son of God's servant he will be blessed and made a great nation. Thus God overrules His children's mistakes, and in loving condescension and tender mercy brings blessing out of trouble.

VI. The Loyal Reception (Genesis 17:23-27).

Now the time of communion has come to an end, and God leaves His servant to ponder what has been said and to respond to the revelation.

How prompt was his obedience (Genesis 17:23). In the selfsame day, as God had said. How striking in their simplicity are these words, indicating the immediateness of Abraham's trustful obedience! This is ever the pathway of blessing. Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it, and do it at once!

How complete was his acceptance (Genesis 17:27). Not only as to himself and Ishmael, but also as to all his house, Abraham fulfilled the Divine requirement and bestowed the sign of the covenant. They were all included in the Divine blessings, for God knew that Abraham would influence his whole household aright.

Suggestions for Meditation In this fresh revelation Abraham learned much about God, and the same lessons are needed by us to day. The more we know of God, the stronger and richer will be our lives.

1. A new vision of God's Character.

God revealed Himself to Abraham as a God of might and power (Genesis 17:1), and, as such, able to fulfill all his hopes. God does not wish His children to be content with anything else than His fullest blessings, and for the accomplishment of this He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. The various passages in the New Testament where we read that God is able call for earnest meditation.

2. A wider view of God's Purposes.

Abraham little realized the far-reaching extent and universal scope of God's purpose concerning him. He was now taught this as he had never been taught before, in great wealth of detail and definiteness of meaning. It is always well to have our view of God's mind for the world extended and deepened, and so think His thoughts after Him.

3. A clearer view of God's Will.

God's will for us, as it was for Abraham, is loyal obedience. As the little child said of the angels in heaven who do God's will there, they obey without asking any questions. This and this alone, is the secret of power in daily living.

4. A fuller view of God's Grace. The whole chapter is full of grace. It was grace that prompted, planned, and provided these blessings for Abraham. It was grace that condescended to Abraham's weaknesses, limitations, and faults. It was grace that persisted with Abraham in spite of every check and drawback, and it was grace that perfected everything concerning him. God is still the God of all grace, and it is the Believer's joy to experience the unsearchable riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Chapter 41

00A.23 Fellowship with God Gen_18:1-21

Fellowship with God Genesis 18:1-21 OUR life in relation to God can be summed up in four words - sonship, worship, stewardship, fellowship. The believer is at once a son, a subject, a servant, and a friend of God. The last-named relationship marks the later period of Abraham's life, and seems to be (as always) associated with growth and maturity of spiritual experience. In this chapter there are several aspects of the Believer's fellowship with God, and it is probable that from this period commence those experiences which led to Abraham being called the friend of God (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 40:8; James 2:23). He is the only one to whom this designation is given in the Old Testament.

I. The Divine Appearance (Genesis 18:1-8). The character of the appearance's noteworthy. It was not in the form of a vision (Genesis 5:1-21), nor was it merely a word or message (Genesis 17:1-27). It was a Divine appearance as a Guest, thus marking Abraham's position of friendship and fellowship with God.

It is evident that the "three men" represent a personal manifestation of God in visible form, accompanied by two created angels (Genesis 18:22 and Genesis 18:1). The fact that the Church of England uses this chapter as a Lesson for Trinity Sunday indicates that this chapter has been regarded as in some sense a foreshadowing of the doctrine of the Trinity. We must, of course, be careful not to read too much of such a New Testament idea into it, though we are perfectly safe, and entirely warranted, in seeing in this unique manifestation an indication of certain essential distinctions in the Godhead which subsequently were fully revealed as the Trinity of the New Testament. The response made by Abraham (Genesis 18:2-8) is a characteristic picture of Eastern politeness and hospitality. The elements of courtesy (Genesis 18:2), activity (Genesis 18:6-7), hospitality (Genesis 18:7-8), and respect (Genesis 18:8) are very interesting and noteworthy, and strictly true to Eastern life to-day. The prominence given to hospitality in the New Testament is also to be pondered (Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:2; 1 John 5:7). Abraham indeed entertained angels unawares (Hebrews 13:2).

II. The Divine Assurance (Genesis 18:9-15). The question "Where is Sarah thy wife?" showed that the strangers knew her name, and the words which immediately followed quickly told him Who the speaker was. The promise of a son was then repeated, with the assurance of the near approach of its fulfilment.

Sarah received this message with the utter astonishment of unbelief. She could not credit the possibility of it. This is only one out of several indications in the course of the story that Sarah's spiritual kinship with Abraham was not very close, and that she had never really risen with him to his clear faith in God.

Sarah was now taught a solemn and severe lesson. She was first of all reminded of God's power. Is anything too hard for the Lord? And when she denied her laughter, she was reminded of God's knowledge (Genesis 18:15). Sarah now became aware of the real character of her visitors, and we

see the result in her fear even while she denied the laughter.

III. The Divine Announcement (Genesis 18:16-21). The visitors then left the hospitable tent of Abraham, and with characteristic courtesy Abraham accompanied them on their journey. The time had come for a further revelation to Abraham.

How beautiful is the suggestion made by the Divine soliloquy! “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” God’s friends are permitted to know His secrets because they are His friends. Abraham is regarded by God as having a right to know what was about to be done (Psalms 25:4; Amos 3:7).

God reveals His purpose to Abraham for very weighty reasons. He is to be the means of blessing to all nations (Genesis 18:18), and it is therefore necessary for him to know the reason of this destruction of two of the cities of the earth Sodom and Gomorrah. Further, Abraham’s influence over posterity (Genesis 18:19) required that he should know of this judgment in order that it might be used as a solemn lesson in the days to come (Psalms 78:1-8). Again, it was his influence with those under his charge, and their obedience, that would in some way bring about the fulfilment of God’s word to Abraham himself (Genesis 18:19, last clause).

God now tells His servant of the terrible sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of His Divine determination to examine into it and to deal with it accordingly. Thus the servant of God learns the Divine will and enters more fully into the Divine purposes.

Suggestions for Meditation In this section we have an illustration of fellowship with God and some of its essential features. Fellowship is the crowning purpose of Gods revelation (1 John 1:3). There is nothing higher than this, for man’s life finds its complete realization in union and communion with God. Notice the following elements:

1. Sacred Intimacy. The picture of God as the guest of Abraham is a symbol of that spiritual relationship which is brought very clearly and beautifully before us in the New Testament. What an unspeakable privilege it is to have God as our Guest, and for us to be His guests (John 14:23; Revelation 3:20.) 2. Genuine Humility.

Abraham’s attitude on this occasion is noteworthy. He quickly realized Who had come, and although he had all the privileges of fellowship, he never forgot his own true place and position. So is it always with the true believer. He never forgets that, not withstanding all the privileges of fellowship, God is God, and he himself is nothing. Reverence is never separated from the fullest, freest realization of the Gospel of Grace. While we have “access,” it is “access into the Holiest” (Hebrews 10:19). There is no incompatibility, but the most beautiful fitness in the freedom, freeness, and fullness of Divine grace, combined with the attitude of reverential awe in those who are partakers of grace. Holy and reverend is His Name (Psalms 61:9).

3. Special Revelation.

Fellowship with God is always associated with the knowledge of His will. Servants do not know their master s purposes, but friends and intimates do. Our Lord taught this plainly to His disciples (John 15:15). There is no position like that of fellowship with God for knowing fully our Master’s will. (Cf. John 13:25, R.V.).

4. Unique Association. The man who is in fellowship with God does not merely know the Divine will, but becomes associated with God in the carrying out of that will. God deliberately and definitely associated Abraham with the realization of His purposes (Genesis 18:17-19), and this has ever been the case. The friends of God become His fellow-workers, and are used to carry out the wide-reaching purposes of His will to mankind. In view of all these glorious privileges and solemn responsibilities of fellowship with God what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?

Chapter 42

00A.24 The Ministry of Intercession Gen_18:22-33; Gen_19:27-29

The Ministry of Intercession Genesis 18:22-33; Genesis 19:27-29

ONE of the essential and most blessed features of the Believer's fellowship with God is the privilege and responsibility, the joy and duty of intercession. The Divine announcement concerning Sodom led Abraham to intercede for the doomed city. God's revelation thus finds its response in His servant's intercession. Some of the elements of intercession are clearly shown in the above passages.

I. The Privileged Position (Genesis 18:22-23).

Intercession with God presupposes a spiritual relationship and position from which all else follows. He was in God's presence. "Abraham stood yet before the Lord." The two angels had gone on to Sodom to fulfill the Divine will, leaving the Angel of the Covenant with Abraham.

He also realized God's nearness. "Abraham drew near." How like this language is to the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews 10:22). Abraham was on a true footing of fellowship as he poured out his heart to God.

He also knew God's will. He had already been told what God was about to do, and this led him to prayer.

We have here a striking illustration of the true spirituality and power of Abraham's life. Several elements of real prayer are clearly seen.

II. The Earnest Spirit (Genesis 18:23-24). His compassion is manifest. Abraham's prayer is evidently for the whole city and not merely for his nephew Lot. It is striking that he does not mention Lot from beginning to end, but only prays for the city. His definiteness is noteworthy. He asked for what he wanted, and this is always the true attitude in prayer. God will tell us whether what we want is also what He thinks we need, but mean while our prayers should be definite. His boldness is striking. There is no hesitation in his utterance, no fear in his attitude. Everything is frank, fearless, courageous, for the simple reason that he knows Whom he believes. Our Lord frequently inculcated boldness in prayer (Luke 11:5-10; Luke 18:1-8).

III. The Urgent Plea (Genesis 18:23-25). But Abraham was perplexed by the fact that the destruction of Sodom would involve the destruction of righteous men with wicked ones. With this difficulty in his mind he did the very best thing; he told God about it. Problems thus brought to God will either be resolved, or else sufficient grace will be given to wait for the perfect solution. Abraham had some how got hold of the great principle that good people are as salt preventing surrounding corruption. How often one Christian in a family keeps back Divine judgment on sin! How often wandering boys are withheld from ruin through their mother s prayers!

Yet he cannot help entertaining a strong conviction. He felt that it was impossible that the righteous could be destroyed with the wicked. In the absence of any revelation of a future

judgment redressing present inequalities, we are not surprised at Abraham's strong assertion of his sense of the injustice of indiscriminate destruction. He was evidently concerned for God also, and was particularly anxious that the heathen around should not get a wrong impression of the God of Abraham. And all the while he rests in a sure confidence in God. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? He makes his appeal to God's righteousness rather than to His mercy, and in so doing he touches the very foundation of things. With a perfect trust in the absolute justice of God he pours out his heart and tells God his difficulties. This is the true spirit of the believer who is face to face with the great mysteries of life. He takes them all to God in prayer, and in the presence of Divine righteousness he finds that rest of heart which enables him to wait patiently for God (Psalms 37:6-7; Psalms 73:16-17).

IV. The Divine Encouragement (Genesis 18:20).

Let us observe, moreover, how point by point the prayer was met by a Divine response: "And the Lord said." Thus God spoke to His servant in answer to prayer. So it ever is with the believer. God's Word is the complement of and response to our petitions.

"If I find ... I will spare." God met his servant's request by a definite promise that if He found fifty righteous He would spare the place.

"For their sakes." Thus God responded to His servant's conviction that there was indeed a power and influence good people. The whole city is to be spared, notwithstanding its sin, simply and solely on account of fifty people therein. Nothing can be clearer than this testimony to the salutary power and influence of godliness (Matthew 5:13).

V. The Deep Humility (Genesis 18:27).

Abraham had a profound consciousness of God. I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord. Again we notice how his friendship with God is never allowed to make him forget his true position of dependence.

He also had an equally real and deep knowledge of himself. Which am but dust and ashes. This is always the consciousness of the true child of God as he abides in the Divine presence. God's holiness and our sinfulness, God's greatness and our nothingness, are the overwhelming experiences.

VI. The Earnest Persistence (Genesis 18:29-32).

Six times Abraham intercedes for the wicked cities. His heart is drawn out in pity and compassion, and he pleads again and again. Persistence in prayer is one of the prominent features of New Testament teaching. Continuing instant (Romans 12:12). Steadfastness in intercession is one of the sure marks of reality and earnestness.

Six times God responded to His servant's prayer. After each petition came the definite answer. So is it always; as long as we ask, God will answer. Notice the threefold promise^ with its element of increasing persistency in Matthew 7:7.

VII. The Natural Limitation (Genesis 18:33).

Why, then, did Abraham stop praying when he reached the number ten? Probably because of his ignorance of the extent and effect of Sodom's sin, and, from another point of view, probably because of his ignorance of the extent of the Divine mercy and longsuffering. As it has often been said, Abraham ceased asking before God ceased giving. The reason why Abraham did not go lower than ten was possibly due to the fact that now he did not think there were anything like that number in the city.

We naturally compare and contrast Abraham's words, "I will speak yet but this once" with the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose pleading on our behalf knows no limitation whatever. "He is able to save to the uttermost . . . seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession" (Hebrews 7:25).

VIII. The Gracious Answer (Genesis 19:27-29).

Abraham rose up early in the morning and looked towards Sodom. Somehow or other he must have expected that God would at least deliver the one righteous man that was in Sodom, and not destroy him with the rest. Is it not very significant that Lot's preservation is here directly connected with Abraham's intercession? Thus Abraham saved his nephew for the second time. The first time by the sword (Genesis 14:1-24), the second time by supplication (Genesis 18:1-33).

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The solemn responsibilities of Intercession.

How striking are the words of Samuel teaching us that we are actually sinning against God if we do not pray for others! (1 Samuel 12:23) Do we clearly realize this? Does it not make us ashamed and even afraid when we remember how little we pray for others as compared with our prayers for ourselves? And yet there is scarcely any part of prayer more prominent in the New Testament than prayer for others (James 5:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:1; Ephesians 6:17-18; 1 Timothy 2:1). The reason why intercessory prayer is thus so plainly taught is that it is the best opportunity we possess of showing spiritual interest in others. Our Christian life will never be really healthy and strong until we make intercession a very prominent and even predominant feature of our private devotions. The Lord's Prayer gives us the model in this as in other respects.

2. The marvellous possibilities of Intercession. The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends (Job 42:10). This shows the reflex blessing of intercessory prayer, but far beyond this is the social value of intercession. God has included in His great purpose of redemptive love the power and blessing of prayer for others, and if only God's people would realize what their prayers could do for the world, they would take up this work of priestly intercession in a way that they have never realized before. Only the great day will reveal what has been done by intercessory prayer. The Apostle Paul depended greatly on it in his ministry, and was frequently asking his friends to remember him and his work in prayer.

3. The essential conditions of Intercession.

We can only intercede in proportion as we abide in close fellowship with God. "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). Asking in our Lord's Name (John 14:13; John 16:23) is another way of stating the need of union and communion with God. In "My Name" means, not simply using His Name as a plea, but praying in union with Him and with all that we know of His will. When these conditions are fulfilled the

Lord’s words become blessedly true. “Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” (Cf. 1 John 3:22; 1 John 5:14-15.)

Chapter 43

00A.25 The Story of Lot Gen_19:1-38

The Story of Lot Genesis 19:1-38

THERE are lives recorded in the Bible which have well been called beacons. There are men like Balaam, Saul, and Solomon, who started well, with every possible advantage, and then closed their careers in failure and disaster. Such a life was that of Lot the nephew of Abraham. He came out of Mesopotamia with his uncle, and continued with him in Canaan until their possessions necessitated a separation (Genesis 12:1-20, Genesis 13:1-18). He thereupon pitched his tent towards Sodom, but soon entered and abode in the city. As a consequence he was involved in its captivity by the kings of the East (Genesis 14:1-24). Even his rescue by Abraham did not suffice to warn him from the place, for he returned and lived there as before. There is scarcely a life recorded in Scripture which is fuller of serious and solemn instruction for every believer.

I. The Angelic Visit (Genesis 19:1-3).

While the Divine personage remained in company with Abraham, the two attendant angels journeyed on to Sodom, where Lot was sitting in the gate, the place of concourse, the place of importance. It is not improbable that he sat there in an official capacity as judge. With the true spirit of Eastern courtesy he rose to meet them, and greeted them with profound obeisance, also offering to them hospitality. At first they declined his invitation, alleging a somewhat remarkable reason, “We will abide in the street all night.” They were there for the purpose of exploration with a view to judgment, and perhaps this was why they suggested remaining all night in the open street. But Lot urged them, and at last they yielded, and accepted his hospitality.

II. The Awful Depravity (Genesis 19:4-11).

Into the fearful story recorded in these verses it is impossible to enter for more than the barest comment. Every one knows that the sin hinted at here is perpetuated for ever by a word in our language to which this chapter has given rise. Perhaps two other cities have equaled Sodom in this respect, the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, both of which have suffered in a similar way from devastation, and one of them to this very day reveals the unspeakable depravity of its inhabitants. One other point dare not be overlooked in this hideous recital of sin, and that is, the selfish readiness of Lot to sacrifice his daughters in order to save his own life and peace.

III. The Solemn Warning (Genesis 19:12-14). The angels now enquire of Lot as to his kinsfolk, and command him to bring them out of the wicked city. They also announce in the plainest terms the purpose of their errand. The Lord hath sent us to destroy it. Lot does not hesitate to believe their testimony, and at once goes forth to urge upon his sons-in-law the absolute necessity of getting quickly out of the city. But he seemed as one that mocked. His testimony had no power. He had lived too long as one of themselves, without any very real difference, to allow of his message being of any avail. When the testimony of the life does not agree with the testimony of the lips the latter always goes unheeded. It is the life that is the true light.

IV. The Urgent Deliverance (Genesis 19:15-22). At daybreak the angels had to urge Lot to take his wife and two daughters out of the city, lest they be consumed. Even then Lot lingered, until at last the men laid hold upon him, his wife, and his daughters, and compelled them to go outside the city, the Lord being merciful. On reaching the confines of the city another urgent appeal was made. Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain.

Even now, with almost incredible weakness, Lot pleads that the mountain is too far away, and begs to be permitted to go to the neighboring city of Zoar. The Divine messengers concede this point, urging him once more to escape, since God was unable to do anything till His servant was in safety. What a marvellous picture of the Divine condescension and patience with one of the frailest of His creatures.

V. The Divine Judgment (Genesis 19:23-26).

Lot, together with his wife and his daughters, had only reached Zoar when the Lord poured out His judgment on the wicked cities and overthrew them and all their people. Lot's wife seems to have been equally attracted to Sodom, for we are told that she looked back, and was soon engulfed in the lava by which the cities were destroyed. With husband and wife both weak, hesitating, and yielding, there can be no surprise at what we know of their family life.

VI. The Powerful Intercession (Genesis 19:27-29).

Abraham rose early that morning on his way to a place from which he could see the plain of the Jordan valley. As he looked towards the cities he saw a smoke like that of a furnace, and yet with exquisite suggestiveness we have inserted at this point the indication that Abraham's prayer was answered so far as concerned his nephew. God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out. Abraham had ceased praying at the mention of ten righteous, but God was better than his prayers, and heard him for four only.

VII. The Unutterable Shame (Genesis 19:30-38).

Again it is impossible to comment on this unspeakably sorrowful scene. Drunkenness and impurity are once more seen in association. It perhaps says one thing for Lot that it was only by means of the sin of drunkenness that his daughters could accomplish their ends. Yet this is but an infinitesimal point by comparison, for we cannot forget that Moab and Ammon (though they were kinsmen to Abraham) were in after years among the most implacable foes of Abraham's descendants. As for Lot he had sounded the lowest depths of shame, and passes away into the darkness and oblivion that were his due.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. Lessons from Sodom.

(a) We observe the awful extent of human depravity. This is one of the most terrible chapters in the Bible, and is a reminder of the hideous possibilities of sin, and the extent to which evil can take hold of human nature. When the restraints of the Divine law are removed or set at naught there are scarcely any limits to human degeneracy and depravity (Romans 1:21-31; 2 Peter 2:8; Jude 1:7-8).

(b) We mark the certainty of Divine judgment. The iniquity of Sodom was indeed full. The cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord, and when human sin reaches its awful fruit the

judgment is as certain as it is unerring. There is no fact in God's universe more certain and assured than this that He is not, and cannot, and will not be indifferent to human sin.

(c) We note the marvel of Divine mercy. From the narrative it might seem that Lot was not worth saving. His weakness amounted to wickedness, and yet again and again God bore with him, waited for him, pleaded with him, urged him, and at length did not bring down the Divine judgment until he was safe out of Sodom. Is there anything in this world so wonderful as the mercy that waits for us, follows us, hedges our path, and short of compulsion does everything to keep us from ruin?

2. Lessons from Lot.

(a) His dangers may easily be ours also. His first danger was from things lawful. It was not wrong to desire a good place for his flocks and herds. The sin was in putting earthly ease and prosperity first. More men are killed by meat than poison. More souls are lost by abuse of things lawful than by the use of things unlawful. It is not wrong to have possessions, it is only wrong to let possessions have us. A ship in the water is perfectly right, but the water in the ship would be perfectly wrong. The Christian in the world is right and necessary, but the world in the Christian is wrong and disastrous. Another danger of Lot's was that of compromise. At first he pitched his tent towards Sodom, but soon entered the city and stayed there. He doubtless thought he could testify to the wicked people, but his words were nothing without deeds. They were quick enough to see that he was as sharp about money-making as the rest of them. A Christian must be outside Sodom in order to testify against it. To go into the world to influence it is futile and fatal. The world does not need influencing but saving, and for this the Christian must live a life of separation, in the world, but not of the world. This suggests yet a third danger that Lot incurred that of worldliness. He did testify and showed genuine hospitality, but his character was weakened, and his life was essentially selfish from the moment that he chose the best part of the land to the moment when he was prepared to sacrifice his daughters for his own safety. Some men are utterly unable to bear worldly success. It affects their character and their home life. Not least of all this worldliness endangered his happiness. He got on in the world, he sat in the gate as a leading citizen, but he was miserable. He vexed his soul day by day in seeing and hearing their wickedness (2 Peter 2:8). It is always so with those who do not put God first. Those who put Him second are the most miserable of men.

(b) His weakness may be ours also. He lacked the spirit of true independence. He was all right as long as he was with the stronger nature of Abraham, but he never seems to have been right afterwards. When the prop was removed he fell. It is often the case with Christian people to-day. Their religion is one of association. As long as they are surrounded with Christian friends, and connected with a Christian Church, their life seems to be perfectly right; but let these supports be removed, and they themselves placed alone in difficult surroundings, and their weakness is at once seen. Lot also lacked decision. At every point of the story from his separation from Abraham indecision is stamped on his career. Mark in this chapter the urgency of the angels, and the references to his lingering, and to their hastening him. Even Zoar had to be left and the mountain reached after all. Every true life needs decision and firmness of character. Otherwise when emergencies come circumstances are too strong and we fall. "The flighty purpose never is o'ertook, unless the deed go with it."

(c) Lot’s needs may be ours also. The one supreme and all-embracing requirement was whole hearted trust in and consecration to God. But for the phrase righteous Lot (2 Peter 2:7) we should have scarcely believed him to be in any sense a believer. From the Old Testament narrative he seems to be apparently godly, but really worldly, and the explanation is that there was nothing whole-hearted about his relation to God. His religion, though real as far as it went, was so entirely superficial that it did not cover more than a small part of his life. And so he was a backslider, an awful failure, his soul saved, but his life lost. Saved, so as by fire. What a call it is to keep close to God and to His people, to witness for God to the world around, never to indulge in any half-way house between godliness and worldliness, but to let our light shine, and live by faith in the Son of God Who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Chapter 44

00A.26 An Old Sin Repeated Gen_20:1-18

An Old Sin Repeated Genesis 20:1-18 THE continuance and power of the evil nature in believers are among the most patent and potent facts of universal spiritual experience. That the infection doth remain in the regenerate is as certain as it is sad and serious. We have here a solemn example and warning of this in Abraham.

I. The Deplorable Sin (Genesis 20:1-2).

Abraham journeyed onward from Mamre (Genesis 18:1) towards the south, that southern district of Palestine known as the Negev. This may have been due to the need of new pasturage for his increasing flocks, or it may have been caused by his call to a continued pilgrimage with no settled habitation in the Land of Promise. Some think that it was prompted by a desire to remove from the surroundings made so painful to him from the events recorded in Genesis 19:1-38. His place of sojourning was Gerar, in the land of the Philistines. As before (cf. Genesis 12:13) Abraham said that Sarah was his sister. Thus Abraham attempted to protect himself at the expense of his wife. This repetition of an old sin would be astonishing were it not for the close consistency it bears to human nature, even among the people of God. Believers are often found to slip and fall where they have fallen previously.

Abimelech, the King of Gerar, at once acted upon the information received about Sarah, and took her with the intention of making her his wife. He doubtless realized the value of an alliance with a powerful man like Abraham. It is sometimes said that this story is only a variation of that which is recorded in chapter 13 and is not a separate incident, but the numerous variations in the narrative, as well as its place in the history of Abraham, disprove this theory. Besides, it is too true to human nature that a sin of this kind should be repeated to make it incredible that Abraham should again transgress.

II. The Divine Intervention (Genesis 20:3-8).

Very appropriately we have the title God employed (Genesis 20:3) when the relation of God with the heathen is in question. Jehovah is the Covenant Name. The Lord’s intervention was for the purpose of preserving Sarah, and at the same time of fulfilling the Divine purposes concerning the seed. Thus God’s children are saved from themselves.

It was necessary that Abimelech should be restrained from doing that which in all ignorance and innocence he was about to do. There was also the thought of instruction and testimony concerning Abraham and his relation to God. Notwithstanding Abraham’s sin, God would not allow him to be dishonored in the face of the ungodly. The character of Abimelech shines out beautifully, and is in marked contrast with Abraham’s at this point. Men of the world stand out superior at times to the people of God, and this is one of the great perplexities and problems of the spiritual realm. Abimelech’s words bear witness to a true knowledge of God, and a genuine fear of God outside the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 20:8). Abimelech had no intention of sinning, only of doing that which was perfectly natural to that age and state of life.

III. The Deserved Rebuke (Genesis 20:9-16).

Again Abimelech's character and attitude shine as he reproaches Abraham with what he had done. It is very sad when a man of God has to be rebuked by a man of the world.

There are three points in Abraham's statement by which he attempted to justify his conduct. (a) He thought there was no fear of God (Genesis 20:11) in Abimelech and his people. We can see how distinctly he was mistaken on this point (b) Sarah was really his sister; that is, a half-sister. Abraham here clearly crossed over the boundary between concealment and lying, and by suppressing the truth he suggested only too plainly what was false, (c) It was an old compact made thirty years ago (Genesis 20:13). This, spoken in extenuation, really intensifies his sin, for it means that all through the thirty years of fellowship with God in Canaan this old compact had been in existence and never broken. How true, again, this is to experience! A believer often finds some old habit or sin cropping up, and if it is not at once dealt with it will assuredly bring trouble and sorrow.

Abimelech gave gifts to Abraham, doubtless as an acknowledgment and as a kind of propitiation of the wrong that would have been done. To Sarah also Abimelech addressed himself, telling her that the gifts which he had given to her husband were of a propitiatory kind, so that the recent events might be covered and forgotten. This must have been a very definite rebuke to Sarah, who, whatever the old compact may have meant, should have at once told Abimelech the true state of affairs. N.B. Perhaps the words he is to thee (Genesis 20:16) should be rendered it is to thee, referring to the gift rather than to Abraham.

All through we see the manifest moral superiority of a heathen man over children of God. When believers are out of the line of God's will they will sometimes go lower than other people. Abimelech is at his best. Abraham is at his worst. We must, of course, take care not to judge the entire life of either by this one incident, but the facts of the incident itself convey their own special lesson. How sad and deplorable it is when a believer does not keep in touch with God! "The corruption of the best is the worst. Tis true, tis pity; and pity tis tis true."

IV. The Definite Result (Genesis 20:17-18). In answer to prayer, God's blessing came down upon Abimelech and his household. Thus God overruled these sad mistakes and brought blessing.

Sarah's position as Abraham's wife was preserved, and she would still be the instrument of fulfilling God's purposes by means of the promised seed.

Divine protection was vouchsafed to Abraham, and his sin overruled by the mercy and love of God. If God had not interposed on His servant's behalf what an unspeakable catastrophe would have been the result!

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The possibilities of sin in believers.

It is almost incredible, after the experiences recorded in chapters 15 and 18 that Abraham should have sinned in this way against God. Notice the elements included in this sin:

(a) The fear of man; (b) innate selfishness; (c) deliberate untruth: (d) distrust of God through fear of circumstances. And what a degradation it was to be rebuked by a man of the world! It is truly a picture full of sadness and shame.

2. The perils of sin in believers.

There was peril to Abraham himself. Old habits broke out afresh which had been restrained and kept in the background for years. This is often a Believer's experience. Former weaknesses and inveterate tendencies which we think no longer powerful suddenly arise and bring about our downfall. There is also a peril to our fellow-believers through our example. What a bad influence on Sarah! Younger Christians arc shocked, and even led into sin, when they see an old believer fall. There is also a peril to the world, for the sin of a child of God dishonors God, and so far prevents the world from being impressed with the Divine character.

3. The persistence of sin in believers.

Abraham's experience proves New Testament truth that the old nature abides in the believer to the very end. Nowhere in Scripture is there any warrant for the idea that the root of sin is taken out in this life. The teaching of Article 11 of the Church of England is in exact correspondence with the Word of God. Neither in the regenerate nor in the sanctified (a distinction often made, but without warrant) is the infection of nature taken away. The realization of this solemn and patent fact would save many a believer from spiritual trouble.

4. The protection against sin in believers.

God took Abraham's part before Abimelech, but assuredly must have dealt very differently with him in private. The Believer's standing before God is one thing; his state is quite another. While God's people are all "accepted in the Beloved" they are not all equally acceptable to the Beloved, and the question of protection against indwelling sin is vital for Christian living. This protection God has provided in abundant sufficiency for every need. The promise is clear: Sin shall not have dominion over you. God's provision of power is in union with the death of Christ, and this, by the power of the Spirit, affords the guarantee of perpetual protection and victory. This provision must, however, be used. We are to "live in the Spirit" and "walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" is the law, not of eradication, but of counteraction. If we will live and walk in the Spirit we shall not yield to and fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Galatians 5:10). Full surrender to the Holy Spirit will keep the inner being sensitive to the approaches of sin. We shall become conscious of the satanic devices to lead us astray; and as we continue to yield ourselves to the incoming, full possession, and entire control of the Spirit of God the old nature will be kept under, the new life will have complete power, and we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loves us.

Chapter 45

00A.27 Joy and Sorrow- Gen_21:1-21

Joy and Sorrow- Genesis 21:1-21 THE believer never comes, never can come, to a point in his experience when God has nothing new to teach him or to give to him. Further and deeper lessons come constantly, lessons about God and about life in relation to Him. This is now very clearly and strikingly brought before us in connection with Abraham.

I. The Promised Seed (Genesis 21:1-8). At last the word of God was fulfilled, and Sarah received the long-promised son. Her joy can readily be understood, and it is suggestive to see the emphasis upon the Lord's action being in strict accordance with His word. "The Lord did . . . as He had spoken" (Genesis 21:1). At the set time of which God had spoken (Genesis 21:2). The comment of the Apostle is very significant in this connection. According to the Authorized Version (Romans 4:19) "Abraham considered not his own body now dead" implying that his faith disregarded the physical circumstances which, humanly speaking, might make it impossible for God to do as He had promised. According to the Revised Version, which omits the negative, and reads, "He considered his own body now dead," we have a still more striking suggestion as to his faith, for it implies that he deliberately thought on the subject of his own age and circumstances, and, notwithstanding this careful consideration, he exercised faith in God and His Word. And now at length this faith was justified, and God was true to His promise. The naming of the child "Isaac" and his circumcision were two prompt and definite proofs of Abraham's thorough trust in God. As already seen (Genesis 17:1-27), the root idea of circumcision is designation, God marking off the life as belonging to Him.

Sarah now laughs the laugh of joy and satisfaction. The fulfilment of the promise was almost too good to be true; and yet it was true, as she shows by her joyous surprise. She doubtless remembers her former laugh of incredulity (Genesis 18:13) as well as Abraham's laugh of faith and hope (Genesis 17:17). In due course the child was weaned; according to Eastern custom, at a much later date than in Western lands. Isaac must have been at least three, if not five, years old when this event took place. Abraham made a great feast to celebrate this occasion. The difference between East and West in this matter, and the spiritual ideas associated with it, can be seen from a careful comparison of Psalms 131:2; Isaiah 28:9; Matthew 21:16.

II. The Profound Sadness (Genesis 21:9-11). The results of Abraham's sin as to Hagar now show themselves acutely. Up to the time of Isaac's birth Ishmael occupied the foremost place in Abraham's life, but now he has to give place to Isaac. The disappointment to a growing and wild lad of seventeen must have been keen, and we are not surprised to read of his mockery of the little child. St Paul (Galatians 4:29) speaks of the action of Ishmael as persecuting, and no wonder, from Ishmael's point of view, since Isaac's arrival meant that he was robbed of his former position.

Sarah was quick to see this action of Ishmael, and resented it. It was now her turn to do what Hagar had done under similar circumstances. Thus the tangled web becomes still more tangled as jealousy, anger, and malice bear their sad fruit.

Sarah at once demands that Hagar and Ishmael shall be cast out. The terms in which she speaks of this bondwoman and her son show the pitiable spirit of jealousy and anger. She insists that Ishmael shall not be heir with her son, a though Abraham had any idea of the two boys being co-heirs. Sarah had either forgotten, or else distrusted God's definite promise about Isaac's sole heirship (Genesis 17:21).

It is no surprise that this was a poignant grief to Abraham. After all, Ishmael was his own child, and for seventeen years had been the joy and light of his life.

III. The Perfect Strength (Genesis 21:12-14).

We are now to see how God interposed amidst this strife and sorrow, overruling His children's mistakes and sin, and doing the very best that was possible for them. We can hear the voice of God comforting him (Genesis 21:12). God urged Abraham not to grieve. In all ages God's cheering message to His people has been "Let not your heart be troubled."

We can observe the wisdom of God guiding him (Genesis 21:12). God tells Abraham to listen to what Sarah had said. Her counsel is to be followed, even though her conduct could not be approved. Ishmael's presence in the home would doubtless have been an ever-increasing difficulty, and a very genuine hindrance to the complete realization of God's will and purposes for Isaac. Thus in sending Ishmael away Abraham was really removing the cause of possible failure in regard to Isaac. Moreover, Ishmael had arrived, or would soon arrive, at a point in his life where he would need room to grow, and a change would therefore be good for him as well.

We can mark the promise of God encouraging him (Genesis 21:13). God would not forget Ishmael, and he also was to become a great nation because of his relationship to Abraham. It is interesting to notice this reason assigned by God for His care of Ishmael. It is because he is the child of one of God's children. Thus Abraham was encouraged to do what must have been one of the hardest things in his experience, to put away from him his own child, and to realize that that child was no longer to be in any close and definite sense part of his life.

We can see the servant of God responding (Genesis 21:14). Abraham at once obeys the Divine word. We see him rising up early in the morning, and with thoughtfulness and tenderness he bids Hagar and Ishmael farewell. It requires very little imagination to enter into his feelings as he saw them depart, realizing that a break had come into his life which could never be altered or set aside. It is striking to notice the entire absence of any remonstrance on the part of Hagar. She seems to have taken everything quietly. Ishmael, too, although seventeen years old, showed no signs of rebellion. Perhaps there was something behind which would explain all, as, indeed, seems to be hinted at in the Apostolic treatment of this incident (Galatians 4:1-31).

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The unchanging faithfulness of God. The birth of Isaac was a beautiful and striking reminder that God is ever true to His word. As He had spoken is the keynote of the narrative. This is the experience of God's people in all ages. Joshua said that not one thing had failed of all that God had spoken; all had come to pass (Joshua 21:45; Joshua 23:14). This is the bedrock of the Believer's life. God is faithful A careful study of all the passages of the New Testament (and they are not few) which bring before us the faithfulness of God will show the prominence of this great truth in the Bible. "He abideth faithful;" and the more closely we enter into fellowship with Him through His Word, the more definitely we shall realize the preciousness of this

great fact. The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations (Psalms 33:11).

2. The perfect wisdom of God.

We can easily realize the aching heart and troubled spirit of Abraham as he prepared to bid farewell to Ishmael, and yet, the initial mistake having been made (Genesis 16:1-16), this severance was really the very best thing that could have happened for all concerned. Discipleship always involves discipline, and discipline is always necessary to spiritual blessing. God was taking up the tangled threads of His servant s life, weaving them into His own Divine pattern, and overruling everything for good. Happy for us if, like the Apostle Paul, we can rest our hearts day by day on the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Romans 11:33).

3. The absolute sufficiency of God.

God’s call to Abraham was met by Divine grace sufficient for his need. The Lord never puts upon His people more than they are able to bear. He encourages them by His promises, He assures them of His presence and power, and in response to all these encouragements His people yield trustful obedience, and find that His grace is sufficient for them. As thy days, so shall thy strength be.

Chapter 46

00A.28 The Daily Round Gen_21:22-34

The Daily Round Genesis 21:22-34 THE ordinary uneventful days of a Believer's life are usually a better test of his true character than an emergency or crisis. It is sometimes possible to face a great occasion with wisdom and courage, and yet to fail in some simple, average experiences of daily living. We have already had illustrations of what Abraham could do in great crises and striking situations. We shall now see him in an ordinary episode, and be able to consider some of the elements of his inner life and character.

I. A Striking Testimony (Genesis 21:22).

Abimelech, King of Gerar, together with Phichol, the chief captain of his host, came to Abraham on a special errand, using the striking words, "God is with thee in all that thou doest." Abimelech is probably a title of a dynasty, like Pharaoh (cf. Genesis 20:2; Genesis 26:1; Genesis 26:16). "Phichol" also seems to be an official title answering to "Vizier" (cf. Genesis 26:26.) This testimony to God's presence with Abraham seems to have been based on the occurrences of Genesis 20:1-18 and on Abimelech's subsequent experiences of Abraham's life and prosperity. It showed that the patriarch's daily life was a genuine witness for God. The fact that a heathen king should be able to draw this conclusion clearly indicates the genuineness and reality of Abraham's life.

II. A Significant Request (Genesis 21:23).

Abimelech, realizing the presence of God with Abraham, is specially desirous of peace for himself, his kindred, and his land. He therefore appeals to Abraham to take a solemn oath to insure this result Abimelech also reminds him of their past intercourse, and the kindness shown on a former occasion (Genesis 20:15). Abimelech is evidently afraid of Abraham's power, and this, with his growing prosperity and influence, might easily lead to difficulty, and even differences, in the immediate future. Perhaps, too, Abimelech might not have felt quite satisfied about Abraham's future attitude in the light of his former experiences. Yet it is very probable that religious influence was not wanting as a reason for making this request. Abimelech was finding out what many others have found out since his day, that the friendship of good men is often an advantage, even in things temporal.

III. A Sincere Response (Genesis 21:24). At once Abraham responds to the invitation of Abimelech, and shows his readiness to do as the heathen king desires. He expresses his readiness and determination to take the oath required, and to give the solemn undertaking that there shall be peace between him and Abimelech. Abraham stands out at this point to distinct advantage. He is truly a man of God, and shows this by his heartiness and willingness in meeting the desires and fears of Abimelech. His readiness would at once go far to show that he was not bent on any conquest or purely selfish ends.

IV. A Serious Remonstrance (Genesis 21:25).

Abraham now points out one difficulty in the way and clearly implies that any compact of peace is really impossible until the difficulty is settled. Abimelech's servants had violently taken away a well of water which belonged to Abraham, and it was with reference to this that Abraham complained. Water was everything to nomadic tribes, and its absence necessarily involved the greatest possible inconvenience, injury, and loss. The fact that Abimelech's servants had dealt unjustly with the well has suggested to some writers that the well may have been made by Abraham for the convenience of Ishmael when he was sent out from his father's home, and that Abimelech's servants were not aware of the connection of Ishmael with Abraham. This is a very probable explanation, though at the same time it is equally likely that in the movement of their flocks and herds the servants of Abimelech might easily have trespassed in Abraham's neighborhood. Such disputes have always been very common.

V. A Satisfactory Explanation (Genesis 21:20).

Abimelech, however, disclaims all knowledge of what had been done. He was entirely ignorant of the action of his servants. Thus, so far as Abimelech is concerned, a simple misunderstanding is at the root of Abraham's remonstrance. How often this is the case between friends and neighbors! Happy are they who are enabled to clear away misunderstandings as quickly and as easily as these two. Abimelech not only disclaims knowledge and responsibility, but complains of Abraham for not telling him of this. The man is evidently sincere, upright, and genuine, a fine specimen of natural goodness, apart from the special spiritual revelation involved in the Abrahamic covenant.

VI. A Solemn Covenant (Genesis 21:27-32).

Abraham thereupon sets before Abimelech the usual covenant presents (Genesis 21:27. Cf. 1 Kings 15:19; Hosea 12:1). Then he sets seven lambs of the flock by themselves, and, on being asked why this difference was made, he replies that they are a special gift, an additional security for the future with reference to the well (Genesis 21:30).

Abraham then calls the name of the place "Beer-sheba," which may mean the well of the oath or the well of the seven. There is an etymological connection between the Hebrew words for "swear" and "seven," probably because of the seven sacrifices (Genesis 21:28). It is, however, very interesting to know that seven wells have actually been found at the place which has been identified with Beersheba, twelve hours south-west of Hebron. Thus the covenant is made, and the two men become united in a solemn compact of brotherhood and peace. Abimelech and Phichol return to their country. Abraham remains at Beer-sheba.

VII. A Special Revelation (Genesis 21:33-34).

Abraham now adds on his own account another testimony to his recent experiences. He plants a grove, probably a tamarisk tree, one of the evergreens of the East, and a fit memorial of the perfect peace which he desired between himself, his God, and his fellow-men. But now there came a new revelation of the meaning of his relation to God. In the course of his prayer and communion he learnt a new Name of God, and the new Name was no mere additional title, but contained a new truth about God; "the Everlasting God" (El Olam). He was thus reminded of God's unchangeableness and his dependableness. This was a distinct advance on his previous knowledge of God as "Most High" (Genesis 14:22), and "Almighty" (Genesis 17:1). Thus, in the course of Abraham's daily life and his faithful attitude to those around him came fresh mercies and

blessings and new experiences of his God.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The spiritual value of ordinary everyday life.

It is impossible for Christians to be ever living in a constant succession of crises and great occasions. These exceptional experiences must of necessity be very rare. Ordinary life is the normal experience of the overwhelming majority of God's people; and the trivial round, the common task, will furnish all we need to ask of opportunities for faithfulness, as well as of experience of God. The prophet Isaiah seems to suggest the three general experiences of life (Isaiah 40:31) (a) There is the exceptional moment of exalted communion with God; mount up with wings as eagles. (b) There is the special emergency; they shall run. (c) There is the ordinary, normal, average, daily life; they shall walk. The last-named is at once the hardest and really the most blessed. Ordinary is, after all, the ordered, and therefore the truly ordained life. If we wait for great occasions in order to show our character we shall utterly fail to do God's will. It is for us to make every occasion great by faithful loyalty to His grace.

2. The true attitude of believers to them that are without. This episode is a helpful illustration of the relation of God's people to those who are not yet within the fold. The Apostle urges us more than once to live in view of the non-Christians around us. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without (Colossians 4:5). Walk becomingly to ward them that are without (1 Thessalonians 4:12). A good report of them which are without (1 Timothy 3:7). The very phrase them that are without tells of the unutterable sadness and loss of being outside the fold and separated from all the great privileges of grace in Christ Jesus. This fact alone should make us the more careful to live aright in order that those who are now without may be attracted to come within. And, further, as a witness for God and His grace it is of the utmost necessity that "we should walk circumspectly" or, as St Paul more literally wrote, "walk accurately"(Ephesians 5:15), providing things beautiful [or attractive] in the sight of all men (Romans 12:17, Greek).

3. The unspeakable blessedness of new experiences of God. A profound satisfaction is realized by the believer as he discovers more and more of the glories of God and His grace. The believer is ever learning, and from the moment of his conversion, in proportion to his faithful obedience day by day, God becomes better known in all the fullness and manifold variety of His revelation. These new experiences as they come are, however, not merely a matter of personal satisfaction, blessed though that is; they tend to prepare the soul for still greater accomplishments. God's revelations are not mere luxuries for personal enjoyment, but are given for the purpose of preparing the soul for fuller service and still clearer testimony for God.

We shall see how this new revelation of God to Abraham was a distinct preparation for a crisis that was to come in his life. It is the same to-day. God reveals Himself more and more fully in order that we may be more and more thoroughly equipped for greater efforts in the kingdom of God.

Chapter 47

00A.29 The Supreme Crisis Gen_22:1-19

The Supreme Crisis Genesis 22:1-19

LIFE is a succession of tests, for character is only possible through discipline. In many lives there is some supreme test to which all others are secondary and preparatory. It was so with Abraham, and we are now to consider the record of the crowning event of his life. For him it was the avenue leading to his closest fellowship with God and his greatest spiritual blessing. For us to-day it still reveals the secret of spiritual power and victory.

I. The Test (Genesis 22:1-2). The time is noteworthy, “After these things.” It was immediately after the new experiences of God recorded in the former chapter (Genesis 21:33-34). It is frequently the case that severe tests follow special times of blessing. Our Lord’s temptation followed immediately upon the spiritual experiment of His baptism, and the two events are closely associated by the Evangelists (Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:1). Discipline thus proves whether our spiritual experiences have really become part of our life and character, instead of being mere temporary enjoyments and luxuries.

What are we to understand by the words, God did tempt Abraham? The word test better expresses the Divine intention and action. God tests us to bring out the good. Satan tempts us to bring out the evil (James 1:12-15). The description (Genesis 22:2) is worthy of careful notice: Thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac. Thus by point after point Abraham is reminded of the dearest possession of his life, and is asked to give to God his best. Trials that are put upon us with no reason given at the time are the severest tests of all. They call for absolute unquestioning faith, and when responded to in this spirit invariably lead the soul higher and nearer to God. Moriah is mentioned again only once (2 Chronicles 3:1), where the reference is to one of the mountains on which Jerusalem is situated. Some writers think that, as the journey from Beer-sheba to Jerusalem would only take about seventeen hours, it is impossible to believe that Mount Moriah is intended in this chapter. At the same time the tradition that this was the spot is at least as old as Josephus, and, to say nothing of its spiritual appropriateness in view of Calvary, there does not seem any valid reason for rejecting it.

II. The Trial (Genesis 22:3-10). The alacrity of Abraham’s reply to God’s call is very striking, and is evidently intended to be regarded as a prominent feature of the narrative. Some writers are fond of depicting his silent agony, and emphasizing that he did not tell Sarah a word of what God had ordered. There is, however, nothing of this in the narrative. No reluctance, no hesitation, no doubt mark Abraham at this point. He “made haste, and delayed not to keep God’s commandment” (Psalms 119:60). He conferred not with flesh and blood (Galatians 1:16). This alacrity should be borne in mind as one of the leading and most significant points of the story. On the third day Abraham came to the end of his journey. His words to the young men need special attention (Genesis 22:5). “Abide ye here . . . I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.” It is therefore evident that Abraham fully expected Isaac would come back with him. The conversation between the father and the son is noteworthy and beautiful. The son’s natural

question about the lamb is followed by the father's whole-hearted and confident reply that God will provide it. Notice the repetition of the phrase in Genesis 22:6 and Genesis 22:8, they went both of them together. The part of Isaac in this matter is always a subject of great interest. Was there any concurrence on his part? It must be remembered that he had already arrived at man's estate. Probably as they neared the place Abraham revealed to his son what God had commanded, and also told him what he himself expected as the result of that command. There is no idea in Abraham's mind that he is doing wrong in sacrificing his son. He was familiar with the practice of human sacrifices from the Canaanites around him, and there was consequently no shock to his conscience in this command. As to the Divine aspect of it, it must be ever remembered that God accommodates His instructions to the moral and spiritual standards of the people at any given time. He knew the end from the beginning, and that He never meant Isaac to be sacrificed. What God desired was not Isaac's life but Abraham's loyalty, thus separating between the false and the true in relation to human sacrifice.

III. The Triumph (Genesis 22:11-14). At the right moment and not before (Psalms 107:27-28), God interposed and stayed Abraham's hand. By this action God bore unmistakable testimony to the error of the heathen as to human sacrifices, and it is a striking fact that from this time forward the Jews never adopted the practice of human sacrifices until they had sunk to the level of the heathen around them. In this respect the superiority of the Old Testament to the worship and practices of the heathen around is evident to all. God could not have given a better object lesson as to the sin of sacrificing our offspring with the thought that it would be pleasing to Him. God sets His seal upon His servant's faith, and says, "Now I know that thou fearest God." Abraham was prepared to give God his very best. Faith can do no more. Abraham not only finds that God interposes to prevent him from killing his son, but that his word to his son, "God will provide" is also literally fulfilled. The ram was offered up as a burnt offering in the stead of Isaac.

Abraham called the name of the place "Jehovah- Jireh," thus bearing his testimony to the reality of God's presence and provision. "The Lord will see to it." This was the secret and assurance of Abraham's faith and the same is true to-day. As God has saved our souls and made us His own children and servants, so assuredly with reference to the whole of our life The Lord will see to it (cf. Romans 5:10). The place became sanctified to Abraham by a very holy and blessed memory. It is well when we can look back over life s pathway and point to a particular place or time when God revealed Himself to us in blessing.

IV. The Testimony (Genesis 22:15-19).

Again the Voice from heaven was heard. It called to Abraham and acknowledged what had been done: Because thon hast done this. God clearly teaches the patriarch that He regarded the sacrifice as actually offered. The will was taken for the deed.

God now introduces a renewal of the promises by a specially solemn oath: "By Myself have I sworn." This expression is only found very rarely in Scripture, and indicates the most solemn oath possible (Isaiah 45:23; Jeremiah 22:5; Jeremiah 49:13; Hebrews 4:13-14). These promises should be compared with those given on the former occasions (Genesis 12:2-3; Genesis 13:10; Genesis 15:5; Genesis 17:4-8).

We can easily picture the glad satisfaction with which Abraham returned to the young men with Isaac his son. He had said they would come back, and they had. He had proved that God was true, and, having loyally accepted and fulfilled God's will, he was filled with joy and peace.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The simplicity of faith.

Faith in the case of Abraham, as indeed in every other instance, is taking God at His word. True faith is nothing more, as it is nothing less, than this. God speaks: man believes. This is the true idea involved in the phrase implicit trust, a trust that relies upon God without having his reasons unfolded to us. This simple faith, taking God at His word, is always at the foundation of the Believer's peace and restfulness, strength and progress.

2. The strength of faith. The entire absence from the narrative of any suggestions about Abraham's emotions or self-sacrifice is surely very significant. He had received certain promises from God about his son, and he was perfectly certain that those promises would be fulfilled. In the strength of this assurance he went forward, his attitude being that of Job: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15). Abraham's faith showed its strength in the way in which he fully expected his son Isaac to return with him to the young men (Genesis 22:5). We will come again to you. Nothing can affect the force of this splendid expectation of Abraham. What, then, did the words imply? Simply this: that whilst he believed at that moment that God intended him to slay his son, he nevertheless felt perfectly certain that God would there and then raise Isaac from the dead and send him back alive. Only thus could Abraham then see that the promises concerning his seed were to be fulfilled. What a magnificent exercise of faith this was! There had never been such an event as a resurrection, and so Abraham had no previous example to suggest this result or to encourage his faith thereby. But with a splendid sweep of God-given imagination, based upon God's personal relation to him, he said to himself, God will raise my son from the dead.

3. The source of faith. The foundation of this remarkable confidence was Abraham's conviction of the power of God: Accounting that God was able (Hebrews 11:17-19). The whole passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews shows that this is the true explanation of this incident, and so far from this view being, as is sometimes alleged, a mere coup de theatre, it was in reality a marvellous exercise of faith when it is remembered that no instance had then been known of God's power being exercised in the resurrection from the dead. God was such a reality to Abraham, and His promises were so certain, that the patriarch at once drew the inevitable and natural conclusion that God's power could and would effect thin.

4. The secret of faith.

How was it that Abraham was able to exercise this unquestioning and even astonishing trust in God? The explanation is found in the phrase, which occurs twice in this chapter, "Here am I." Abraham lived in close fellowship with God, ready for His new revelations and responsive to His continual calls. Abiding close to God, he learnt more and more of the character of the One with Whom he was in covenant. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and when we thus abide in Him He abides in us, and our faith grows strong, our love grows deep, our hope grows high. Then it is we stagger not through unbelief (Romans 4:20), and we are able to say: "The Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed" (Isaiah 1:7).

Chapter 48

00A.30 Death in the Home Gen_23:1-20

Death in the Home Genesis 23:1-20

AFTER the great crisis (Genesis 22:1-24) Abraham had twenty-five years of apparent uneventful life. Three scenes illustrative of home and personal experiences are successively brought before us : (a) the news of relatives from afar (Genesis 22:20-24); (b) the death of the wife and mother (Genesis 23:1-20); (c) the marriage of the son (Genesis 24:1-67) We are now to consider the second of these, the death of Sarah.

I. Death (Genesis 23:1-2). At the age of one hundred and twenty-seven, forty years after the birth of Isaac (Genesis 17:12), Sarah died. She is the only woman whose age is recorded in the Bible. The following points with reference to her death are worthy of consideration and meditation.

It was the death of a believer. Certain hints in the story suggest that Sarah's spiritual life and experience were not quite on the high level of her husband's, but at the same time it is equally evident that her spiritual life was real, and her faith in the promises of God strong. The New Testament also adds its witness to the fact of Sarah's spiritual oneness with Abraham (Hebrews 11:11-13; 1 Peter 3:5-6).

It was the death of a life-long companion. For sixty years Sarah had lived in Canaan with Abraham, and with the exception of the incident about Hagar, which was itself prompted by Sarah, nothing marred the fellowship of these two as husband and wife. They afford to us a picture of true married life, a husband and wife united in the Lord and in each other in Him.

It was the death of a mother. To Isaac the death of Sarah was a very great loss. Although he was now nearly forty years of age, he had always lived at home and was the recipient of his mother's love and devotion and the subject of her constant hope and prayer. We are distinctly told of his sorrow on her death (Genesis 24:6-7).

It was a death in the home. The removal of one member of a household, especially if that member is a beloved wife and mother, causes a blank which nothing else can fill. The quiet influence of such a life in the home is of untold value, and the loss at death is proportionately great.

II. Sorrow (Genesis 23:2).

Sarah's life came to its end at Hebron, and it would almost seem from the words Abraham came to mourn that he was away at the time of her death. It is possible, if not probable, that Abraham had two establishments with separate flocks and herds, one at Beer- sheba (Genesis 22:19), and the other at Hebron, where Sarah then was. This is the first occasion in Scripture of the record of a man's tears, and they were neither idle, nor unmanly, nor morbid, but the genuine and rightful expression of Abraham's deep sorrow on the death of his wife.

III. Duty (Genesis 23:3).

There is danger lest sorrow overwhelm us and we should give way beyond measure. The great safeguard against this danger is work. So Abraham rose up and applied to the children of Heth with reference to a burial place.

Abraham's desire for a resting-place for the body of his wife is a simple but striking testimony to the innate feelings about the care of the body. The possessive pronouns, "his dead" (Genesis 23:3), "my dead" (Genesis 23:4), "thy dead" (Genesis 23:6), are very noteworthy in this connection. The body of his beloved wife was precious to him and was regarded by him and by others as his own property, of which he was about to take special and loving care.

IV. Faith (Genesis 23:4-18). The dialogue between Abraham and the sons of Heth is full of touching and deep interest, and is especially noteworthy as a revelation of Abraham's inner life.

Abraham confesses that he is a stranger and sojourner, and yet by his request for a burial-place he clearly indicates that he intends to stay in the land of Canaan, and not to return to Mesopotamia. When Eastern sentiment as to burial with ancestors is remembered, this request for a piece of ground in Canaan is a striking testimony to Abraham's faith. He was fully assured that Canaan was the place for him and his descendants, and on this account Sarah is to be buried there.

We notice the perfect courtesy of Abraham in reply to the offers of the people of the land. Whether, as some writers think, all this was mere parleying with a view to a bargain, or whether, as others urge, it was a genuine and sincere offer on the part of the children of Heth, Abraham's attitude stands out in a very beautiful way. Religion is not intended to decrease, but to increase natural politeness, gentlemanliness, and courtesy. Indeed, courtesy is one of the truest marks of a genuine believer.

Abraham persisted in declining the offer (if it was really intended as an offer) of a burying-place. He was determined that Sarah should not be buried in any land but his own. It must not be hired; it must not be given. Till God's time came Abraham would not be a debtor to those who were to be dispossessed. By faith he refused.

Payment was consequently made, and everything was done in due form in the presence of witnesses. Thus, the first foothold in the land of Canaan that Abraham ever had was bought. Notwithstanding all God's promises of that land to him and to his seed, Abraham would not deal unjustly, even in appearance, with those then in possession of Canaan.

V. Love (Genesis 23:19-20). The funeral brings us to the first grave of which we have any record in Holy Writ. The last offices of respect were paid, and the lonely old man went back to his home. The possession of the property was guaranteed to Abraham and made sure for a perpetual possession. Visitors to Hebron to-day are still shown what is called Abraham's Tomb, and, although no Christian is allowed to enter and explore for himself, there does not seem much doubt as to the genuineness of the tradition which associates the present place with the cave of Machpelah. What an inspiring thought to realize that very likely the bodies of the patriarchs are still there, and that some day they will be exposed to view!

Suggestions for Meditation From this simple and touching story of death in the home we may learn how we should behave in times of bereavement. The true attitude at such times is threefold:

1. Sorrowing Love. The expression of love in sorrow is as natural as it is inevitable and beautiful. A consciousness of loss cannot fail to produce sorrow, and no one is to be blamed for feeling and expressing a sense of bereavement. It would be utterly unnatural if death were to come without eliciting sorrow.

2. Faithful Service. At the same time, in order that the soul may not be swallowed up with over much sorrow, there comes to us all at such occasions the call to and opportunity for definite service. The memory of a loved one is best treasured by doing what that loved one would wish were she here. Service always prevents sorrow from becoming dissipated in idle regret and mere remembrance.

3. Blessed Hope.

Abraham laid Sarah's body to rest in sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection (Hebrews 11:14). It was this above all things that upheld and strengthened him and he bade farewell to the wife who had shared his joys and sorrows for so many years. The expectation and anticipation of reunion in Christ on the Day of Resurrection is still the real hope, the blessed comfort, and the strong inspiration of the people of God. It enables us to look upon death without fear, and to look forward without dread. In the midst of death we are in life through Him who is the Resurrection and the Life.

Chapter 49

00A.31 The Evening of Life Gen_24:1-9; Gen_25:1-10.

The Evening of Life Genesis 24:1-9; Genesis 25:1-10.

THERE is scarcely anything more beautiful and inspiring than the calm, bright, peaceful close of a long and honored life. Like a summer sunset, it floods the whole scene with brightness and glory. The hoary head is a crown of glory as it sinks to rest after a life's long day spent in the way of righteousness. So it was with Abraham, as we can see from the passages which record his closing years.

I. Crowning Experience (Genesis 24:1-9).

Abraham's was an old age happily spent in continued enjoyment of the Divine blessing (Genesis 24:1). The Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. These words sum up the whole of Abraham's life and experience, and now in old age he is still rejoicing in the consciousness of God's presence and favour. "The blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22; Psalms 37:22). His was an old age marked by persistent faithfulness to the Divine will (Genesis 24:2-4). Abraham still clings with undiminished faith and persistence to the revelation of God concerning him and his seed. He is therefore urgent that his son should not take a wife from the daughters of the Canaanites. The commission which he now gives to his trusted servant (perhaps Eliezer, Genesis 15:2) shows clearly that he desires and determines to follow closely the Divine will. The oath mentioned here and in Genesis 47:29 only occurs in these two passages in the Old Testament. It betokens a specially solemn engagement, though the reason of the precise form and method is practically unknown, and is therefore variously interpreted. A somewhat similar form of oath has been found in Australia (Driver, Genesis, p. 231). His was an old age characterized by deep insight into the Divine purpose (Genesis 24:6-7). The servant naturally asks what is to be done if the woman of his kindred is unwilling to take the long journey into Canaan. Abraham promptly and briefly replies that in any case his son is not to be taken out of Canaan. Whatever happens, Abraham is perfectly clear that God's will must be done and His purpose maintained. His was an old age possessed of absolute assurance of the Divine favour (Genesis 24:7-9). He tells the servant that God, who had been with him all through his long life, would prosper the errand, and bring about that which was desired. At the same time the servant is once more enjoined not to take his son out of the land, and in the event of the unwillingness of the woman to come the servant will be clear of his oath. Thereupon the solemn promise was made, and the servant at once set out on that errand which, as we shall see, was crowned with Divine favour and success. The details of the story of his meeting with Rebekah, and the subsequent marriage, will come before us in the next chapter. We would now merely call renewed attention to this beautiful picture of an honored old age, loyal to God at all costs, satisfied with favour, full with the blessing of the Lord.

II. Closing Events (Genesis 24:1-10).

It is evident that Abraham's closing years were marked by a fresh accession of bodily and mental vigor, as can be seen from the statements included in this section.

After the events recorded in the last chapter, culminating in the marriage of Isaac, Abraham in his solitude took to himself another wife, Keturah. At the same time the narrative makes it quite evident that she did not occupy the same rank of equality as Sarah did (Genesis 24:6; 1 Chronicles 1:32). It is interesting and significant to notice that one of the sons of Abraham's second marriage was Midian, whose descendants became the intensely bitter foes of the descendants of Isaac.

Abraham was careful to make Isaac's position perfectly clear, and, by providing for his other sons and sending them away eastward, unto the east country, he took the necessary steps to maintain Isaac's position free from possible difficulties. Abraham thus sets possessors of wealth a good example in the careful and complete provision which he made during his life time for his family. At length, at the age of one hundred and seventy-five years he passed away, seventy-five years after the birth of Isaac and thirty-five years after the marriage of the latter with Rebekah (Genesis 21:5; Genesis 25:20). The description of his death (Genesis 24:8) is very beautiful, and it is interesting to note that he was gathered to his people, referring to their reunion in the unseen world. It is obvious that this phrase cannot possibly refer to his burial, since only Sarah's body was in that tomb. (Cf. Genesis 35:29; Genesis 49:33.) The two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, met over their father's dead body to pay the last tokens of respect. Death is the great healer of family differences and personal feuds.

III. Characteristic Elements.

Looking over Abraham's life, we cannot but be struck with certain outstanding points in his character. Dr Candlish, in his suggestive lectures on Genesis, divides the patriarch's life into two main sections; the first of these (Genesis 12:1-20, Genesis 13:1-18, Genesis 14:1-24, Genesis 15:1-21) he characterizes as the time of faith, when Abraham was accepting the present gifts of God; the second (Genesis 16:1-16, Genesis 17:1-27, Genesis 18:1-33, Genesis 19:1-38, Genesis 20:1-18, Genesis 21:1-34, Genesis 22:1-24, Genesis 23:1-20, Genesis 24:1-67) he characterizes as the period of patience, when Abraham was expecting the future inheritance promised to him. The following element may, however, be seen throughout the whole of his life. His Faith.

He took God at His word at each step of his career, and his simple trust in the Divine promise is the predominant feature of his life. His Faithfulness.

He is rightly described as faithful Abraham (Galatians 3:9)), for he not only believed, but expressed his belief in life. God's promise had its outcome in Abraham's practice; his faith was proved by faithfulness. His Fear. By this is meant his attitude of reverence. Notwithstanding the familiar terms on which he lived with God, he never forgot the relative position of the Divine Majesty and his own nothingness. His Fellowship. As we have already seen, the latter portion of his life was marked by a great access of spiritual experience and blessing, which led him into full friendship and fellowship with God. This was with Abraham, as it is now with the believer, the culminating point of all spiritual life. As we review the entire life of Abraham, and consider it specially from God's standpoint, we cannot help being struck with the threefold exemplification which is so evident all through the story.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The Divine Purpose.

One thing above all others marked the attitude of God in relation to Abraham: His will was to be done. From first to last this was God's purpose. He had in view not merely the manifestation of what a life could be, but also, and perhaps chiefly, the choice of Abraham as the instrument of furthering His great purposes of redemption through the promised Messiah. Whether we think of Abraham personally or as the ancestor of the Messiah, we cannot help learning this one lesson, that believers are placed upon this earth for the one purpose above all others of fulfilling the Divine will. "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

2. The Divine Power.

God never commands without enabling, and in order that His purpose might be fulfilled He provided needful strength for Abraham. God's grace was to be accepted. It is as true to-day as ever that As thy days so shall thy strength be, and the grace of God will always be found sufficient for carrying out His will and purpose.

3. The Divine Plan. The practical question remains as to how, and by what means, the Divine purpose can be accomplished and the Divine power utilize by man. The answer is found in the life of Abraham. God's word was to be believed. When faith responds to the Divine promise the Divine power is at once given, and through that power the Divine purpose is perfectly accomplished. On the one hand God assures the believer, "My grace is sufficient for thee;" and on the other the believer responds, "I can do all things through Him Who is empowering me."

00A.32 The Model Servant Gen_24:10-67

The Model Servant Genesis 24:10-67

WE have already considered Abraham's part in the search of a bride for his son Isaac, but the chapter is so full of interesting and vivid detail that it needs careful attention from the stand point of Abraham's servant, whose attitude and action illustrate in the highest degree the qualities of true service. We may, therefore, fitly regard him as a model for all who are called upon to work for God. Several characteristics of his service call for attention.

I. Intelligent Obedience (Genesis 24:1-9).

He was at hand ready for work, and upon being told what was required of him met his master's commands by an evident desire for information (Genesis 24:5). His service was an intelligent service, and he wished to know what was to be done under certain contingencies that might present themselves. God always welcomes inquiries from His servants concerning His will (John 16:19). On being assured by his master of the Divine guidance he at once pledged himself to Abraham, and took a solemn oath of faithfulness to duty.

II. Zealous Interest (Genesis 24:10-14). With promptitude the servant set out on his important errand, and we can see from the entire narrative that he was fully identified with the object of his quest. His was no mere slavery, for it was an evident delight to him to do his master's bidding, and to seek for a bride for his son. The true spirit of the man is seen in his earnest prayer for guidance (Genesis 24:12); his task was a difficult one. He was on a very unlikely and unusual errand, and so he prays that the God of his master would give him good success. Not only does he pray for guidance, but for grace (Genesis 24:13-14). He seeks to know the road, and then asks for power to walk along it. He requests opportunities, and then grace to use them. There is scarcely anything more touching and beautiful than this prayer, especially in its emphasis upon his master, and his desire that God would show kindness to Abraham.

Happy are those masters who have servant as this, and happy are those servants able to pray in this way for their masters.

III. The Holy Tact (Genesis 24:15-33).

It is impossible for us to dwell in exhaustive detail on all the interesting and beautiful touches of this full narrative. We cannot, however, fail to notice his perfect courtesy (Genesis 24:17). Manner counts for a very great deal in all Christian work. We may spoil a good cause by our lack of considerateness and courtesy. We observe, too, his patience (Genesis 24:21). He will not force matters, for there must be no hurry. The man is filled with a holy watchfulness for every indication of the will of God. The man looked steadfastly on her, holding his peace, to know whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not The wisdom of the man is equally evident (Genesis 24:22). He brings out what would be perfectly known to the young girl as bridal gifts, and offers them first before approaching the subject of his errand, or mentioning the person of his master or

his master's son. We cannot fail to observe his reverence and thankfulness as he realizes that his prayer has been answered, and that God has indeed guided him in the way. Not least of all is the man's intense earnestness (Genesis 24:33). He would not eat or rest until he had told his errand; his master's cause must come first.

IV. Loving Faith (Genesis 24:34-49).

Again we are impressed with the combination of wisdom and faithfulness in all that the servant says and does. He states his position at once with dignity and humility (Genesis 24:34). He is loud in the praises of his master, and tells them in brief his history (Genesis 24:35-36). He then declares definitely the object of his errand (Genesis 24:37-48), and makes the proposal, offering a definite choice to the relatives of the young woman whom he had met at the well (Genesis 24:49).

V. Blessed Success (Genesis 24:50-67).

There are difficulties in the way, as they point out, but they are willing that Rebekah should go; only they ask him to allow her to remain a few days before the departure. The man, however, is decided; his master's business requires haste, and he urges upon them the necessity of instant decision. Rebekah at once, and with definiteness, says, "I will go," and thus the journey home was commenced.

Soon the purpose of the servant is accomplished. He introduces Rebekah to Isaac, and the servant retires to tell his aged master what he has done. The servant disappears from view at this point with fitness and appropriateness, but we are sure that he received his well done from Abraham, and entered into the joy of his master in the accomplishment of the task appointed to him.

Suggestions for Meditation In addition to the lessons of Christian service already observed in our study of the chapter it is possible, and we believe legitimate, to regard this story as an illustration of still higher truths. The length of the chapter in a book whose spiritual purpose is evident at every stage- seems to compel the thought that the full detail in these sixty-seven verses must have some deeper meaning than appears on the surface. Spiritual commentators have consequently not been slow to find herein the seeds of profound spiritual truths. Doubtless our forefathers went too far in the direction of spiritualizing the Old Testament narratives, but it is equally possible for us to go to the other extreme, and to see nothing of the kind in them. If it be ever borne in mind that such a spiritual use of the narrative is secondary and not primary, that it is application not interpretation, and if moreover we avoid fanciful details and confine ourselves to leading lines of spiritual suggestion, the method in not only legitimate but essentially helpful, let us therefore look at some of these suggestions that are often brought out of this chapter.

1. The purpose of the father. The father has but one purpose in this chapter, to seek a bride for his son. "A certain king made a marriage feast for his son" (Matthew 22:2).

2. The position of the son. The son is the father's one thought, and in him all his purposes are to be fulfilled (Genesis 24:36). So also is it in regard to the Son of God (Ephesians 1:20-22).

3. The prospects of the bride. The bride was thought of before she herself knew it (Genesis 24:4), and arrangements were made for her to be offered the position of wife to Isaac. "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in

love”

(Ephesians 1:4).

4. The proclamation of the servant. The one object of the servant was the announcement of Abraham’s purpose, which carried with it the revelation concerning the son, and the offer to Rebekah. How wonderfully he proclaimed the vast resources of the father (Genesis 24:35), and the glory of the son (Genesis 24:36). In like manner the Holy Spirit through the mouths of Christian preachers is continually proclaiming the glory of Christ. Is it not something more than a coincidence that we have such striking words in John 16:14; ?John 16:155. The power of the message. The success of the servant in attracting Rebekah to go with him is very noteworthy. In like manner, Christ, if He be lifted up, will draw men to Himself. There is nothing so attractive as the preaching of a free and full Gospel (John 12:32).

6. The progress of the soul. The decision of Rebekah and her determination to go is another striking point of the narrative. She believed the servant’s word based upon the evidences of Abraham’s good faith. She ventured everything and went. So is it with the soul that rests upon the Word of God based upon the certainty of those things wherein we have been instructed. Faith ventures and finds itself justified. Faith steps on the seeming void and finds the rock beneath.

7. The prospect of the home.

Rebekah in coming to Canaan finds a husband, her true life, and her permanent home. The soul coming to Christ enters into true fellowship, rejoices even now in eternal life, and knows that in God’s good time there will be the Canaan above, the rest for the people of God.

Chapter 51

00A.33 The Father of the Faithful

The Father of the Faithful

BEFORE passing on to the story of Isaac, and the record of the development of the Divine purpose with Abraham and his descendants, it will be useful to dwell once more on the life and character of Abraham as a whole.

None of the lives recorded in the Old Testament made a deeper impression or became more prominent in after ages than that of Abraham. His position as the founder of the Jewish nation, and his character as the pattern and type of believers in all ages, have given him a very important place in Holy Scripture. The following summary of passages may serve as a guide to fuller and detailed study.

I. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT The Scripture Record. It is evident to the most casual reader that wherever Abraham is mentioned he is always assumed to have been a veritable historic personage. There is no possibility of his being regarded as an “eponymous hero.” That he existed, that he had the experiences recorded in the Book of Genesis, and that he was the personal, definite, historic founder of the Jewish nation are always regarded as simple matters of fact. The Gracious Covenant (Exodus 2:24). “God remembered His covenant with Abraham.” This Abrahamic covenant is often referred to in times subsequent to the patriarch, and is regarded as the foundation of everything in connection with God’s dealings with Israel. The Divine Title (Exodus 3:6). “I am . . . the God of Abraham.” This title of God in relation to the patriarch is full of spiritual reality and blessedness, and is dwelt on in later books with evident satisfaction. It is especially precious as a spiritual fact in the light of Hebrews 11:16 : “God is not ashamed to be called their God.” The Special Appeal (Isaiah 51:2). “Look unto Abraham your father ... for I ... blessed him.” God here uses Abraham and His own dealing with the patriarch as a reminder to Israel and an assurance to His people in captivity that He will bless them also, as He had blessed their ancestor. The unchanging faithfulness of God is one of the foundation truths of Holy Scripture. The Definite Plea (1 Kings 18:36). “Lord God of Abraham.” Elijah bases his prayer on God’s relation to Abraham. He uses it as a reason for God’s answer to His prayer, and His manifestation in the face of idolatry. In like manner Moses put forth the same plea: “Remember Abraham . . . to whom Thou swarest . . . and saidst” (Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 9:27). Believers have a blessed and holy right to plead God’s faithfulness to their forefathers as a reason for continued help. The Unique Relationship (2 Chronicles 20:7). “Abraham, Thy friend.” (Cf. Isaiah 41:8.) He is the only personage in the Old Testament who has this high and privileged title. To this day in Arabia “El Khalil” (God’s friend) is used of Abraham. A careful study of these and other passages, especially in the Psalms, will reveal a wealth of spiritual teaching associated with Abraham and the Divine Covenant made with him.

II. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT The Record of his Life. Here again we are face to face with the simple fact that al1New Testament writers regard Abraham as a genuine personage, and no mere mythical hero. Whether we study passages like Acts 7 or Romans 4 or Hebrews 11 or dwell upon

particular verses in the Gospels and elsewhere, there is only one interpretation possible; the New Testament accepts, endorses, and uses the Old Testament testimony to Abraham, and it is not too much to say that no one with his New Testament in his hand can hesitate for an instant as to the true meaning and genuine implications of the references to the patriarch. His Relation to the Messiah. The genealogy given by St Matthew (Matthew 1:1) traces our Lord's connection with Abraham and clearly teaches that the Messiah took on Him the seed of Abraham (Hebrews 2:16). This fact in the first Gospel, which is essentially the Gospel for the Jews, shows the historic root of the Messianic expectation. Looking at Abraham's relation to the Messiah from another standpoint, we notice what may be called his spiritual anticipation of the Messiah: Abraham rejoiced to see My day (John 8:56). What this sight of the Messianic day really meant and included it is now impossible to say. We must be on our guard against assuming too much spiritual knowledge or against almost entirely denying it. Probably on the occasion of the great events recorded in Gen. 15 and especially in Gen. 22 Abraham had a spiritual vision given of Him in Whom all the promises were to be completely fulfilled. His Relation to the Jews. We can see from several passages the national and individual pride felt in Abraham (Matthew 3:9; John 8:39). A poor woman is spoken of by our Lord as a daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:16), and the highest and most precious view of the future life to the Jews seems to have been Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22). We can see from all this how profound was the Jewish reverence for their great ancestor. The pride was in some respects perfectly natural and legitimate, though in the result it became a stumbling-block and a danger to them, since they rested in their lineal descent and forgot the need of spiritual affinity and kinship.

Aspects of The above passages are concerned with general references to Abraham. In the four passages that follow he is used by the writers for the purpose of conveying special spiritual teaching, and it is to be noted carefully that each passage by itself has one main thought about Abraham. There is no repetition, but four different aspects of his spiritual life are dwelt upon. His Righteousness by Faith (Romans 4:1-25). This is the main thought of the entire chapter, in which the Apostle sets out to prove that Abraham became righteous not by works but by faith. Righteousness in Romans, as also in Genesis 15:1-21 is much more than justification, and from first to last we are to understand that Abraham became righteous by faith in God (Romans 4:3; Romans 4:13; Romans 4:21-22). His Spiritual Seed (Galatians 3:1-29; Galatians 4:22-31). Another aspect of Abraham's life is here considered. The key-thought of the whole passage is the relation of Abraham to the great spiritual seed of believers of whom he is the father (Galatians 3:9, Galatians 3:16, Galatians 3:26; Galatians 3:29; Galatians 4:31). The Apostle is emphasizing the great outstanding reality of spiritual kinship with Abraham through faith, and all that faith brings of sonship to God and liberty. His Life of Faith (Hebrews 11:8-19). It is interesting to notice that three times in the New Testament the words of the prophet, "The just shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4), are quoted, but each time with a special emphasis. Taking the words as they stand in the Greek, "The just by faith shall live," we notice that in Romans 1:17 the emphasis is on "the just"; in Galatians 3:11 it is on "by faith"; in Hebrews 10:38 it is on "shall live"; and the result is that the great chapter, Hebrews 11 is concerned with illustrations of the life of faith that is, with faith as the spiritual principle and power of the entire life of the believer from the beginning to the end. Consequently Abraham is there described as manifesting various characteristics of the attitude of faith e.g. his obedience of faith (Hebrews 11:8); his patience of faith

(Hebrews 11:9); his expectation of faith (Hebrews 11:10); his consecration of faith (Hebrews 11:17). The entire passage shows the various ways in which faith manifests itself as the fundamental power of daily living. His Faith and Works (James 2:21-24). This passage, as is well known, has given rise to great controversy, but there surely was no need of much difference of opinion. St Paul uses the story recorded in Genesis 15:1-21 as a proof that Abraham was justified by faith. St James uses the event recorded in Genesis 22:1-24 which occurred twenty-five years after, as a proof that Abraham was justified by works. Seeing, then, that for twenty-five years Abraham's relationship with God was of faith, it is evident that Genesis 22:1-24 is the crown and culmination of that faith, and is proved by Abraham's act of offering Isaac, Faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect (James 2:22). Works are the evidential proof of faith. As Calvin has aptly said, while it is faith alone that justifies, the faith that justifies is never alone.

Suggestions for Meditation

Let us now sum up the entire record of Abraham's life as found in Holy Scripture, and dwell upon it from God's standpoint and from his own. We may see in it a revelation of true life.

1. Life's choicest privilege.

What is this? It is to be associated with God, as was Abraham; to be lifted up into union with God and into fellowship with His Divine purposes of blessing for the world. We can easily imagine what Abraham would have been without this privilege. Now, however, he is for ever associated with God, and God is called "the God of Abraham" (Luke 20:37). Such is the case with every believer. God lifts him out of the mire of sin and raises him to a position of high privilege, transforming his life and enabling him to realize the Divine will.

2. Life's strong foundation.

What is this? It is God's covenant with man. This was at the basis of everything with Abraham. This, too, was what David rested on and rejoiced in; the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure (2 Samuel 23:5). This is still the foundation of the Believer's life and tower of hope, the new covenant in Christ (Hebrews 8:10-12). A life lived in the consciousness of an everlasting covenant made between God the Father and God the Son on behalf of the believer and sealed to him by the Holy Spirit makes life strong, peaceful, and satisfied.

3. Life's greatest glory.

What is this? It is faithfulness to God. The one thing needful is not success, but sincerity; not glory, but goodness; not honour, but holiness. A humble, consistent, earnest life, lived to the praise of God, is the greatest life that can be lived; and this, on the whole, was the characteristic of Abraham's life. He witnessed to the reality of God and His grace.

4. Life's simple secret.

What is this? It is faith-faith believing God's word and trusting God Himself. Faith rests on God, receives from God, responds to God, relies on God, realizes God, rejoices in God, and reproduces His life and character. In proportion to our faith will everything else be. By faith is the simple but all-embracing secret of daily living. So it was with Abraham, so it has ever been, so it ever will be until Faith is changed to sight and hope with glory crowned.

00A.34 The Birth of Jacob Gen_25:11-28

The Birth of Jacob Genesis 25:11-28 “GOD buries His workmen and carries on His work.” This is the simple but significant truth taught in the verse that immediately follows the record of the burial of Abraham.

“And it came to pass after the death of Abraham that God blessed his son Isaac.”

God calls His servants to Himself, but His purposes abide. Abraham dies, but God lives, and the Divine blessing continues to rest upon the son of His servant. Abraham’s seed was already experiencing the commencement of the fulfilment of the Divine promise, “In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth he blessed.” We have now to follow the course of the Divine purpose and see how it was carried out; how the unchanging God continued with His servants, blessing them and fulfilling His own word of truth and grace. The second half of Genesis contains the generations of Ishmael (Genesis 25:12-18), of Isaac (Genesis 25:19-34, Genesis 26:1-35, Genesis 27:1-46, Genesis 28:1-22, Genesis 29:1-35, Genesis 30:1-43, Genesis 31:1-55, Genesis 32:1-32, Genesis 33:1-20, Genesis 34:1-31, Genesis 35:1-29), of Esau (Genesis 36:1-43), and of Jacob (Genesis 37:2-36, Genesis 38:1-30, Genesis 39:1-23, Genesis 40:1-23, Genesis 41:1-57, Genesis 42:1-38, Genesis 43:1-34, Genesis 44:1-34, Genesis 45:1-28, Genesis 46:1-34, Genesis 47:1-31, Genesis 48:1-22, Genesis 49:1-33, Genesis 50:1-26). The record deals very briefly with the stories of Ishmael and Esau, the brevity indicating the definite purpose of Genesis, which is to show the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham and the development of God’s purpose of redemption (Genesis 3:15). The lives of Abraham and Jacob stand out prominently in the record. Of Isaac much less is said. His life was practically devoid of striking incident, his character was quiet and passive, and, except as a link in the chain of the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise, he is of no special importance in the patriarchal history. It is different with Jacob. God is known as the God of Abraham, but still more definitely as the God of Jacob. The latter title is particularly appropriate in view of the fact that Jacob was the direct and immediate ancestor of the twelve tribes of Israel. The life of Jacob is of interest and value, not merely as revelation of human character, but also and chiefly as a manifestation of Divine grace. Viewed from the standpoint of his nature, Jacob is unattractive and even repulsive; but as we study his history step by step we become conscious that God’s grace is at work, molding and fashioning him by the discipline of sorrow, suffering, and loss. There is no character in Holy Scripture which more clearly manifests the glory of Divine grace in dealing with the most forbidding of materials. And because the record in Genesis holds the mirror up to nature and also reveals the glory of grace, the story of Jacob has a perennial interest for us all. We see ourselves in the story of Jacob; our weaknesses, and yet our aspirations; our failures, and yet our fresh starts; our cowardice, and yet our endeavour to trust God. At the point at which we take up the story of Genesis, we are introduced to the family life of the patriarch Isaac. He has been married many years, his father is still alive, and nothing of moment in connection with the development of the Divine purposes seems to have occurred since the day of his marriage. Consider carefully each element in this picture of family life.

I. The Husband (Genesis 25:20-21)

Isaac was experiencing a great disappointment. It was now nearly twenty years (Genesis 25:26) since that memorable day when he first saw the wife of God's choice. And yet his home was still without a child. Year after year had passed, and there was no fulfilment of the Divine promise. This was a real trial and a definite test of his faith. The Divine message had been clear that in Isaac, not in Ishmael, Abraham's seed was to be called; and yet now it seemed almost impossible that the promise could be fulfilled. God's delays, however, are not necessarily denials, and the fulfilment of the promise was not the only element in the Divine purpose. The training of faith and the discipline of character were also in view, and we feel sure God delayed the fulfilment of His word in order that all human hope which rested solely on natural powers should give way, and the Divine action might be made still more prominent. In his difficulty and trial Isaac did the very best possible thing; he took it to the Lord in prayer. The answer soon came. God had only been testing His servant's faith, and we are clearly intended to understand that the gift of the children was a definite grant from God, a Divine interposition in order to make it still more evident that the promise to Abraham was by grace and not by nature. God often delays in the bestowal of His grace in order that we may the more thoroughly rely upon Him and the more definitely realize that our expectation is from Him, and not merely from secondary causes or natural laws.

II. The Wife (Genesis 25:22-23)

Even now everything was not clear, and it was Rebekah's turn to experience distress and perplexity. She could not understand God's dealings with her, and wondered as to the cause of it. Like her husband, however, she did the very best thing; she turned to God and inquired of Him. How often it has occurred since that day that God's children have received answers from Him very different from what they have expected, and have experienced perplexity as to the meaning of the Divine discipline! Sometimes in the pathway of duty, when the soul is sincerely conscious of uprightness and whole-hearted consecration to God, there is trouble, trial, difficulty, and anxiety. A man believes he has been right in following a certain pathway, only to find himself surrounded by almost overwhelming anxieties and difficulties. The forces of evil seem more active than ever, and he begins to wonder whether he was right, after all, in doing what he has done. Like Rebekah, he must again resort to God and seek out the Divine will. The answer is very striking. Rebekah was taught that her trouble involved great and far-reaching results. She was first of all told that she was to have two sons, not one; then that the two sons would represent two nations which are to be opposed to each other from the very first; and, last of all, that the elder was to serve the younger. Thus Rebekah was the unconscious instrument of carrying out the Divine purpose. Her trouble had nothing whatever to do with herself individually, but was part of a great Divine plan which God was about to work out for His own glory. In all this we see the marvel and glory of the Divine sovereignty. Why the younger son should have been chosen instead of the elder we do not know. It is, however, very striking to find the same principle exercised on several other occasions. It is pretty certain that Abraham was not the eldest son of Terah. We know that Isaac was the younger son of Abraham, and that Joseph was not the eldest son of Jacob. All this goes to emphasize the simple but significant fact that the order of nature is not necessarily the order of grace. All through, God desired to display the sovereignty of His grace as contrasted with that which was merely natural in human life. The great problem of Divine sovereignty is of course insoluble by human intellect. It has to be accepted as a simple fact. It should, however, be observed that it is not

merely a fact in regard to things spiritual; it is found also in nature in connection with human temperaments and races. All history is full of illustrations of the Divine choice, as we may see from such examples as Cyrus and Pharaoh. Divine election is a fact, whether we can understand it or not. God's purposes are as certain as they are often inscrutable, and it is perfectly evident from the case of Esau and Jacob that the Divine choice of men is entirely independent of their merits or of any pre-vision of their merits or attainments (Romans 9:11 -note). It is in connection with this subject that we see the real force of St. Paul's striking words when he speaks of God as acting "according to the good pleasure of His will" (Ephesians 1:5 -note) ; and although we are bound to confess the "mystery of His will" (Ephesians 1:9 -note) , we are also certain that He works all things "after the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11 -note). There is nothing arbitrary about God and His ways, and our truest wisdom when we cannot understand His reasons is to rest quietly and trustfully, saying, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight." "In His Will is our peace."

III. The Sons (Genesis 25:24-28) From the moment of their birth the sons differed in appearance, and their unlikeness was a symbol of that hostility which characterized their after-life and the history of their descendants. The outward signs were expressive of real differences. As they grew they were also very different in pursuits, Esau being a clever hunter, a man of outdoor life; while Jacob was just the opposite-a quiet (Revised Version, margin), home-keeping man. Their names were given with reference to the facts which were evident at their birth. Esau was so called because of his hairy aspect, and Jacob from his laying hold of his brother's heel at their very entrance upon life.

They also differed in regard to the paternal affection bestowed upon them. Esau was his father's favorite, Jacob his mother's. Isaac, the quiet, passive man, saw in Esau, the bold hunter, the energetic nature of the woman whom he had loved as a wife all those years. Rebekah, the strong, self-assertive woman, saw in the quiet, gentle Jacob the quiet, passive husband whom she had loved so long. It is often found that the father loves the boy or girl who resembles the mother, while the mother is frequently found to favor the boy or girl whose nature is most akin to the father; but when, as in this case, partiality is carried to great extremes, nothing but trouble can be the result. God's revelation about the younger ruling the elder was obviously no secret. Both parents and sons must have known of it, and it is this knowledge that makes the partiality more heinous, and at the same time more deplorable in its results.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. In times of difficulty or perplexity let us wait and pray.

Both Isaac and Rebekah experienced the real difficulty of not knowing how God's will and purpose were to be fulfilled. They did the very best possible thing; they handed their difficulty over to God in trust and prayer. In the midst of perplexity it is not wise or well to be too much occupied in telling others of our troubles. Our wisdom and comfort will be found in telling the Lord Himself. "Half the breath thus vainly spent" should be sent to Heaven in supplication. Waiting for God and waiting on God will always be our greatest consolation.

2. In the face of deep problems of life let us trust and pray.

Rebekah could not understand the circumstances which were causing difficulty and anxiety; and even after the revelation of God concerning the younger son there must have been not a little

perplexity to know the meaning of it all. Our greatest wisdom in all such circumstances is found in simple trust and earnest prayer. God's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). We may perhaps have no real thought beyond our own little horizon, but it may be that God is working out His purpose through us on a large scale. What matters it what we endure, so long as God's will is being done through us? Let us abide in humble trust and hopeful prayer and "believe to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

3. In the presence of home troubles and trials let us watch and pray.

Isaac and Rebekah clearly brought upon themselves a great deal of their trouble by their partiality for the sons, and when home life is thus disturbed by jealousies and quarreling we may be sure that God's blessing is withheld.

"Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation" (Matthew 26:41) is as important in connection with home life as it is with anything else, and those are most likely to meet all such difficulties successfully who watch that the enemy shall not take occasion to lead them astray, and who pray for needed grace daily to do the will of God.

00A.35 The Birthright Gen_25:29-34

The Birthright Genesis 25:29-34 THE revelation of the Divine will concerning the two brothers (Genesis 25:23) was evidently no secret. It is clear that both Esau and Jacob knew of it. This fact is in some respects the key to the true interpretation of this incident.

I. The Bargain of the Brothers The contrast in appearance which marked the two boys was continued in their characters as men. Their daily pursuits were expressive of their natures and temperaments. Esau comes in one day from hunting, tired and hungry. The savor of the pottage is enticing, and the hungry and weary man cries out to his brother to feed him with that red stuff of which he does not even know the name. Now is Jacob's opportunity, for which he has probably been waiting. He had doubtless already taken his brother's measure and knew how to deal with him, and so he proposes a bargain: "Sell me this day thy birthright." The birthright seems to have included temporal and spiritual blessings; it carried with it a double portion of the paternal inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17; 1 Chronicles 5:2) ; it gave the holder precedence as head of the family or tribe; above all, it constituted the possessor priest and spiritual head of his people. All this Jacob evidently knew, and in the light of what God had said to his mother he already appreciated the value of the birthright.

It is not at all improbable that long before this moment Esau had learned to set little store by the family privileges which belonged to him as the firstborn son. To him the position and opportunity meant little or nothing; and now he impulsively cries out that as the birthright is of no profit to him, since he is at the point of death, he is willing to sell it for a meal of red lentils. It seems clear from the narrative that there was no likelihood whatever of his dying for want of food. The words are expressive of his utter disregard of and indifference to the position and privileges associated with the birthright.

Jacob, knowing his brother's weakness and bearing in mind the issues involved in the transaction, calls upon Esau to take a solemn oath. This Esau is quite ready to do, and so the transaction is closed. He sold his birthright and in return received the meal that he so eagerly desired. "Thus Esau despised his birthright." In these few words we have the illuminating touch which explains the whole position. This was no sudden impulse on the part of Esau, just as it was no sudden brilliant idea on the part of Jacob. On the one hand, there was the attitude of despising the birthright and on the other the attitude of full appreciation. These things do not spring up suddenly and at once; they are plants of longer growth. It is this fact that compels us to go beneath the surface and try to discover the explanation of both sides of the transaction.

II. The Characters of the Brothers On the surface of the story Esau is a good specimen of the man of the world-frank, warmhearted, and every inch a man. There is a superficial attractiveness about him, and we easily dub him a fine fellow. In reality, however, he was at once sensuous and sensual. The one word "profane" (Hebrews 12:16 -note) in its literal meaning sums up his character. It comes from pro-fanum, "outside the temple," and refers to that plot of ground just in front of the fane which was common to everyone, as being outside the sacred enclosure.

Gradually the word came to mean that which was purely earthly and common, as opposed to that which was sacred, consecrated, and dedicated to God. Esau's life was entirely earth-bound. God was not in all his thoughts. He was intent only on present gratification, and set no value on the Divine gifts. To him future blessings were intangible and unreal, and as he thought he was going to die he did not see any reason why he should grasp at blessings which could never be personally enjoyed. Everything about the present was real to him, while everything about the future was unreal, vague, and misty; and so, whatever we may say about Jacob's part in the transaction, Esau cannot be exculpated. So far from being an injured man he really supplanted himself. To him this world was everything and God nothing.

"He is the kind of man of whom we are in the habit of charitably saying that he is nobody's enemy but his own. But, in truth, he is God's enemy, because he wastes the splendid manhood which God has given him. Passionate, impatient, impulsive, incapable of looking before him, refusing to estimate the worth of anything which does not immediately appeal to his senses, preferring the animal to the spiritual, he is rightly called a "profane person."

"Alas!" while the body is so broad and brawny, must the soul lie blinded, dwarfed, stupefied, almost annihilated?" (Carlyle)."

Jacob's character, on the other hand, was unattractive and even repulsive on the surface. He was cool and calculating, could hold his appetites and desires in check, and wait-if necessary for years-for the accomplishment of his purpose. He evidently knew his brother well, and had been watching his opportunity. When the psychological moment came he took advantage of it at once. All this tends to repel us from the man as unworthy and contemptible, and no one for a moment can doubt that his crafty and subtle method was in every way objectionable and deplorable. And yet underneath the surface there was not a little in him of an entirely opposite character. He had a keen and true appreciation of that which Esau despised. He realized the spiritual nature of the birthright; and though we utterly object to the method by which he attempted to obtain it we must never forget that his object was good, and that he desired to obtain that which he knew God intended for him. Thus Jacob was appreciative of the spiritual meaning of the birthright, and was at any rate to some extent truly sensitive to the Divine word. He wanted spiritual blessings, even though he went the wrong way to obtain them. He also shines out in contrast with his brother in his constancy. Esau was one of the most inconstant of men, everything by turns and nothing long, a shallow nature full of impulse and ungoverned feelings; today despising his birthright, tomorrow wanting it back; today absolutely indifferent, tomorrow sorrowing over his loss. Jacob on the other hand was tenacious and persistent, and possessed a reserve of strength which, even though it was often directed into wrong channels, was in itself one of the most valuable features of human life.

Suggestions for Meditation

Thus while superficially we are attracted to Esau and repelled by Jacob, as we penetrate towards the depth of their characters we see the true natures of the brothers and their differences of attitude to and outlook on life and things spiritual.

1) Lessons from Esau (a) The real proof of life is personal character.

It was the act in Esau's case that revealed the true state of affairs and showed what he was. We see in him "that inexorable law of human souls, that we are preparing ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil that gradually determines character" (George Eliot). No one becomes base all at once, and we may be perfectly sure that Esau's character had already deteriorated before he made this choice. Character is continually growing, and when the crisis comes we act, not solely according to what we wish at the moment, but according to what we really are, for our wishes are the expressions of our actual character. Esau possessed no spiritual insight, no appreciation whatever of the blessings of the great Abrahamic covenant. He cared only for this life and for present enjoyment. The result was that when the test came the true man was revealed. According as he had lived previously, so his character showed itself. The tissues of the life to be We weave with colors all our own; And in the field of Destiny We reap as we have sown.

(b) The supreme test of character is found in little things

It seemed but a small matter, a feeling of hunger and a desire for food, and yet it was the means of testing and revealing Esau's real character. It is a sad and solemn picture, a strong man who cannot wait a moment for food and cries out to be fed. How often in history have insignificant events been turning points of human lives! We are tested more by trifles than by great crises. Many men can shine in emergencies who are not able to stand the test of faithfulness in little things.

(c) The imperative necessity in life is to subdue the flesh to the spirit

Esau failed to see, because he had lost the power to see, that the mind and soul need food as well as the body. And if life is "harmony with environment," then nothing purely physical can nourish the soul. It is only too easy to crush and kill our higher aspirations by undue attention to the demands of our lower nature. This is true not only of the purely earth-bound like Esau, but also of great and noble natures like Darwin's, who by absorption in intellectual pursuits become atrophied in taste and feeling. No part of our complex nature must remain unnourished, but we must see to it that physical and even intellectual enjoyments do not dwarf and eventually kill the spiritual side of our being. When the animal and spiritual collide, it will involve sacrifice if the spiritual is to be considered. The little girl's explanation of St. Paul "keeping under his body" was not far wrong: "by keeping his soul on top."

(d) The one thing needful is to put God first in our life So far as we can see, God had no place in the life of Esau. With all his bodily vigor and general attractiveness there was one part of his nature entirely uncultivated. He was God-less. He lived for the present, not for the future; for things physical, not spiritual; for time, not eternity. In this he is like many men today. They have everything that this world can give-wealth, money, natural powers, position-everything but God. And yet, with all their advantages, they must necessarily fail. "In the beginning God." And when God is first, then all else finds its place-purpose, power, and perpetual peace and progress.

2. Lessons from Jacob.

(a) The necessity of right principle

Jacob's purpose in desiring the birthright was undoubtedly genuine and exemplary, but the way in which he went to work to obtain the birthright was in every way deplorable and wrong. He was one

of the earliest, but unfortunately has not been by any means the last, of those who have considered that the end justifies the means. This is one of the deadliest foes of true living. The end does not justify the means; and right ends must always be accomplished by right means, or else left unaccomplished.

(b) The value of waiting for God

If only Jacob had been willing to wait God's time and way, what a difference it would have made to him! The birthright would have been his in any case, but he was unwilling to allow God to give it to him. How like we are to Jacob in this respect! We take God at His word, and yet we will not wait God's time; and the result is we bring untold sorrow and trouble upon ourselves and others. It is essential that we keep in view the two requirements of the true life, faith and patience (Hebrews 6:12 -note). It is not enough to believe what God has said; we must "wait patiently for Him." (Psalms 37:7 -note) (c) The certainty of righteous retribution

We must never forget that God permitted Jacob no possession of the birthright until he had first of all acknowledged Esau as his lord (Genesis 32:4-5 ff), and had renounced all claim to it as the result of this evil bargain. He did not enter upon the birthright until it came quite naturally into his possession after Esau had abandoned it (Genesis 36:6). How different his life would have been if only he had believed that God was able to carry out His purposes unaided-at least, unaided by cleverness and deceit!

(d) The conclusion of the whole matter is that the only guarantee of true living is God in the heart and life as absolutely and permanently supreme. When God dwells in the heart as Saviour, in the conscience as Master, in the life as Lord, then-and only then-do we become assured of the possession of God's spiritual birthright and of its enjoyment in God's own way.

00A.36 Isaac Gen_26:1-33

Isaac Genesis 26:1-33

ALTHOUGH Isaac lived the longest of all the patriarchs less is recorded of him than of the others. This is the only chapter exclusively devoted to his life. His was a quiet, peaceful, normal life. He was the ordinary son of a great father, and the ordinary father of a great son. We are accustomed to speak of such lives as commonplace and ordinary, and yet the ordinary life is the “ordered” life, and in the truest sense the “ordained” life. Like the rest of us, Isaac’s experiences were marked by light and shade, by sin and discipline, by grace and mercy. The chapter before us is full of illustrations of how difficulties should and should not be met.

I. Difficulty met by Divine Guidance (Genesis 26:1-5)

Once again there arose a famine in the land of Canaan and the difficulty about food quickly became urgent with Isaac and his large household. Trials are permitted to come into the life of the best and holiest of men, and it is by this means that God sometimes teaches His most precious lessons. As the result of this famine Isaac left his home and journeyed southwards into the land of the Philistines to Gerar. The question naturally arises whether he was right in taking this journey, whether he had consulted God about it, whether it was undertaken by the will of God, or prompted by his own unaided wisdom. In any case the Lord appeared to him and prevented him from going farther southward into Egypt as his father had done under similar circumstances. “Go not down into Egypt.” Egypt was not the promised land, and there were dangers there to body and to soul from which it was necessary that Isaac should be safeguarded. With the prohibition came the definite Divine instruction to remain in the land of Canaan, and the promises to his father Abraham were thereupon repeated and confirmed. Careful study should be made of the various occasions on which the Divine promise was given to Abraham, and then a comparison should be instituted with these words to Isaac. It will then be seen that each time there is some new feature of the Divine revelation and a confirmation of the Divine promise. It is impossible to avoid asking the question whether in view of the sequel Isaac was right in going even as far as to Gerar. It would almost seem as though he had been walking by sight rather than by faith and had not consulted God before starting out from home.

II. Difficulty met by Human Sin (Genesis 26:6-11)

Isaac continued to dwell in Gerar and it was not very long before he was asked by the inhabitants of the place about his wife. Following his father’s evil example he told a deliberate lie and said, “She is my sister.” In this he was actuated by cowardly fear and by deplorable selfishness; “Lest the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah.” It is sometimes wondered how it was that Isaac did exactly what his father before him had done, and the similarity of the circumstances has led some to think that this is only a variant of the former story. Would it not be truer to say that this episode is entirely consonant with what we know of human nature and its tendencies? What would be more natural than that Isaac should attempt to do what his father had done before him? Surely

a little knowledge of human nature as distinct from abstract theory is sufficient to warrant a belief in the historical character of this narrative. Besides, assuming that it is a variant of the other story, we naturally ask which of them is the true version; they cannot both be true, for as they now are they do not refer to the same event. The names and circumstances are different in spite of similarities. This belief in Rebekah as Isaac's sister was evidently held by the people of Gerar for some time, for it was only after Isaac had been there "a long time" that the King of the Philistines detected the sin and became convinced that Isaac and Rebekah were husband and wife. Like his predecessor before him Abimelech was a man of uprightness, for he very plainly rebuked Isaac and reminded him of the serious consequences that might have accrued to him and to Rebekah if the facts of the case had not become known. Is there anything sadder in this world than that a child of God should be rebuked by a man of the world? The corruption of the best is indeed the worst, and when a believer sins and his sin has to be pointed out to him by men who make no profession whatever of religion, this is indeed to sound the depths of sorrow and disappointment. Abimelech took immediate steps to prevent any harm coming to Isaac and Rebekah from what had been done, and it is not difficult to imagine Isaac's feelings as he realized the results of his deliberate untruth.

III. Difficulty met by Divine Blessing (Genesis 26:12-17)

Isaac still lived on at Gerar, and quite naturally occupied himself with his daily agricultural work. He sowed seed, and in the very same year received an hundredfold owing to the blessing of the Lord. This was an exceptional result even for that exceptional land, and the Divine blessing is of course the explanation. Not only so, but his flocks grew and his household increased more and more "until he became very great." This marked Divine blessing following soon after his deliberate sin is at first sight a difficulty, for we naturally ask how God's favor could possibly rest upon him so quickly after the discovery of his grievous error. The answer may be found in a somewhat frequent experience of the people of God. They are often permitted to receive publicly a measure, and a great measure, of the Divine blessing even when they may not be in private fully faithful to the Divine will. God may at times honor His people in the sight of men while dealing with them in secret on account of their sins. As Richard Cecil once said, "A minister of Christ is often in highest honor of men for the performance of one half of his work, while God is regarding him with displeasure for the neglect of the other half." It seems to have been something like this with Isaac. In the presence of his enemies the Philistines God indeed, "prepared a table" before him, but it is pretty evident from what follows that God had other ways of dealing with him on account of his sin. God may not suffer His servants to be dishonored before the world, but He will take care to discipline them in faithfulness, and even with severity in the secret of His fellowship with them. This prosperity soon had its inevitable outcome. "The Philistines envied him," and this envy was shown in what was perhaps the severest and most trying way. "All the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them and filled them with earth." The digging of wells was a virtual claim to the possession of the land, and it was this in particular that the Philistines resented. They were not prepared to allow Isaac to regard himself as in any sense the owner of this property, and they therefore made it difficult and even impossible for him to remain there. Water especially for such a household as his was an absolute necessity, and the stopping up of the wells compelled him to take action. Abimelech too was not happy about this increasing property, and begged Isaac to depart, saying that he was mightier than the Philistines. Isaac thereupon departed, and yet even then did not go back to his own

home, but remained in the valley of Gerar and dwelt there. Once again we cannot help feeling conscious that Isaac was not exercising sufficient faith in the power of his father's God, or he would never have remained so near Gerar in the land of the Philistines.

IV. Difficulty Met by Human Patience (Genesis 26:18-22) This reluctance to go far away soon had its effect. Isaac was necessarily compelled to dig again the wells of water that had been stopped up, but this was at once met by a strife with the herdsmen of Gerar for the possession of the wells. Again Isaac's herdsmen dug a well, and the men of Gerar strove for that also. All this was evidently intended to make things uncomfortable for Isaac until he should be willing to return to his own home. Compelled by circumstances to make another move, a third attempt was made at well-digging, and at length the people of Gerar did not continue to strive. This was regarded by Isaac as a mark of Divine favor. "He called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." The spirit of yielding is very noteworthy, more particularly as peacemakers are very rare in the East. A strife of this kind is scarcely ever likely to be met by such a spirit of willingness to yield. On the contrary, there is every likelihood of such action leading to further strife and insistence upon personal rights. God was at work gently but very definitely leading Isaac back again to his own home.

V. Difficulty met by Divine Favor (Genesis 26:23-33) At length Isaac was impelled, not to say compelled, to leave the land of the Philistines, "and he went up from thence to Beersheba." Let us observe carefully what follows these words. They are very striking and significant. "The Lord appeared unto him the same night." Does not this show clearly that God never meant him to go even to Gerar? By this Divine appearance "the same night" it is evident that Isaac was at last in line with God's will, and could receive a Divine revelation. "I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for My servant Abraham's sake." This is the first time that we have the now familiar title, "the God of Abraham." Isaac is told not to fear, that he can rely upon the divine presence and blessing, and upon the fulfilment of the promise to his father Abraham. When God's servants get right with Him they are certain to receive His full revelation of truth and grace. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." (Psalms 25:14 -note)

Isaac at once responded to this Divine revelation. "He builded an altar there, and called upon the Name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well." Let us mark carefully these four stages in the patriarch's restored life. First comes the altar with its thought of consecration, then prayer with its consciousness of need, then the tent with its witness to home, and then comes the well with its testimony to daily life and needs. The altar and the home sum up everything that is true in life. First the altar and then the home, not first the home and then the altar. God must be first in everything.

Personal blessing from God and the consciousness of a life right with God were not the only result of Isaac's return to Beersheba. "Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar." The point of time is very noteworthy, "Then Abimelech went," that is, when Isaac had returned to the pathway of God's will, those who were formerly his enemies came to him and bore their testimony to the presence of God with him. Isaac naturally asked why they had come, seeing that they had sent him away from them. Their reply is very significant, "We saw plainly that the Lord was with thee . . . thou art now the blessed of the Lord." How true it is that "when a man's ways please the Lord He maketh even

his enemies to be at peace with him." It is scarcely possible to doubt in view of all these verses record that Isaac ought never to have left his home, but should have trusted God to keep him in spite of the famine in the land. But at last he was right with God, and both Divine favor and human acceptance wait upon him. He responded with alacrity to the desire of Abimelech for a covenant of peace, and after a feast of fellowship his visitors departed from him in peace. When God is honored by man, man is always honored by God.

Suggestions for Meditation

Isaac's life, as recorded in this chapter, is full of simple yet searching lessons for people who, like him, are called upon to live ordinary, every-day lives.

1. The Secret of true living is here revealed.

God must at all costs be first. Divine revelation is the foundation of all true life, and Divine guidance is its only safety. Not a step must be taken without His direction, not a work undertaken without His grace and blessing. "In the beginning God" must actuate and dominate every life that seeks to live to His glory. It is a profound mistake to think that we need only concern ourselves with God's will in the great events, the crises of life. The story of Isaac shows with unmistakable clearness that there is nothing too trivial for God's guidance, and nothing too small for the need of His grace and power.

2. The need of strength of character is here emphasized.

There is always a very serious peril in being the son of a great father. Life is apt to be made too easy, and the son often occupies his father's position without having had his father's experience. Isaac entered upon his inheritance without having passed through the various ways of discipline that Abraham experienced, and the result was that things were so easy for him that he did not realize the need of individuality of character and definite personal assertion of himself in the Divine life. In opening the wells that had been filled up he was copying Abraham's example without obtaining Abraham's success, and he was doubtless thereby taught that it was necessary for him to have a personal hold on God and duty for himself instead of merely imitating what his father had done. It is always dangerous when life is made too simple and easy for young people; "it is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth," and it was the absence of this yoke that doubtless ministered in great measure to that weakness of character which seems to have marked Isaac almost throughout his whole life.

3. The importance of separation from the world is here seen. As long as Isaac was in or near Gerar he did not experience much happiness. He was envied, thwarted, and opposed by the jealous Philistines. He was wanting not only in happiness but also in power, for it was not until he returned to Beersheba that Abimelech came to him bearing testimony to his conviction that God was with Isaac and blessing him. Thus for happiness, comfort and power with others, separation from the world is an absolute necessity. There is no greater mistake possible than to imagine that we can be one with the world and yet influence them for Christ. Lot found out this mistake to his cost, and so it has ever been. Separation from the world, paradoxical though it may seem, is the only true way of influencing the world for Christ. We must be in the world but not of the world if we would glorify God, bring blessing to our own souls, and be the means of blessing to others.

4. The spirit of meekness is here illustrated.

It is noteworthy that all through his life Isaac's temperament was of a passive rather than of an active nature. During his childhood he was subject to the insults of Ishmael, in his manhood he was taken to Moriah and bound there for sacrifice, and a wife was chosen for him by his father. He accepted the rebuke of Abimelech with meekness, he and his servants yielded to the Philistines about the well, and in his later life we can see the same spirit of passive yielding in his relations with Rebekah and his two sons. And yet in spite of all this meekness the Philistines testified to him as a man of power and might, and begged that he would not do them any harm. What a testimony this is to the spirit of true gentleness and meekness. The world thinks very little of meekness, but it is one of the prime graces of Christianity. "Let your sweet reasonableness be known unto all men" is the apostolic word echoing the Master's beatitude, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." Not only so, but this meekness is an echo of God's own life, for does not the Psalmist say "Thy gentleness hath made me great"? (Psalms 18:35 -note) As the French aphorism truly says, La douceur est une force. Meekness means the self-sacrifice of our own desires and interests, and in this spirit of gentleness is the secret of truest character and finest victory over self and others. Egoism is always a cause of weakness, for a constant consideration of ourselves is so absorbing that it tends to rob us of the very finest powers of our character. On the other hand, as we cease to regard self and concentrate attention upon others we find our own character becoming stronger as it becomes more unselfish, and with that is quickly added influence over others, and a beautiful recommendation of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 55

00A.37 The Blessing Gen_27:1-40

The Blessing Genesis 27:1-40

NOWHERE, perhaps, is the real character of the Bible more evident than in this chapter. The story is given in all its naked simplicity, and, although no precise moral is pointed, the incidents carry their own solemn lesson to every reader. All four persons concerned with the history are portrayed without hesitation or qualification, and the narrative makes its profound impression upon the reader by its simple but significant recital of facts. It is an unpleasant picture that we have here presented to us, a family life full of jealousy and deceit. If love is not found in the home, where may we expect it? And if, in particular, jealousies are found associated with the profession of faith in God, how terrible is the revelation!

I. The Father's Plot (Genesis 27:1-4)

Isaac's part in the history here recorded is sometimes overlooked, and yet it is evident that he was in large measure responsible for the sad results. In the time of old age he calls his elder son and speaks of his own approaching death, inviting his son to prepare food that he may eat, and at the same time give his elder son the parental and patriarchal blessing. There does not seem to have been any real sign of approaching death, and, as a matter of fact, Isaac lived for over forty years after this event. The hurry and secrecy which characterized his action are also suspicious, and not the least of the sad and deplorable elements is the association of old age with feasting, personal gratification, and self-will. It is perfectly clear that he knew of the purposes of God concerning his younger son (Genesis 25:23), and yet here we find him endeavoring to thwart that purpose by transferring the blessing from the one for whom it was divinely designed. This partiality for Esau, combined with his own fleshly appetite, led the patriarch into grievous sin, and we cannot but observe how his action set fire to the whole train of evils that followed in the wake of his proposal.

Esau was quite ready to fall in with his father's suggestion. He must have at once recalled the transaction with his brother whereby the birthright had been handed over to Jacob. He must also have known the divine purpose concerning him and his brother; and although his marriage with a Canaanitish woman had still further disqualified him for spiritual primogeniture, it mattered nothing so long as he could recover what he now desired to have. He realized at last the value of that which his brother had obtained from him, and he is prompt to respond to his father's suggestion, since he sees in it the very opportunity of regaining the lost birthright.

II. The Mother's Counter-Plot (Genesis 27:5-17)

We have now to observe with equal care the part played by Rebekah. Isaac had evidently not counted on his wife's overhearing his proposal to Esau, nor had he thought of the possibility of her astuteness vanquishing his plot. It is necessary that we should be perfectly clear about Rebekah's part in this transaction. Her object was to preserve for Jacob the blessing that God intended for him. Her design, therefore, was perfectly legitimate, and there can be very little doubt that it was inspired by a truly religious motive. She thought that the purpose of God was in danger, and that

there was no other way of preventing a great wrong being done. It was a crisis in her life and in that of Jacob, and she was prepared to go the entire length of enduring the Divine curse so long as her favorite son could retain the blessing that God intended for him. Yet when all this is said, and it should be continually borne in mind, the sin of Rebekah's act was utterly inexcusable. We may account for it, but we cannot justify it. She was one of those who take upon themselves to regard God as unable to carry out His own purposes, thinking that either He has forgotten, or else that His will can really be frustrated by human craft and sin. And so she dared to do this remarkably bold thing. She proved herself to be quite as clever as Isaac and Esau.

Jacob's compliance was not immediate and hearty, for he evidently perceived the very real risk that he was running (Genesis 27:12). He also saw the sin of it in the sight of God, and feared lest after all he should bring upon himself the Divine curse instead of the Divine blessing. Yet, influenced and overpowered by the stronger nature of the mother, he at length accepted the responsibility for this act, and proceeded to carry out his mother's plans.

III. The Younger Son's Deception (Genesis 27:1-29) The preparations were quickly and skillfully made, and Jacob approached his father with the food that his mother had prepared for him. The bold avowal that he was the first-born was persisted in, and his aged father entirely deceived. Lie follows lie, for Jacob had to pay the price of lies by being compelled to lie on still. Nothing in its way is more awful than this deception. We pity Jacob as the victim of his mother's love, but we scorn and deplore his action as the violation of his conscience and the silencing of his better nature. The terrible thoroughness with which he carried out his mother's plans is one of the most hideous features of the whole story. The father's benediction is now given; and although it is mainly couched in terms of temporal blessing, we see underlying it the thought of that wider influence suggested by the promise of universal blessing given to Abraham and his seed.

IV. The Elder Son's Defeat (Genesis 27:30-40)

It was not long before the true state of affairs came out. Isaac must have been astonished at the discovery for more than one reason. He had thought doubtless that in blessing, as he considered, his elder son, he had overreached both Rebekah and Jacob, and now he finds after all that the Divine purpose has been accomplished in spite of his, own willful attempt to divert the promise from Jacob. It is, however, to Isaac's credit that he meekly accepts the inevitable, and is now quite prepared to realize that God's will must be done.

We are not surprised at Esau's behavior, for we know the true character of the man. His bitter lamentation was due to the mortification he felt at being beaten. His cry of disappointment was probably, if not certainly, due to the fact that he had lost the temporal advantage of the birthright and blessing, not that he had lost the spiritual favor of God associated with it. His indignation at Jacob, like all other anger, is characterized by untruth; for whilst Jacob undoubtedly supplanted him, the taking away of the birthright was as much his own free act as it was due to Jacob's superior cleverness. We cannot help being touched by his tearful request to his father to give him even now a blessing. He realizes, when it is too late, what has been done, and although a partial blessing is bestowed upon him it is quite beyond all possibility that things can be as he had desired them to be. Esau had despised his birthright, but, however it came about, he was evidently conscious of the value of the blessing; and when the New Testament tells us that "he found no place for repentance," it means, of course, that there was no possibility of undoing what had been

accomplished. He found no way to change his father's mind, though he sought earnestly to bring this about (Hebrews 12:17 -note). There is a sense in which the past is utterly irretrievable, and it is only very partially true that "we may be what we might have been."

Suggestions for Meditation

We have been concerned mainly with the four human actors in this family drama, and we have seen how one after another was dealt with; but that which lies behind the entire narrative is the thought of the God who reigns and rules over all. What does God teach us from this whole story?

1. "Let us not do evil that good may come." (Romans 3:8 -note)

Right objects must be brought about by right means. It is one of the most remarkable features of human life in all ages that lofty purposes have been associated with the most sordid of methods, and one proof of this is found in that intolerable phrase "pious fraud." Yet clearly one of these words always contradicts the other. If a thing is pious it cannot be a fraud; if a thing is a fraud it cannot be pious. We must not convert our opponent by using untruth as an argument, we dare not win victories for Christ by any unworthy efforts. As it has been well said, the heights of gold must not be approached by steps of straw. Righteousness can never be laid aside, even though our object is yet more righteousness. In personal life, in home life, in Church life, in endeavors to win men for Christ, in missionary enterprise, in social improvement, and in everything connected with the welfare of humanity we must insist upon absolute righteousness, purity, and truth in our methods, or else we shall bring utter discredit on the cause of our Master and Lord.

2. "Be sure your sin will find you out." (Numbers 32:23) This message is writ large on every line of the story. All four found this out to their cost, as we see in the subsequent history of Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau. They were never the same afterwards, and their sins in some respects dogged their footsteps all the rest of their days. If only Isaac had realized this at the outset, how much he might have saved himself and his family!

Oh! what a tangled web we weave, When first we practise to deceive.

3. "Walk in the light as He is in the light." (1 John 1:7)

It has been well said (Eugene Stock, Lesson Studies in Genesis) that this chapter is a chapter of desires and devices. Isaac had his desires and devices; so had Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau. Each one of them attempts to accomplish their desires by means of the most unworthy devices; and sorrow, disappointment, trouble were the inevitable result. How different it would have been with them if they had lived in the presence of God! How different it always is with us if, instead of following the devices and desires of our own hearts, we are able to say like the Psalmist, "All my desires are before Thee"! For if only "we delight ourselves in the Lord" He will give us "the desires of our hearts." And as we delight ourselves in Him our desires become His desires, and His desires ours, by the transformation of Divine Grace.

4. "The Lord reigneth." (Psalms 97:1 -note) This is perhaps the chief and fundamental lesson of the whole story. It is utterly futile to suppose that we can thwart the Divine purpose. "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand" (Proverbs 29:21). God maketh "the devices of man to be of none effect" (Psalms 33:10 -note), for we well know that "the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand" (Isaiah 46:10). Whenever man has attempted

to play the part of Providence, the issue has always been disaster. “A man’s heart deviseth his way ; but the Lord directeth his steps” (Proverbs 16:9). The true secret of living is to realize that we are not agents, but only instruments in carrying out the Divine will; and if with all our hearts we truly seek Him, waiting upon Him in prayer, trust, and obedience, we shall find ourselves taken up into the line of His wise providence, used to carry out His purposes, and enabled to live to His glory.

Chapter 56

00A.38 Interlude Gen_27:41-46; Gen_28:1-9

Interlude Genesis 27:41-46; Genesis 28:1-9 THIS section seems to suggest the after-swell of a storm; the I waters are pent up, longing to rush forth. After the crisis recorded in the preceding section we notice the actors in the drama evidently impressed and affected by the terrible experience through which they have passed.

I. Esau's Anger (Genesis 27:41-42)

Mortified at his loss of the blessing, and hating his brother on that account, Esau forms a resolve marked by cold-blooded calculation. He expects the death of his father at no distant date, and makes up his mind to wait for that event and then to kill his brother. He will not cause grief to his father, but he does not allow any feelings for his mother to enter into his project. It is evident from all this that there was no genuine repentance in him. While Isaac meekly accepted the Divine decision Esau was determined not to do so. To him life was nothing so long as he could not get rid of his brother. The words "comfort himself" (Genesis 27:42) show the grim satisfaction that actuated him as he contemplated his brother's murder. But the days of mourning did not come. His father lived, and the postponement of the revenge led to the failure of the project. Full of passion and impulse he could not keep his plan to himself, for while at the outset he only spake "in his heart," it was not long before the project was heard of by Rebekah.

II. Rebekah's Plan (Genesis 27:43-46) To hear of Esau's determination was to take action, and with characteristic promptitude and vigor she tells Jacob what has happened, at the same time urging him to flee to his uncle at Haran and stay there a short time until his brother's anger should pass away. Rebekah well knew the short-lived passion of her elder son.

This, however, was not all that was in her mind. She saw much further ahead than the few days necessary for the dissipation of Esau's anger. She did not inform Jacob of any deeper project, but In her conversation with Isaac this entirely different idea is brought forward. Rebekah's characteristic cleverness is again in evidence. She is quite at home in all these plans and projects. She will not speak to Isaac of her fears of Esau's murder of Jacob, but she introduces a suggestion about Jacob's marriage which has the desired effect. She tells her husband that she is sore troubled because of Esau's unfortunate marriage with the daughters of Canaan, and she fears still further trouble if Jacob should follow his example. There was no need to suggest to Isaac where Jacob was to go, for he would doubtless remember from whence he had taken his own wife. Rebekah's view of the marriage was assuredly correct, and it is perhaps true to say that there never has been any Divine blessing from mixed marriages between God's people and people of the world.

Rebekah, however, little knew what she was doing in proposing this scheme to Isaac. It was impossible for her to foresee every contingency. She could outwit her husband and her son, but it would seem as though she had either forgotten or did not know that in Laban she had a brother who was quite her own equal in craft and cleverness. Not for an instant did she imagine that she

would never see Jacob again, and that her old age would be bereft of the company of her favorite son. Thus does shrewdness overreach itself, bringing sorrow and trouble upon its own head.

It is impossible to take leave of Rebekah without observing once again her remarkable cleverness and masterfulness. She is certainly one of the ablest women whose lives are recorded in Holy Writ. Full of plans and projects, ever impatiently questioning. she is typical of those resourceful people who leave nothing to chance, but take every precaution within their reach to accomplish what they desire to do. From the moment she first comes upon the scene we have suggestive hints of her capacity and power. Her first question is concerned with the great problem of her own acute suffering (Genesis 25:22). Her resourcefulness and determination are evident all through the story of the last section, while in the passage before us we see on the one hand her fear lest she should be deprived of both sons (or it may be of husband and favorite son) in one day, and also her intense sorrow and disappointment at the bare possibility of Jacob marrying a wife of whom she herself could not approve.

While vigor and capacity are very important, far more important and necessary are patient trust in God and consistent integrity. Most human catastrophes have been brought about by men and women regarding themselves as agents instead of instruments, and by thinking that the world cannot possibly be managed except by their shrewdness and sharp practice. Ability must be consecrated to God if it is to be of real service.

III. Isaac’s Blessing (Genesis 28:1-5).

Rebekah’s suggestion is sufficient to compel Isaac to take action. He accepts the indication of Divine providence, and realizes now that Jacob is the real heir of the promise to Abraham. He therefore calls his son, and charges him not to take a wife of the daughters of Canaan, but to go to Padan-aram and take a wife of the daughters of Laban, his mother’s brother. Then follows the patriarchal benediction; the blessing of “God Almighty” is invoked upon him, that title of God which was first revealed to his forefather Abraham (Genesis 17:1). Added to the blessing is a prayer that God would make him fruitful, and multiply him according to the blessing of Abraham.

It is touching to realize that Isaac lived over forty years after this event, and nothing is recorded of him. His life generally was much quieter and far less full of incident than those of his father and of his son, and yet it would almost seem as though the utter silence concerning these forty years was intended to remind us of the comparative failure of Isaac after his deliberate attempt to divert the blessing from his son Jacob. At any rate, God often has to set aside even honored workers by reason of unfaithfulness, and it is possible that Isaac’s sin led to these years of quiet without any incident worthy of being recorded by Divine inspiration. At the same time this may not be the true interpretation of the silence, which may be due simply to the absence of anything in his life worthy of special note. Quiet lives can glorify God just as much as public ones. It is perfectly true that “full many a flower is born to blush unseen,” but not to “waste its sweetness on the desert air.” God can use the Jives unseen of men to bring about blessing and glorify Himself.

IV. Jacob’s Obedience (Genesis 28:5). In all this section Jacob appears quite passive. First he listens obediently to his mother’s voice about fleeing to Haran, and then with equal readiness he accepts his father’s command and sets out on his long journey. Genesis 38:5, according to the well-known Hebrew literary characteristic, anticipates the detailed record by stating quite briefly his

journey and destination. Jacob little knew at the time what this all meant. Apparently it was but a small incident, a stay of a short time while his brother's anger cooled; but God had wider purposes to fulfil, and that which seemed an ordinary journey and a short stay was to be made part of a great project involving many other lives than his own. When he said "Good-bye" to his mother and father, in the full expectation of a speedy return, he was entering upon some of the profoundest experiences of his life. He went away ostensibly to avoid his brother's anger and to seek for himself a wife. He found very much more than this, for, as we shall see, he came in contact with God, and learned lessons that lasted him all his days. Events that seem trivial to us are often fraught with momentous results.

V. Esau's Marriage (Genesis 28:6-9). The narrative once more turns by contrast to Esau, who now makes another attempt to regain the blessing. He is quick enough to see at length that his father and mother disapprove of his own marriage, and had sent Jacob to seek a wife from Laban, and now Esau attempts to steal a march on Jacob and reverse the blessing. He tries to please his parents, for obviously he has no thought of doing what he proposes from any higher motive. He adds to his two Canaanitish wives a daughter of Ishmael, his own cousin. It makes no difference to him that Ishmael is not of the same direct line as himself, nor does it matter to him in the least that God had passed over Ishmael for his father. Esau has no idea of spiritual realities. All that he is concerned about is to please his parents, and if possible to win back the blessing. This again shows the real character of the man and the utter absence of any spiritual reality actuating his life. Esau is one of those who, as it has been truly and acutely said, tries to do what God's people do in the vain hope that somehow or other it will be pleasing to God (Dods, Genesis, in loc. The Expositor's Bible). He will not do precisely what God requires, but something like it. He will not entirely give up the world and put God first in his life, but he will try to meet some of God's wishes by a little alteration in his conduct. Instead of renouncing sin he will cover it with the glory of small virtues; but it is one thing to conform to the outward practices of God's people, it is quite another to be thoroughly and truly godly at heart. Men of the Esau type may attend the House of God and Join in its service, but at heart they are essentially without God and regardless of His claims on their lives.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. God has a plan for every life.

One of Horace Bushnell's great sermons has the title Every Man's Life a Plan of God. God had a plan for Jacob's life, and that plan could not be hindered by the action of Isaac or Esau, nor could it be really furthered by the cleverness and craft of Rebekah. It gives dignity, force, and peace to life to realize that God has a plan for it, and it is at once our duty and privilege to seek out that plan and to discover God's will concerning us.

2. God has His own ways of realizing His plan for us.

Rebekah's thought in sending out Jacob was very different from God's idea. There were surprises in store that Jacob never dreamt of. God's ways are higher than ours, and it is our truest wisdom to let God show us His way and enable us to fulfil His purpose concerning us.

3. God is willing to reveal His plan for us.

Two requirements are necessary if we are to know God's plan for our lives. There must be the sympathy of trust and the faithfulness of obedience.

Sympathetic trust is always the parent of spiritual insight.

God ever reveals Himself to the trustful, loving heart. Faithful obedience is another and connected secret of spiritual insight. “If any man wills to do...he shall know” (John 7:17). “Then shall we know, if we follow on” (Hosea 6:3). Trustful obedience, step by step, is the sure guarantee of spiritual knowledge. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.” (Psalms 25:14 -note)

00A.39 Bethel Gen_28:10-22

Bethel Genesis 28:10-22 THE story of God's special and personal dealings with Jacob commences with this incident. Hitherto he has not appeared in a very favorable light, and it is only indirectly that we have been able to gather anything of his relation to God. Now, however, we are to have a series of revelations of his character as he is being tested and trained by the wisdom and grace of God. The story is one of chastisement and mercy. Jacob again and again reaps the fruit of his sins, and yet we shall see the triumphs of Divine grace in one of the most naturally unattractive and even forbidding of temperaments.

1. The Journey (Genesis 28:10-11) His departure from home in search of a wife was very different from that of his father's servant on the memorable occasion when Abraham sent him to bring back Rebekah. Jacob is alone, no steward to accompany him, no cavalcade, no companions; he is really fleeing for his life. It is not wholly Imaginative to try to realize something of his thoughts and feelings on this memorable occasion, fresh from the loving farewell with his mother. It is almost certain that he commenced to review the past as well as contemplate the future. Should he ever return to his father's house in peace? Should he ever possess the blessing that had been bestowed upon him? Was it after all so very precious and valuable? In what respect was he better than his brother Esau? Would it not have been better if he had never sought the birthright and obtained the blessing? Such thoughts as these probably coursed through his mind as he realized that he was virtually being banished from all that was near and dear to him.

He is like many another since his day who has gone out from the old home to seek his fortune elsewhere, although in his case the departure was not the natural and inevitable development of young life, but was due to his sin. There is always something of a crisis when the old home is left and a new life is entered upon. Most young people have to face this fact and to experience all the emotions that are associated with it.

II. The Dream (Genesis 28:12). From Beersheba, 12 miles to the south of Hebron, Jacob journeys, and at length reaches the place afterwards known as Bethel, which was situated in the mountains of Ephraim, about three hours' journey north of Jerusalem. The place was a bleak moorland in the heart of Palestine. "The track winds through an uneven valley, covered, as with gravestones, by large sheets of bare rock; some few here and there standing up like the cromlechs of Druidical monuments." (Stanley's Sinai and Palestine) Here he lies down to rest, and, influenced no doubt by the surroundings, in his sleep the stones seem to be like stairs reaching from earth to heaven. To the lonely man there seemed "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven," and on the ladder angels of God were ascending and descending. As on so many other occasions, God spoke by means of this dream. The ladder was intended first of all to remind Jacob of the gulf between his soul and God. By craft he had obtained his brother's birthright, by lying and deceit he had snatched away the blessing, and now the fugitive is reminded of the separation between his soul and God and the absolute necessity of some means of communication. The ladder also reminded him of the way in which his soul could come back to

God in spite of his sin, and the fact that it reached from earth to heaven signified the complete provision of Divine grace for human life. Right down to his deepest need the ladder came, right up to the presence of God the ladder reached, and the vision of the angels on the ladder was intended to symbolize the freedom of communication, telling of access to God, and of constant, free, easy communication between earth and heaven.

III. The Revelation (Genesis 28:13-15). The ladder was only the symbolical part of his dream; he also received that which was far more and deeper than anything symbolical. Above the ladder stood the God of his father, and from that Divine presence came his first direct message from above. There was first of all the revelation of God as “Jehovah, the God of Abraham and of Isaac.” Then came the specific revelation concerning the land whereon Jacob was lying, and the promise of that land to him and to his seed. It will be remembered that the blessings bestowed upon Jacob by Isaac his father (Genesis 27:27-29 and Genesis 28:3-4) were couched in very general terms, but now Jacob received the specific, clear assurance that the covenant with Abraham and Isaac was to be continued with him, and through him to his seed.

Then followed a four-fold assurance which must have been very precious to the soul of the fugitive (a) The Divine Presence: “I am with thee”;

(b) the Divine protection: “and will keep thee”;

(c) the Divine preservation: “and will bring thee again into this land”;

(d) the Divine promise: “I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.”

Observe in this passage the threefold repetition of “Behold”; “Behold the angels” (Genesis 28:12), “Behold the Lord” (Genesis 28:13), “Behold, I am with thee” (Genesis 28:15). Thus Jacob was encouraged and assured by a Divine revelation.

IV. The Response (Genesis 28:16-17). The vision aroused Jacob of his sleep, and he was astonished at finding God where he tied himself alone. Hitherto he does not seem to have had personal knowledge of God, everything having been mediated to him through his father and mother. Now he understands and realizes God as his personal God, and is surprised to find that heaven is so near, though he is far from home. Henceforward life takes a different color and “earth’s crammed with heaven” for him. No wonder he is afraid, for he realizes that this is the place where God dwells, the house of God, the gate of heaven. When the soul comes in contact with God for the first time it is a good sign that the result is awe, reverence, fear. “Holy and reverend is His is Name.”

V. The Memorial (Genesis 28:18-19).

Jacob seems to have gone to sleep again and rested until the morning, and then on rising he took the stone which he had put for his pillow and consecrated it to God in commemoration of that wonderful night. This was a fine and worthy idea; to him the place would be evermore sacred as the spot at which he first met God. He did not wish to lose any part of the impression of so memorable an occasion. The place of our conversion is one to be remembered and recalled.

“He felt that, vivid as the impression on his mind then was, it would tend to fade, and he erected this stone that in after days he might have a witness that would testify to his present assurance.

One great secret in the growth of character is the art of prolonging the quickening power of right ideas, of perpetuating just and inspiring impressions. And he who despises the aid of all external helps for the accomplishment of this object is not likely to succeed" (Dods' Genesis, The Expositor's Bible).

It is evident that Jacob was deeply impressed with the vision, the ladder, and the voice of God, and his responsiveness to the Divine revelation is worthy of careful notice in view of his former craft and deceit. It shows that, in spite of everything, he had that in his soul which reached out towards the Divine will, however unworthy and wrong were the methods that he used. We cannot imagine the purely secular, sensuous, and even sensual Esau entering into the spirit of this vision or allowing it to have any influence upon his life.

VI. The Vow (Genesis 28:20-22). With the memorial stone comes the story of the first vow recorded in Scripture. Jacob acknowledges his need of God, which is another testimony to the genuineness of the man, and he vows, saying,

"If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord 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." The precise attitude of Jacob in this vow has been variously interpreted. Some have thought that his "If" really means "Since God will be with me," and following the margin of the Revised Version it is suggested that the protasis should not be in Genesis 28:21 but in Genesis 28:22, and that we should read: "Since God will be with me and will keep me . . . and will give me . . . and the Lord will be my Guide then this stone . . . shall be God's house."

Others think that Jacob cannot be excused a low and mercenary feeling in this vow. We must be careful not to read too much into it, but it is equally necessary not to read too little into it. Let us remember that this is what we should call Jacob's conversion, the commencement of a life of grace, and we are therefore not to be surprised if he is unfamiliar with God and cannot at once rise to a high level of spiritual attainment. Even supposing it is true that he met God's "I am with thee" with "If God will be with me," he is only doing what Peter did under very different circumstances. When the Lord said, "It is I," Peter replied, "If it be thou." It is a great thing that Jacob realizes his need of God and that he makes this resolution, under whatever condition, acknowledging God as his God and pledging himself to God's service. If only some of those who are inclined to criticize Jacob would do what he promised and give the tenth of their income to God, what a different state of affairs would obtain in connection with God's work at home and abroad!

Suggestions for Meditation The story of Bethel left its mark on the people of Israel, for it is found referred to, at least twice in after ages (Hosea 12:4; John 1:51). It is full of lessons for the life of the believer, and we shall do well to ponder it closely as a revelation of Divine grace.

1. God's condescending grace. The vision of Bethel was used by our Lord as a symbol and type of Himself: "Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." (John 1:51) As the ladder was to Jacob so is the Lord Jesus Christ to mankind, a revelation of God's wonderful condescension and mercy. Set up on earth in Bethlehem, the top of it reached to heaven at the Ascension, and now the Lord Jesus is our Divine ladder, first of

revelation and then of communication. All that we know of God comes through Him, and all that we receive from God comes through Him. Ever since the Incarnation of our Lord earth has been no desert, but a place where God is manifest to the eye and heart of faith.

2. God’s all-sufficient grace.

How appropriate this story is for those who are standing on the threshold of life, who have just left home and are feeling all the loneliness associated with this time! It is on such an occasion that God meets us and offers us Himself, shows us the ladder between earth and heaven, assures us that His grace is all-sufficient, and that though we are far from home we are very near to him: “My grace is sufficient for thee.” (2 Corinthians 12:9 -note) 3. God’s overruling grace.

There was really no need for Jacob to have fled from his brother, for God could have dealt with Esau and put everything right; but Jacob has to suffer the results of his impatience and imprudence, and God will overrule his mistakes and sins and teach him still deeper lessons. Though he had left his father’s house, God was still with him, and in this vision he was taught that God was now taking him in hand and would not leave him till the work of grace was done. How wonderfully God overrules our mistakes, and faults, and sins, and gathers up the threads of our troubles and even weaves them into His pattern for our life!

4. God’s sovereign grace.

It was necessary that Jacob should learn how utterly helpless he was to bring about the Divine purposes concerning him. It was only when he was asleep, needy and helpless, that God revealed Himself. Jacob had hitherto considered it necessary to use craft and cleverness in order, as he thought, to bring about the purposes of God. He was now to be told that God could dispense with him and yet accomplish His own Divine aims. It is a very salutary lesson to learn the sovereignty of grace, to realize that we have no claim on God, to be conscious that God does not require our cleverness or ability, and to lean our hearts increasingly upon the Divine word: “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.” (Zechariah 4:6) 5. God’s teaching grace. At Bethel God really commenced the education and making of Jacob. To educate is to “educe” or draw out that which is within, and while we might have thought that there was no material worthy of God’s consideration, the Divine Teacher could see the possibilities of this man, and was willing, in marvellous patience, to attempt the work of training. God did this in three ways:

(a) He revealed Jacob’s character to himself; He brought him to the end of himself and revealed to him something of his evil heart.

(b) He also showed to Jacob his utter helplessness from earthly sources.Bereft of father and home, in danger from his brother, and powerless himself, Jacob was perforce compelled to turn to God.

(c) Above all, the Lord revealed Himself to Jacob.

He introduced him to a larger life and wider experience, reminding him that the Divine presence was to be found everywhere. So “He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye.”

6. God’s longsuffering grace. When Jacob awoke after the vision his true life commenced. We are not altogether surprised at the low level of his spiritual life, for he was evidently unfamiliar with God and needed very much more experience before he could enter fully into all the Divine purposes concerning him. Even if we acquit him of bargaining we can still see that his knowledge of God was only superficial, and he was not yet able to enter into the fulness and glory of the Divine thought concerning him and his seed. But God had commenced His work in Jacob’s soul and with marvelous patience God continued His dealings with him. Since at our conversion we know very little of God, we and others must not be surprised if our lack of familiarity with Divine realities leads us into error; but the great thing is to commence the true life, for as we yield ourselves to God and wait upon Him we shall find ourselves taught, upheld, and blessed by the wonderful patience of His grace. Only let us be clear that when God says, “I am with thee” we do not reply with “If,” but say, out of a full heart, “I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me,” and, like Abraham of old, go forward “fully persuaded that what He has promised He is able also to perform.”

Chapter 58

00A.40 The New Life Gen_29:1-30

The New Life Genesis 29:1-30

JACOB is now in the greatest of all schools, that of experience, and there are many lessons to learn. These three chapters (Genesis 29:1-35, Genesis 30:1-43, Genesis 31:1-55) cover forty years of his life, and are the record of a large part of his training.

1. The New Start (Genesis 29:1). The Hebrew is very suggestive: “Then Jacob lifted up his feet.” A new hope had dawned in his breast, and now he starts on his way from Bethel with alacrity. The revelation of God and the assurance of God’s presence and blessing had brought light and cheer to his heart, and, like every young convert fresh from the experience of meeting God for the first time, “he went on his way rejoicing.” Who does not remember those early days, when everything seemed different, when joy illuminated the pathway, and hope sprang up, covering the pathway with its rainbow of blessed assurance! The long journey (450 miles from Beersheba) was at length accomplished, and he arrived in the country of his kinsfolk, “the people of the East.”

II. The Memorable Meeting (Genesis 29:2-14). As he neared his journey’s end he came across a well with flocks of sheep lying by it, and on asking the shepherds whence they were, received the answer, “From Haran.” Another question followed about Laban, and he was soon told that his uncle was in health, and that Rachel his daughter was coming with the sheep. Then comes a point exceedingly characteristic of Jacob. He suggests to the shepherds that, as it is not yet time to gather together the cattle and fold them for the night, they should at least go and give the flocks of sheep food and water. What was the meaning of this suggestion of Jacob? There does not seem much doubt that it was made for the purpose of getting an opportunity to be alone with Rachel. Already he seems to realize that his way has been guided aright, and with characteristic forethought and promptitude he desires to make the most of the opportunity. The shepherds decline to accede to his request, urging that it would cause unnecessary trouble to give water to some of the sheep while the others had not yet gathered around the well.

Then comes the meeting with Rachel, and we are doubtless right in regarding Jacob’s feelings as those of “love at first sight.” With courtesy he went near and rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, and then revealed himself to his cousin, telling her who he was and whence he had come. Rachel thereupon goes and tells the news to her father. The picture is one of idyllic beauty. Faith had come into his life through his meeting with God at Bethel, and now had entered that second best of God’s gifts, a woman’s love.

Laban at once comes out to meet him, and gives him the heartiest possible welcome. In spite of all that we have to see and note about Laban, it is evident that he was a man of warm-hearted and generous impulses, and was genuinely delighted to welcome his kinsman into his house.

III. The Faithful Service (Genesis 29:15-20).

Laban again stands out well in the story at this point. He does not wish to presume his relationship to Jacob by expecting him to do service for nothing, so he asks him to say what wages he desires. Jacob thereupon proposes to serve seven years for Rachel, Laban's younger daughter; and to this Laban agrees, saying that he would much prefer giving Rachel to him than to a stranger.

"And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." There are few verses more familiar in the story of Jacob than this beautiful description of his love; and whatever else may be said about him, his sharp practices, cleverness, and craft, it is impossible not to give adhesion to Coleridge's well-known words that "No man could be a bad man who loved as Jacob loved Rachel." For seven long years he toiled hard and faithfully in the service of Laban, and yet because of his great love the time passed rapidly and seemed but a days. Love such as this takes little account of time; buoyed up and urged on by its joyous hope, it lives and labors and grows stronger and stronger.

V. The Bitter Disappointment (Genesis 29:21-30). The seven years are now over, and Jacob asks Laban for the fulfilment of his promise. Laban thereupon prepares for the usual wedding-feast, which, in the East, lasts seven days, and then, under cover of the darkness, and according to Eastern custom, he brings his daughter closely veiled to the tent of Jacob. Jacob is soon made aware of the treachery of Laban, to which Leah was a party, though probably with no real power to resist her father's will. Nor indeed was she likely in any case to resist it, since it is evident that a deep love for Jacob had sprung up in her heart. Laban's answer to Jacob's reproach is another indication of the true character of the man. He told Jacob that it was not customary in their country that the younger daughter should be married before the first-born; and yet surely Jacob ought to have been told this at the beginning, not at the end of the seven years. To add to the difficulty and confusion Laban proposes that at the end of the week of the marriage-feast for Leah Jacob Should take Rachel also as his wife. Jacob agrees to this; and so, at the close of the marriage festivities in connection with his marriage with Leah, Jacob accomplishes his heart's desire and marries Rachel.

It is clear, from a careful consideration of the story, that he married Rachel at the beginning, not at the end of his second seven years of service. His love for Rachel had never varied, and he was quite prepared to serve with Laban "yet another seven years."

Suggestions for Meditation

Jacob is already in the training school of discipline. God is dealing with him in deed and in truth, and as we study the story we find several messages that ought to come home to our own hearts.

1. Doing the will of God.

After Bethel came the long journey to Haran, and Bethel was intended to fit Jacob for the journey and all that lay before him. Quiet times with God are intended to be the means of doing our ordinary work in "the daily round, the common task." Conversion is intended to be expressed in consecration. Mountain-top experiences are to be followed by service in the valley, and the real test of our life lies not in our profession, but in our character and conduct. One of the most practical pointed and pressing questions that we should ask ourselves day by day is this: What are our Bethels doing for us? "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." All our professions of fellowship with God will count for nothing unless those experiences are reproduced in our ordinary

everyday life. “How call ye Me Lord, and do not the things which I say?”

2. Experiencing the providence of God. The story before us is a very ordinary one. A journey, a meeting with shepherds near a well, a young woman coming up, an act of courtesy; and yet these small events led to great and far-reaching results. How very much depends upon very little! There is nothing really small in human life. We start out in the morning, and what we may call a chance meeting, or the receipt of an ordinary letter, or some very slight circumstance may affect the whole of the subsequent life of quite a number of people. We call this the “providence” of God, and we do well; and the true Christian heart will always love to trace the hand of God in the ordinary everyday experiences of life. For, after all, “ordinary” means “ordered,” and it is the joy of the believer to realize that everything is ordered and that “all things work together for good to them that love God.” The harmonious and beneficent combination of circumstances guided and overruled by the wisdom and will of God constitutes for the Christian soul the joy and cheer of everyday living.

3. Discovering the justice of God.

Laban’s deception came to Jacob as a great surprise, and yet he ought not to have been astonished in view of his past. He was now commencing to reap as he had sown. He was now being treated as he had treated his father and brother, and the deceiver is at length deceived. He had come to the school whence all his own powers of deceit had originally come. Laban is seen to be the equal of his clever sister Rebekah, and Jacob is being paid back with the family coin. God has no favorites, and if His own children wander from the pathway they have to suffer. And yet the sufferings are not punitive, but disciplinary. We are chastened and trained and it is the highest wisdom of every believer to accept and to learn all that God has to teach him. Old tendencies need to be corrected, old weaknesses made strong, old faults removed; and if only we yield ourselves into the hands of the great Potter He will fashion the clay, in spite of all our natural disadvantages, into vessels unto honor.

Yet take Thy way-for, sure, Thy way is best; Stretch or contract me, Thy poor debtor; ‘Tis but the tuning of my breast To make the music better.

Chapter 59

00A.41 In the Shadows Gen_29:31-35; Gen_30:1-43

In the Shadows Genesis 29:31-35; Genesis 30:1-43

JACOB'S life at Haran was one long prolonged discipline in various ways. He was almost continually in the crucible, whether through the faults and sins of others or through his own unworthy and sinful expedients. The entire story is full of sad and sordid incidents, but as we read it we shall do well to bear in mind that the long-suffering patience of God was all the while at work with his unworthy servant.

I. At Home (Genesis 29:31-35, Genesis 30:1-24). The results of Laban's deception were soon evident in Jacob's home life. The possession of two wives brought its inevitable results. Polygamy was only tolerated, never accepted, by the Hebrews in after-days. The experience of their progenitor doubtless weighed with them in the attitude they assumed towards it (Leviticus 18:8). Yet even in this unhappy experience we can see the overruling hand of God, for when He saw Jacob's partiality for Rachel He taught him some needed lessons in connection with the birth of his first children. The way in which Leah's thoughts turned to God on the occasion of the birth of her first four sons is very striking. She realized that the Divine hand was being put forth on her behalf, and she trusted that through the birth of the sons her husband's feelings would be changed towards her. The story then proceeds along familiar lines, in the envy and jealousy of the two sisters. First Rachel and then Leah manifests this spirit, with what results we know only too well. It is not too much to say that all this household friction had its dire influence upon the temperaments of the children, and we can hardly be surprised at what we read of them in after-days. There could not be righteousness, holiness, and peace amid such untoward surroundings. When there is trouble between parents, the children must necessarily suffer. It is impossible also to avoid noticing what seems to be a declension in Leah's spiritual life from the time of the birth of her fifth son (Genesis 30:17-21). In connection with the first four the Lord's hand was very definitely perceived, but now there is no longer any reference to the Covenant Name Jehovah, and the expressions indicate what is almost only purely personal and even selfish as two sons and a daughter are born to her. At length God heard the prayers of Rachel and granted her her heart's desire in the birth of a son. It was now her turn to recognize the hand of the Lord and to acknowledge His mercy and goodness in dealing with her. As we review the whole story we are impressed more and more with the sadness of it all. It started with Laban's deception combined with Leah's co-operation; and although perhaps it would have been impossible for Jacob to have sustained any protest against this action, we can see the result of it in the years of sorrow and chastening that came to him and all the actors in this unhappy domestic tragedy. Where the home life is not full of love and peace, there can be no true witness for God or genuine helpfulness to one another.

II. At Work (Genesis 30:25-43) The birth of Rachel's son seems to have been a turning-point in Jacob's life, and to have prompted a desire to return to his own country. He had now been with Laban the best part of twenty years (Genesis 31:38; Genesis 31:41), and the longing for the old

country and the old home pressed heavily upon him. Laban, however, was altogether unwilling to lose so valued a servant, for far too much blessing had come into his life through Jacob to allow him willingly to depart. He therefore suggested to Jacob that he should stay and fix his own terms; but Jacob was not ready to do this. He had had experience already of the way in which Laban had not kept his engagements about wages (Genesis 31:7; Genesis 31:41), and he therefore preferred to take matters into his own hands. The real Jacob comes out in his distrust of others and his determination to manage things for himself. He therefore proposes to leave with Laban all the animals of one color, and to keep for himself those that were spotted and speckled among the sheep and the goats. If we read Laban's words aright (Genesis 31:34) it would seem as though he agreed to this proposal with reluctance; but his caution and greed are at once seen (Genesis 30:34-35), for he proceeds to remove the very animals that would be likely to fall to Jacob's lot, hands them over to the care of his sons and then puts the distance of three days' journey between them and Jacob. This again shows the character of the man with whom Jacob had to deal. Truly the deceiver is having a full payment in his own coin.

It is now Jacob's turn to plot and plan, and his retaliation is sharp and complete (Genesis 31:37-43). He is quite the equal of his uncle, and his plan succeeds beyond his imagination, for he increased exceedingly and had large flocks as well as a great retinue of servants. He was not likely to be far behind in any effort for his own advantage, and we can see in this method of revenge the depth of his resentment against Laban. It was a case of equal meeting equal, for there is nothing to choose between them in the character and extent of their cleverness and craft.

Suggestions for Meditation The entire story is full of searching lessons as we contemplate the extent to which human nature will go in furthering its own ends and accomplishing its own will. At the same time it is not without a background of teaching concerning the overruling mercy of God.

1. A Severe Discipline. The fact that God permitted the deception about Leah to be practised on Jacob seems to suggest that it was necessary for him somehow or other to be emptied of self and self-seeking. Circumstances were therefore used to break him down and bring him to the end of himself. It is certainly very remarkable that, notwithstanding his intense love for Rachel, it was through Leah that the most permanent-that is, the Messianic-blessings were to come to and through him. It is a striking fact of experience that when he was about to enter upon the enjoyment of his seven years of toil God allowed something else, instead of that which he desired, to come into his life; something entirely unexpected; something that seemed the very opposite of what he wished. When such disappointments come-if, as in this particular case, they are not the result of our own sin-it is well for us by the Spirit of God to be able to transmute our disappointment into "His appointment," for very often by such discipline our life becomes more fruitful. What we want may be good, but what we need may be better; and God deals with our needs, not with our wants.

2. A significant testimony.

How very striking it is to read Laban's words in appealing to Jacob not to depart! "I have learned by experience that the Lord bath blessed me for thy sake" (Genesis 30:27). Laban had wit enough to see the value of having Jacob associated with him, and so he seeks to profit by the association, and use Jacob for his own ends. There does not seem to have been any real religion in Laban, but he was able to appreciate the value of it in Jacob. There are many Labans today who are not personally pious, but who are quite able to appreciate the good effects of piety in others. They do

not become Church members and workers, but they attend church because of the social and other advantages that accrue to a profession of Christianity. It is a fine testimony to the value of religion when a man of the world is able to realize that there is something in it after all, and that, however indirectly, it “pays” to be associated with God’s people. So far as the man’s personal life is concerned we may rightly speak of it as mean and contemptible, but we must not overlook the fact that it is a genuine testimony to the value of religion.

3. A sad down fall. When we read of Jacob’s plot against Laban our hearts sink within us as we remember that this was done by a man who had been to Bethel, had seen angels, and heard the voice of God. We may not be surprised at Laban’s deception; but for one who had met with God to descend to the level of the worldling, was indeed a deplorable revelation. Here are two men trying to outwit each other, and one of these two men is a professed believer in God. It is absolutely impossible to excuse and to exculpate Jacob. On no account was he warranted in following Laban’s example. Just as it had been almost from the first, he was afraid to trust God with his affairs. He must take them into his own hands, and use all kinds of unworthy means to bring about ends that were in themselves perfectly right and justifiable. It was right and true that he should be paid his wages for those long years of service, but it was utterly wrong that he should be paid as the result of such unworthy means. The corruption of the best is the worst; and when a Christian falls, great and awful is the descent.

4. A striking manifestation. The human side of things is so prominent in this story that we almost fail to see and realize the Divine hand behind it all. How marvelous was God’s patience with His unworthy servant! How much God must have seen in Jacob to have waited all these years, disciplining him, leading him, overruling his mistakes and sins! Is there anything comparable with the patience and mercy of God? As we read the narrative we find ourselves irritated and disappointed with Jacob’s failures and falls after Bethel; and yet God was waiting His own time and way to bring about His purposes, to lead Jacob in the right path, to bring him to the end of himself and his self-seeking, and to manifest in that strong character the power and glory of His grace. Shall we not pray that we may have grace to exercise similar long-suffering patience with others, in spite of all disappointments and shattered hopes? If God be so long-suffering with us, surely we ought to be long-suffering one with another.

Chapter 60

00A.42 Turning Homewards Gen_31:1-55

Turning Homewards Genesis 31:1-55

It was impossible that the relations just described between Laban and Jacob could last long. Everything was hurrying towards climax of a necessary separation. Jacob's heart was also set returning home (Genesis 30:25). As we study the various actors and movements we seem to see at first nothing but jealousy, craftiness, plotting, and hypocrisy. Yet, in spite of all these, we can hardly fail to notice how marvelously God overruled the confusions and made them subserve His purpose of grace for Jacob.

I. The Crisis (Genesis 31:1-3)

Jacob's remarkable prosperity could not remain long unnoticed, and it was perhaps inevitable that Laban's sons should attribute it to craft and theft. And yet, in fairness to Jacob, we must observe that the charge was certainly exaggerated. They made no allowance for their father's craftiness (Genesis 30:35) which was the occasion, if not the cause, of Jacob's counter-move. Laban was evidently actuated by similar feelings of envy (Genesis 31:2). He hardly expected to find his match in his apparently yielding and submissive nephew. In the midst of this trying situation God interposed, and made known His will to Jacob, so that what had hitherto been an intense desire became also a plain duty (Genesis 31:3). He is commanded to return, and with the command comes the promise of the Divine presence.

II. The Consultation (Genesis 31:4-16).

Jacob acts with his accustomed promptitude, and the first step is to take counsel with his wives. To have them in accord with him would be a very great advantage. The journey home would be long, and the destination unknown and strange to them. Much therefore depended on his obtaining their acquiescence. He thereupon placed before them all the facts (Genesis 31:4-13), speaking plainly of their father's injustice to him. Deception, change of wages no less than ten times, and all this in spite of faithful, strenuous, long-continued service, had been Jacob's experience of Laban. But God had not left him, and now had come the Divine message to return to his own land. In this recital Jacob claims for himself Divine protection and approval (Genesis 31:5; Genesis 31:9; Genesis 31:11), and reveals no consciousness of any wrong-doing of his own. To him it was a deep-seated conviction, which marked his life from the outset, that the end justified the means, and it seems clear that he considered he was doing right in taking steps to increase his possessions by reason of Laban's actions in not paying the proper wages. Jacob had a long way to go yet before he came to the end of himself. The true character of Laban is clearly seen from the fact that his daughters entirely sided with Jacob against their own father. Even though it was husband against father, they were very evidently and heartily one with Jacob. They too had experienced their father's selfishness and greed, and were ready to approve of their husband's project and to go with him. While not laying undue stress on this acquiescence and approval, it is impossible not to regard it as a testimony to Jacob's general faithfulness, so far as the wives had

the spiritual discernment to judge of it.

III. The Flight (Genesis 31:17-21).

Again Jacob acted with characteristic promptitude and initiative, that very striking feature which marked all his life. Collecting all that he had, he set out on his long journey. What his feelings were as he turned his face homewards we can well understand. Whether lie had heard of his mother's death we know not; but if the news had not reached him, we can imagine the joyful anticipation of meeting her who had sacrificed much for him. There was, however, one crook in the lot, through happily Jacob was unaware of it. Rachel, his favorite and greatly beloved wife, still retained some of her Syrian superstitions and had stolen the teraphim, or small household gods, belonging to her father. These idols seem to have been used as charms, whose presence was thought to bring good to the possessor. It is curious that Rachel, and not Leah, should have almost always turned out to be Jacob's greatest hindrance in life.

IV. The Pursuit (Genesis 31:22-24).

Jacob had only been gone three days when Laban was told of what had happened. At once he started off in pursuit, evidently intending to bring back the fugitives by superior force, and compel Jacob once more to return to a service that in spite of everything, was decidedly profitable to Laban. But Laban has to reckon with Someone Who was stronger than Jacob. God interposes on Jacob's behalf and warns Laban to do the fugitives no harm. This Divine warning is a clear proof of what Laban had intended to do. It is also a testimony that, in spite of all we with our clear light can now see objectionable in Jacob, right arid truth were on the whole with Jacob, and not with Laban. "Laban's treatment of Jacob has naturally a bearing on the estimate we form of Jacob's behavior towards Laban. Laban is not only the first to break faith with Jacob, but is throughout the chief offender: and had Laban treated Jacob honestly and generously, there is no reason to suppose that he would have sought to overreach him" (Driver, p. 290 The Book of Genesis with introduction and notes) V. The Expostulation (Genesis 31:25-35).

Laban's attitude of injured innocence is very suggestive in the light of the whole story. It is a mixture of hypocrisy and exaggeration. His expressions of love for his daughters and grandchildren are either utterly unreal, or else so impulsively emotional as to be practically worthless. He had had many years of opportunity to show love to them, but the very reverse had been their experience, as they had told Jacob. Love expressed so late as this cannot be worth much. It is what we are prepared to do for our loved ones while they are with us, not the kind of things we say of them after they are gone, that is the real test and genuine measure of our affection.

Laban tells Jacob what he had power to do and what doubtless he would have done but for the warning from God the previous night. And so he contents himself by charging Jacob with the theft of his household gods. It is difficult to appraise at anything like a real spiritual value the religion of Laban. It seems to have been mainly of an indirect and second-hand character, a mixture of truth and error, a blending of a consciousness of the Divine presence with a belief in images. This superstitious use of household gods seems to have been a breach of the law of the second rather than of the first Commandment.

Jacob was of course entirely ignorant of Rachel's theft, and is therefore able to assert his innocence and allow Laban to search through the tents for the lost teraphim. Rachel was a true daughter of her father and a match for him in cunning. But she little knew the trouble she was bringing on Jacob and herself by this deceit.

VI. The Vindication (Genesis 31:36-42) The failure to discover the gods gave Jacob his opportunity to vindicate himself, and right bravely he does it. He recounts with telling force what he had done for Laban, and how he had been requited. And it should be carefully observed that the statements are allowed to "pass unchallenged" (Driver, p. 290 The Book of Genesis with introduction and notes), a proof of their essential truth, for Laban was lot the man to allow all this to be said if it had not been true. One ing at least cannot be laid to the charge of Jacob; he was not faithful in his long-continued service to Laban. These verses r reading and pondering. Jacob clearly sees the true meaning the Divine vision to Laban. It was nothing else than a rebuke r conduct that was in every way uncalled for and despicable. God ay have much against His own servants which He will not allow pass, but He will in any case defend their cause against the ong-doer and champion them in the face of flagrant injustice. (Cf. Jeremiah 15:19-21.) VII. The Covenant (Genesis 31:43-55) (Related Resource: Covenant: Summary Table)

Laban at length realizes the true position of affairs, and proposes to end the feud by a covenant. A pillar is first of all raised, and then a heap of stones. The heap is called by Laban, in Syriac, "Jegarsahadutha" ("the heap of witness"), and by Jacob, in Hebrew, "Galeed," which has exactly the same meaning. The pillar is called "Mizpah" ("watch tower"), and is regarded as the symbol of the Lord watching between the two parties to the covenant and keeping guard over the agreement, lest either should break it. Then comes the solemn oath in the Name of God, followed by the usual sacrifice and sacrificial feast. These two were now "blood-brothers" (see Trumbull's Blood-Covenant), pledged to eternal unity and fealty. The next morning Laban and his followers returned, and Jacob and his household went on their journey.

It is impossible to avoid noticing the curious misconception of the term "Mizpah" which characterizes its use today. As used for a motto on rings, Christmas cards, and even as the title of an organization, it is interpreted to mean union, trust, and fellowship; while its original meaning was that of separation, distrust, and warning. Two men, neither of whom trusted the other, said in effect: "I cannot trust you out of my sight. The Lord must be the watchman between us if we and our goods are to be kept safe from each other." Thus curiously does primary interpretation differ from spiritual application, and conveys a necessary admonition against the misuse of Scripture even by spiritual people.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The will of God in daily life.

Mark carefully the steps by which Jacob was led to return home. They afford a striking lesson on the Divine methods of guidance. First of all a desire to go home sprang up in Jacob's heart. Then circumstances between him and Laban began to make it impossible for him to remain. The nest was being stirred up, and his position rendered intolerable by envy, jealousy, and injustice. And, lastly, came the Divine message of command. Thus inward desire, outward circumstances and the Divine word combined to make the pathway clear. This is ever the way of God's guidance; the conviction of the spirit within, the Word agreeing with it in principle, and then outward circumstances making action possible. When these three agree, we may be sure of right

guidance. When the first two alone are clear, the way may be right, but the time is not yet come. When the third only is clear and the two former are not, we may be certain that the way is not right. Only let us be spiritually alert, and then “the meek will He guide in judgment, the meek will He teach His way.” (Psalms 25:9 -note) 2. The acknowledgment of God in daily life.

We cannot fail to see the way in which Jacob, Leah, Rachel, and Laban, all in their turn and way, speak of God as either interposing on their behalf or else taking action to prevent them from accomplishing their purpose. Above all we observe the way in which Laban and Jacob make and complete the covenant, by invoking God’s presence and power. It may not be possible always to discern God’s hand aright, or to attribute to Him precisely the things that really come from Him, but it is surely one of the prime secrets of true life to be able to acknowledge God’s presence and power, and to realize that there is “a Divinity that shapes our ends.” The words of the wise man are as true today as ever, and true moreover, in spite of any mistakes we may make about God’s hand: “In all thy ways acknowledge Him.” (Proverbs 3:6) To do this is to live as He desires us to live.

3. The Providence of God in daily life.

Amid much that is sad and even sordid in this story; amid “envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness”; amid craft, deceit, and lying on almost every side, we cannot fail to see the hand of God overruling, and making even the wrath of man to praise Him. We are often perplexed by the problems of sin and freewill, and we are baffled as we try to think out how God’s will can possibly be done amid all the perverseness of human nature. But we can learn much from a story like this, as we observe each actor a perfectly free agent and yet see everything taken up into the Divine purpose and made to serve far-reaching ends. We may well speak of God’s providence, His “seeing beforehand” and making provision accordingly. It is this that gives quietness amidst perplexities, and enables the soul to rest in faith until all is made clear. God’s providence is indeed the saints’ inheritance.

00A.43 God's Host for Man's Help Gen_32:1-23

God’s Host for Man’s Help Genesis 32:1-23

God’s discipline for man sometimes takes the form of a lengthened process, like the years of Jacob with Laban. At other times it is experienced in the form of a short and perhaps sharp crisis, as at Bethel. We are now to consider another of these crises in the life of Jacob, a turning-point, a pivot in his career. Freed from the trammels endured at Haran, he soon becomes aware once again of the hand of God upon him and the Divine purpose concerning him. The grace of God which had never left him, is now to work upon him as never before. Let us mark closely the various stages of the process. Now and henceforward we shall see very clearly the conflict of nature and grace, and the way in which grace overcomes nature. There is scarcely any character in Scripture which is more full of profound yet practical lessons for the spiritual life.

I. Messengers of God (Genesis 32:1-2)

Delivered from the thraldom of Laban’s service Jacob goes on his way towards the old home, only to realize before long that another difficulty confronts him in his brother Esau. But between the two difficulties comes this timely revelation from God; “the angels of God met him.” How and by what way this manifestation was vouchsafed, whether by waking vision or midnight dream, we know not. Suffice it to say that it was one more proof of the Divine assurance that Jacob should not be left until the purpose of God had been accomplished in him (Genesis 28:15). The angels of God had come to him at Bethel (Genesis 28:12) and in Haran (Genesis 31:11), and now met him again. The ministry of angels to the children of God is one of the most interesting and precious elements of the Divine revelations in Scripture. No details are given to satisfy curiosity, but the fact is certain and the blessedness is real (Psalms 34:7 -note; Daniel 6:22 -note; Hebrews 1:14 -note). And it is worth while remembering that angels, as they are brought before us in Holy Writ, are invariably depicted as the servants of the saints-their inferiors, not superiors. It is probably a mistake to think of angels as occupying an intermediate place between men and God, as something more than the one and less than the other. It may have been this error that has led to the worshipping of angels and the thought of them as mediators between an impure humanity and a holy God. Scripture, on the contrary, reveals them as always ministers, servants, of those who are higher than themselves in spiritual place and privilege, of those who are “heirs of salvation.” (Cf. Hebrews 1:14 -note; 1 Peter 1:12 -note) This manifestation from God Jacob was quick to see. He recognized the Divine hand, and said, “This is God’s host.” Whatever may have happened during those years in Haran, Jacob still retained sufficient spiritual discernment to apprehend God’s action in this meeting. And he at once raises a memorial of the occasion by calling it “Mahanaim”-”Two Hosts” or “Two Camps”-God’s heavenly host and his own earthly host of possessions granted to him by God (Genesis 31:9) and now to be protected by God. “Whether visible to the eye of sense or, as would appear, only the eye of faith, they are visible to this troubled man; and, in a glow of confident joy, he calls the name of that place “Mahanaim,” Two Camps. One camp was the little one of his own down here, with the helpless women and children and his own frightened and defenceless self;

and the other was the great one up there, or rather in shadowy but most real spiritual presence around about him, as a bodyguard making an impregnable wall between him and every foe" (Maclaren). On the first great occasion of his life he had raised his memorial and called it "God's House" (Genesis 28:17). On this, the second great occasion, he is conscious of "God's Host." He has still a deeper experience to pass through before he can raise his third and crowning memorial to "God's Face."

II. Messengers of Man (Genesis 32:3-6).

It is impossible to avoid seeing the connection and contrast between God's messengers to Jacob and Jacob's messengers to Esau. The pity of it is that Jacob did not fully learn the simple yet profound lesson of the connection. As he nears the borders of the old country, memory begins to move and conscience to work. He knows that there can be no peace and quiet until his relations with Esau are assured and put on a proper footing. Not until that matter was settled could Jacob feel certain of his future. Is not this a great principle of the spiritual life? We must put right what we know to be wrong before we can enjoy settled peace. Unconfessed sin, unforgiven wrong, must be dealt with and put right. Righteousness must precede peace (Isaiah 32:17; Psalms 85:10 -note and Psalms 72:3 -note).

Jacob's despatch of an embassy to his brother was obviously to feel his way, to learn Esau's mind towards him. But the obsequiousness of the message, with its repeated emphasis on "my lord Esau" and "thy servant Jacob," does not sound well from one who had met the angels of God. The words indicate a servile fear that seems strange and surprising in one who had already been assured of the birthright and blessing, and whose personal position as the owner of great possessions surely warranted a higher tone. There is a world of difference between genuine repentance and grovelling humiliation. Jacob could have shown the one without the accompaniment of the other. The message is throughout marked by a spirit of fear of Esau which is unworthy of one who had received such assurances from God. But Jacob was probably not the first, as he certainly was not the last, to fail to realize the direct and causative influence of his intercourse with God on his intercourse with man. While he is in God's presence he seems to be learning aright his spiritual lessons; but when he is face to face with a crisis he forgets the assurances derived from God and proceeds to act for himself as though his own initiative and natural powers were everything. The messengers return and bring news of the coming of Esau to meet his brother, accompanied by 400 evidently armed men. Not a word of friendly greeting in response to the fawning message, not a single indication of reconciliation in spite of all the intervening years. Not even Jacob's reminder of his long sojourn with Laban "until now," with its implication of having left Esau free all this time, had sufficed to put matters right. The old hostility which had died down by lapse of time seems to have been roused up, and the impulsive, easily-stirred Esau sets out to meet Jacob with a retinue which appears to bode nothing but ill. It may have been done merely to frighten Jacob, or it may have been prompted by a genuine determination to take revenge, but it had the immediate effect of driving Jacob into an exhibition of his old natural self, and thereby afforded a fresh proof of the small extent to which God's assurances of grace had as yet laid hold of his inner life.

III. Fear of Man (Genesis 32:7-8).

Jacob's intense fear and distress were evidently due to his conviction that Esau's coming meant hostility, that the past had not been forgotten or overlooked. But he soon recovers his balance, though, instead of at once casting himself on God, he begins his characteristic work of planning. Esau's host had for the time driven out of his mind the host of God, and now again he proceeds to display that natural resourcefulness which characterized him all his days from the beginning to the very end. He divided his possessions into two parts, so that in case Esau fell on one of them the other might escape and at least something be left. The employment of this stratagem clearly shows that with all his possessions armed resistance was quite impossible, and, still more, it shows that once again Jacob was not using for his own peace and assurance the real meaning of the revelation that God had vouchsafed to him. At that moment the "angels of God" were not in his mind, or he might easily have remembered that they who were with him were more than all Esau's host (2 Kings 6:16).

IV. Fear of God (Genesis 32:9-12) And yet, in spite of all his clever planning, he cannot help turning to God, even though, like many others since, he arranges matters before he begins to pray (Acts 1:23-24). He called God to help him in the due execution of his own projects, instead of reversing the order and asking, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Let us now look at his prayer. It is worthy of careful consideration on several grounds; both for what it contains and also for what it lacks.

It is a prayer of real and yet partial faith (Genesis 32:9).

He calls on God, and so far well; yet is it not strange, after Bethel and Haran and Mahanaim, that he does not rise to the height of calling God his own God, but contents himself with the thought of God as the God of his fathers? Then, again, his faith is clear and true in his reminder to God of His commands and promises about the return from Haran, but is it not curious that he does not see that after these promises God would surely take care of him? By all means let us put God in remembrance and plead His promises, but let us also expect that God can and will fulfil His own word (Acts 27:25). His faith, then, was real, but partial; true, but inadequate; and yet, though it is easy for us as we read the narrative to see where he failed, let us not forget that we are often doing the very same ourselves, with far greater light than Jacob had, and therefore with infinitely less reason. We must take care lest we miss the lesson for ourselves in all this, "lest we forget." The prayer was also marked by true humility (Genesis 32:10).

He acknowledged his own unworthiness of all that God had done to and for him, and with heartfelt gratitude he testifies to the way in which blessings had been showered on him. There is perhaps nothing wanting here unless, as some think, it be a consciousness of sin. Certainly we find no indication that he realized any connection between his present fear of Esau and the events associated with the surreptitious possession of the blessing. But in any case the spirit of this humility is a marked advance on anything we have hitherto seen in Jacob. God was indeed at work in his soul. The prayer was also one of intensely earnest entreaty (Genesis 32:11).

He cries out for fear of Esau, and craves deliverance. He assigns as his reason for protection the fear lest he, his wives, and children should be destroyed by his passionate and ruthless brother. The reference to the "mother with the children" is very touching and beautiful, revealing the tenderness of Jacob's nature. And yet it is impossible to overlook the characteristic lack of faith whereby, after expressing this fear of losing his children, he quotes God's promise about those

very children being “as the sand of the sea.” How like Jacob was this failure to draw the true conclusion of faith from the premises of the Divine promise! And if we call attention to it we are not desirous of blaming him, so much as of using his failure to point the moral for ourselves. “Hath He said, and shall He not do it?” As we review this prayer we seem to see in it a revelation of a genuine work of grace after years of apparent fruitlessness. Like a stream that emerges into day after running for a long distance underground, Jacob’s spiritual life comes out now after those years at Haran; and, though there is still much to seek, we can see the clear marks of the work of God directing, deepening, and purifying his soul. God had never left him (Genesis 28:15), as these spiritual experiences abundantly indicate.

V. Dread of Man (Genesis 32:17-19)

Once again we seem to be brought face to face with the other and less worthy side of Jacob. After prayer he is planning again. What is the connection between his praying and his planning? Was the latter the due use of precautions? Was it the proper way of answering his own prayer? It would hardly seem so. It appears rather to be an expression of his intense fear. He proceeds to arrange his possessions into droves of cattle, with distances separating them. He is intent on appeasing Esau with a present, and with remarkable skill he brings train after train to lay siege to his brother. He piles present upon present to break down opposition. When he first sent messengers to Esau (Genesis 32:3) there was no indication of any present, for he thought perhaps none would be needed; but now his great fear compels him to take these steps. He is still concerned to manage Esau, instead of letting God do it for him; and the message to the servants breathes the same spirit of obsequious cringing to his brother. Truly “the fear of man bringeth a snare,” (Proverbs 29:25) and it is only “he who trusteth in the Lord” that is set on high above all such dread.

VI. Distrust of God (Genesis 32:20-23) .

It seems clear that all this careful preparation was unwarrantably made. We can see it now in the sequel (Genesis 28:9), but it was equally unwarranted before Esau appeared. The man who prayed that prayer (Genesis 32:9-12) surely ought not to have spoken as he afterwards did (Genesis 32:20). Had he not already forgotten his prayer? He was so filled with his own fears and prospects that he quite failed to rest his heart on God and trust Him to plan and protect. If we express our needs in prayer, it is obviously unfitting to go on arranging and scheming as though we had never prayed. It is one thing to seek wisdom from God and trust Him for it; quite another to ask God’s blessing on our own wisdom. And it was this that Jacob had to learn before he met Esau. Only when God had brought him to an utter end of himself could the true position be taken and the full blessing granted. Meanwhile we pause here to gather up some of the most obvious lessons for ourselves.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. God’s provision comes just when it is needed. The angelic host appeared just after Jacob had left Laban and before he encountered Esau. God is never too soon and never too late. “Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness.” The old theological phraseology of “prevenient grace” embodies one of the profoundest and most precious truths of the spiritual life. God anticipates our need, and provides His grace just when we require it. He sees beforehand, what we cannot see, the needs of the soul, and comes in love to meet them. Whatever the circumstance or emergency, God will be there; for wit only has He said, “I will not forsake thee” (that is, when once He has come), but also “I will not fail thee” (that is, when the

need first arises). As we go on our way we may rest assured that God's host will meet us.

2. God's provision comes just as it is needed. Not only when, but as; not only timely, but appropriate. What was Jacob's one great need at that moment? Surely it was protection. And so God sent His host to assure him of it. God always suits His grace to His people's needs. When Israel was in Egypt they needed deliverance, and obtained it. When they reached Sinai they required instruction, and received the Law. When hostility from surrounding nations was at hand, then, and then only, came the entirely new title "the Lord of hosts" (1 Samuel 1:3). So it is always. "As . . . so" is God's great principle for His people. Whatever the need, that will be the nature and measure of the supply.

3. God's provision should remove the fear of man. The Divine revelation to Jacob was intended to do for him exactly what he needed most, and yet he never really lost the fear of his brother. He could not fully trust God. He "committed his way to the Lord," but did not "trust also in Him." He still carried his burden himself, even after God's angels came, and after his own prayer to God. And yet God's grace is intended to be a reality in our lives. We miss very much when we do not trust Him fully. If only the swimmer yields to the water, the water bears him up; but if he continues to struggle, the result is disastrous. Let us learn to trust, just as we learn to float.

4. God's provision renders clever scheming unnecessary and even sinful.

There is a very true sense in which everyone who prays must also use means. "Trust in God and keep your powder dry." But there is an equally true sense in which anxiety about means and methods is the very reverse of the right attitude for the believer. Jacob's heart was more set on planning than on praying. He plans before and after his prayer. He asks God, it is true, but almost at the same time he seems to feel that he must depend entirely on his own resources. He leans on his plan more than on his prayer; indeed, as we read of the plans, we forget that he ever prayed, and he apparently forgot it also. To the true believer, the man of real faith in God, there will be no real difficulty as to the relation of prayer and work. His work, as well as his prayer, will be manifestly permeated by trust in God. There is a very real sense in which orare est laborare; for the man who prays trustfully, restfully, hopefully, will find heart and mind so taken up with God that instinctively he will be led to adopt such methods as will reveal his trust and answer his own prayer. The soul that is truly and fully occupied with God will never be at a loss to know the true relation between prayer and work, work and prayer; for in answer to prayer comes the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of a sound mind, the spirit of courage and fearlessness, the spirit of calm restfulness and equally calm progress. It will know when to "stand still" and when to "go forward," because God is its all in all.

NOTE.-The word rendered "appease" in Genesis 32:20 is kipper, the word afterwards used for "covering" or "atonement." This is its first occurrence in the Bible (Genesis 20:16 is different, but allied in thought), and, according to the principle of first occurrences in Scripture (see on Genesis 16:1-4), the usage here helps to interpret the true meaning of atonement.

Chapter 62

00A.44 Peniel: The Face of God Gen_32:24-32

Peniel: The Face of God Genesis 32:24-32 THE one absorbing thought with Jacob was his meeting with Esau. It never seems to have occurred to him that there was a far greater need-a meeting with God. Still less did he imagine that there could be any connection between the two meetings, that his meeting with God would prove the best preparation for meeting his brother. These two thoughts sum up the story before us: Jacob must meet God before he meets Esau, and the one meeting will be the only and sufficient way of preparing for the other. We are thus able to understand what a spiritual crisis this was to Jacob, and we can also perceive, what Jacob did not, how lovingly God provided for this by the embassy of the angels (Genesis 32:1). More than this, we can see in the story an illustration of God's dealings with His children today. Are we faced with some difficult problem? Are we opposed by some apparently insuperable obstacle? Are we at our wit's end in view of some terrible need? Let us learn from the story of Jacob to put God first, and thereby to discover the secret of all real spiritual power and blessing. The story brings before us a striking contrast of the human and the Divine, and reveals the way in which the human is met, dealt with, overcome, and blessed by the Divine. Step by step as the narrative is unfolded we observe this contrast between nature and grace, between man and God, between self-effort and Divine power.

I. Human Solitude (Genesis 32:24).

Jacob had sent all his family, household, and possessions over the ford Jabbok. But for some reason or other he remained that night on the opposite bank; he was "left alone." Why was this? He was clearly conscious that a great crisis had come in his life. Anything might happen on the next morning when Esau and his four hundred men arrived. He had planned and prayed, prayed and planned, and now there was nothing more for him to do. Inaction was the most difficult of all things for so resourceful and energetic a nature. For Jacob to wait, instead of to work, was the greatest of all efforts. And yet there he was, in the darkness of the night, alone, with all the events of the past day clear before him, with all the awful possibilities of the coming day well in view. Why, then, was he alone? Is there any spiritual meaning in it? Was there a spiritual need expressed by this sending over all his household and himself remaining outside the promised land? Was 'there any idea of the blessing of solitude as "the mother-country of the strong?" It is difficult to say, but the probability is that this solitude was merely for the purpose of taking every possible precaution. He had arranged his present to "appease" his brother, he had sent over the ford all that was nearest and most precious to him, and now he remains alone on guard, ready for any emergency, or any attack under cover of the night. Alert as ever, he will leave nothing to chance; he will not even sleep.

II. Divine Discipline (Genesis 32:24).

Suddenly he is conscious of an assailant. A man wrestles with him. At once, the courageous, resourceful Jacob closes with this opponent. It would seem as though Jacob regarded him as an emissary of Esau who had come to bar his way to the promised land. As such he is to be resisted

and opposed with all possible strength. The struggle went on until daybreak, and all the while it was not Esau or any of his men. Let us mark carefully the description: “There wrestled a man with him.” It is sometimes read as though Jacob wrestled with the man, and from it is derived the lesson of prevailing- prayer. But this is to mistake altogether the point of the story. “There wrestled a man with him.” The wrestling was an endeavor on God’s part to break down Jacob’s opposition, to bring him to an end of himself, to take from him all self-trust, all confidence in his own cleverness and resource, to make him know that Esau is to be overcome and Canaan obtained not by craft or flattery, but by Divine grace and power. There is no lesson at all on prevailing prayer. Far from it; quite the opposite. The self-life in Jacob is to be overcome, the old nature is to be conquered, the planning is to be rendered futile, and the resourcefulness made impotent. Instead of gaining Canaan by cleverness he must receive it as a gift from God. Instead of winning he must accept it from Divine grace. Was this a literal physical struggle? Most assuredly it was. The outcome shows this very clearly (Genesis 32:25; Genesis 32:31-32). And yet the physical aspect is subservient to the spiritual, the bodily weakness was to be a symbol of the spiritual need of the man.

III. Human Opposition (Genesis 32:25). In the darkness of the night Jacob did not realize who and what his assailant was. And so he put forth all his resources of bodily vigor. Keyed up by the stirring events of the preceding day, and remembering that all his precious possessions were involved, to say nothing of his own life, he resisted this powerful opponent, and the struggle remained in the balance hour after hour. His pertinacity was marvelous! Here was no coward, no poltroon, but a man of unbounded energy, ready to fight for his own to the last.

How like he is to many of us today! We do not realize that all these untoward circumstances, these perplexities, these sorrows, are part of the Divine discipline, and intended to bring us to the end of ourselves. And so we struggle, and strive, and fight, and resist, and all to no purpose. God had been trying to get Jacob to trust Him all these years. He met him at Bethel with vision and promises, and yet how poor was the response (Genesis 28:1-22). He met him again during those years in Haran, using disappointment (Genesis 29:1-35), trouble (Genesis 30:1-43), and opposition (Genesis 31:1-55) to lead to trust, but to little or no effect. And then came the angelic host (Genesis 32:1 ff) ; but its effect was only transient, the self-effort was soon in the ascendant again. And now comes the crowning attempt to break down this man’s self-confidence and lead him to lean, to trust, to wait on his covenant God. But he will not, he cannot; he must oppose, he must resist, he must act for himself. He might pray, and pray earnestly, but he must also act; and act he did, though the net result was only to thwart and delay the Divine purpose concerning him. So it is often with us; we refuse to trust God, to put Him first, in spite of all the assurance of His love and the revelation of His grace through many a long year. But God did not leave Jacob, and He does not leave us.

IV. Divine Power (Genesis 32:25). At last Jacob was made to realize the true state of affairs. So outstanding was the human opposition that nothing short of a special manifestation of Divine power would suffice to break it down. God could have done this earlier in the struggle, but He would not, for He wanted Jacob’s willing surrender. Yet at length, as He could not obtain this, there was nothing else to be done but to deal with him in severity, and by an assertion of Divine power to bring this masterful man to an end of himself. God wished Jacob to realize that only by Divine grace he could meet Esau and enter Canaan; that he could not overcome by guile and enter by

cleverness; that only by mercy, grace, and favor could his difficulties be met and his way prospered. And so “He touched the hollow of his thigh,” took away the very power required for wrestling, brought him by one swift blow to the very end of his resources, and left him utterly powerless. Thus Divine love dealt with him in mercy and taught him, albeit in severity, the one lesson he needed most to learn.

Here again we see ourselves and God’s dealing with us. God must bring us to Himself, and He can only do this by bringing us to an end of ourselves. And because of our senseless resistance and dull inability to see His fatherly hand in discipline, he has to touch our natural powers and resources, and reduce us to impotence before He can teach us the needed lesson and bestow the needed grace. And yet His “touch” is always one of love, of wisdom, of mercy, if only we would see it.

V. Human Helplessness (Genesis 32:26). As the dawn came on, Jacob recognized the mysterious assailant. No longer able to wrestle, he began to cling. Instead of opposition came tenacity, and Jacob proved himself to possess the latter as fully as the former. Disabled at the very point of strength for wrestling, Jacob could do nothing but cling. From cunning to clinging, from resisting to resting-this was the literal and symbolical experience of the crafty but now conquered Jacob. His words, ‘I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me,” are clear evidence of the change in him. He is conscious at last of the futility of all his efforts to appease Esau and overcome his animosity, and now he clings to God and seeks for blessing. At last he is in the right position, but at what cost! If only he had learnt the lesson sooner, how much trouble and anxiety he would have been spared! No fears of Esau, no need of planning to appease him, no concern for his wives and children, nothing but rest of heart in the love of God. Ah! if only he had learnt the lesson of Bethel, and the lesson of Haran, and the lesson of Mahanaim! But now it is learnt, and God is better to him than all his fears. What he struggled for, he lost; what he trusted for, he gained. So it is always. It is always worth while to trust God and put Him first.

VI. Divine Blessing (Genesis 32:27-29).

“Except Thou bless me” was Jacob’s desire (Genesis 32:26). “And He blessed him there” was the Divine answer (Genesis 32:29). But what was included in that Divine blessing? Very much that concerned Jacob’s life and experience. A new character was to be his. He is asked his name, and is compelled to call himself Jacob, “Supplanter.” But this is to be changed to “Israel,” “God’s Prince” or “God’s Perseverer” (Driver - The Book of Genesis) ; the one who is no longer the crafty one, but he who is worthy to prevail, to lead, to rule, to overcome. A new power was also to be his. He had experienced power with God by clinging. He is now to have power with man by reason of having power with God. (Cf. Hosea 12:3-4.) When God is put first, power with man naturally and necessarily follows. The gloss of the Septuagint and the Vulgate seems to give the true idea of the verse: “Thou hast had power with God; much more shalt thou prevail with men.” The one is the guarantee of the other. A new experience was also to be his. The Divine Angel could ask Jacob’s name (Genesis 32:27), but Jacob was not allowed to know the Angel’s (Genesis 32:29; cf. Judges 13:17). There seems little doubt that this was a Divine manifestation, not the visit of a created angel. (Cf. Genesis 18:1-2; Genesis 18:16; Genesis 18:22.) But if Jacob might not know His name, he could experience His blessing, for “He blessed him there.”

VII. Human Gratitude (Genesis 32:30). As on previous occasions, Jacob again raised his “Ebenezer,” and made a memorial of the experience which had been vouchsafed to him. He called the name of the place “Peniel,” God’s Face, in token of that wonderful bestowal of God’s favor and of the preservation of his life (Exodus 33:20; Deuteronomy 4:33; Judges 6:22 f. and Judges 13:22). He realized, in some measure at least, what it meant. God had met him, taught him, blessed him; and now he could meet Esau without fear, and face any emergency, in the strength of that glorious vision.

VIII. Divine Glory (Genesis 32:31-32).

“The sun rose upon him.” There was sunshine within as well. The sun seemed brighter than ever that morning, and the very face of nature seemed changed by reason of that vision of the face of God. The sun of God’s glory was reflected on Jacob’s face too, and though he had to bear the marks of that contest (Genesis 32:31), and though there was to be a perpetual record of it in the days to come (Genesis 32:32), yet it had all been worth while, for the grace of God had overcome the self-effort of man, the fear of God had displaced the fear of man, the power of God had given assurances as to the power of man. Jacob was now a monument of Divine grace, and was intended henceforth to live to the Divine glory. Thus God justified and vindicated Himself in the life of His unworthy servant, “to the praise of the glory of His grace.” Thus God’s loving sympathy, marvelous patience, and perfect wisdom shone forth in His dealings with Jacob; grace was glorified, and God Himself magnified.

(For a summary of the true meaning of this episode, see the suggestive note in Driver’s Genesis, p. 296 The Book of Genesis with introduction and notes.) Suggestions for Meditation

Peniel was a noteworthy landmark in Jacob’s spiritual history. It was the third occasion and culminating point of a special Divine revelation. The first was Bethel, where “the House of God” reminded and assured him of the Divine Presence. The second was Mahanaim, where the “Host of God” taught him the Divine Power. The third was Peniel, where he was led beyond the ideas of God’s presence and power to that of Divine Favor and Fellowship. The “Face” of God is used constantly in Scripture as a symbol of favor, friendship, fellowship (Exodus 33:11; Exodus 33:20; Deuteronomy 34:10), and in the believer’s life fellowship is the highest of our spiritual privileges (1 John 1:3). God desired and purposed to bring Jacob into this position of blessedness and power; and all the Divine dealings, from Bethel onwards, were intended to lead up to this. So it is now; everything that God has for us is expressed in terms of union and communion of which the New Testament is so full. What, then, will this fellowship accomplish?

1. The “Face of God” is the place of transformation of character.

Fellowship with God changes Jacobs to Israels. “Behold . . . we are being changed.” From this time onward there was a very distinct change in Jacob; and although the old nature was still there, Peniel had its effect and exercised transforming influence. There is nothing like fellowship with God to change and transfigure our nature.

2. The “Face of God” is the place of power for daily life.

Like Jacob, we have to meet our Esaus and we are afraid. We strive, plan, struggle, and all to no purpose. But we see God’s Face, and all is changed. Power with man comes from power with

God. We have, it may be, a crisis today; but first of all we pray, and the victory is gained. We wonder who will roll away the stone, but find that it is already gone. Fellowship with God gives insight and foresight, peace and patience, calm and courage in every emergency, and enables us to become “more than conquerors” over every foe. Just as power with God came by surrender, so also will power with men come by willing self-sacrifice on their behalf. Self is the greatest foe to blessing from God or influence with men.

3. The “Face of God” is the place of spiritual blessing. In the presence of God it is impossible to use carnal weapons. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” When Jacob came to an end of struggling and commenced clinging, the blessing quickly came. Jacob hitherto had no idea of a blessing obtained by passive receptiveness. But in the life of a true believer God’s best gifts come that way. Gain comes by loss, gathering by scattering. So it must be always. Fellowship with God dispenses with subterfuges, natural craft, and clever resourcefulness. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. Blessing must be obtained in the right way or not at all. The supreme need of man is the grace of God, and this is not only independent of, but opposed to all that is merely earthly and human. Just as salvation is of God by grace, so is every spiritual blessing derived in the same way. Whether we think of the individual believer or the community of God’s people, all grace comes through fellowship with God. Not by unworthy expedients, not by mere human effort, not by natural energy, but in union and communion with God all grace and blessing become ours. We must see the Face of God.

Chapter 63

00A.45 After Peniel Gen_33:1-20

After Peniel Genesis 33:1-20 WHEN the Angel at Peniel said, “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel,” the obvious meaning was that from that time forward the man was to be known by the new name only. In similar cases of change of name, Abram to Abraham, Saul to Paul, Simon to Peter, the new name persisted and, at least with Abraham and Paul, the old one was never used again. But what do we find in the story of Jacob? This; that after Peniel the name “Jacob” occurs no less than forty-five times, while “Israel” appears only twenty-three times. And what is equally significant, the usage to which we are familiar is “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” not “Abraham, Isaac and Israel.”

Why, then, did not the name “Jacob” disappear entirely and “Israel” take its place? Was it not because Jacob went back from the new position and privilege given him at Peniel? He did not continue true to that Divine revelation; he did not abide in the position and power of a “Prince of God.” It is unutterably sad when a believer recedes from a high position of spiritual privilege. To be disobedient to the heavenly vision and revert to the old type of life is one of the most terrible of sorrows and one of the profoundest of mysteries. It is bad for a man to refuse God altogether; it is in some ways infinitely worse for a believer to lose position, peace, and power through unfaithfulness. Let us give heed to this story of Jacob’s failure, and as we mark his steps backward let us ponder well the secret of his fall.

I. First Step Backward (Genesis 33:1-11). The next morning after Peniel Jacob had yet to face his great problem of the meeting with Esau. The difficulty was still there, Esau and his 400 men, and not even the intercourse with God had removed it. But that intercourse provided him with the secret and means of victory over it if only he had used the opportunity. God does not always see fit to remove obstacles from our pathway, but He always gives power to triumph over them. Instead, however, of Jacob meeting Esau “in the strength of that meat” received by Peniel, we find him still actuated by fear. Leaving household and cattle as arranged the preceding day (Genesis 32:7-8), he makes a new disposition of his wives and children, placing them in such order that the best-loved are hindermost. Thus he prepares for the worst, still contemplating the possibility, not to say the probability, of Esau’s vengeance. The fear of man still brings a snare.

Then, putting himself at the head of his family procession, he goes forward to meet his brother, bowing with very great deference -far in excess, so it would seem, even of the customary Oriental courtesy. He is intent on showing his brother all possible consideration, and apparently means to acknowledge Esau’s superior prerogatives. This, after obtaining the birthright and blessing is strange, and perhaps is intended as a tacit acknowledgment of his old sin of craft and deceit. But be this as it may, the response of Esau is very striking. He runs to meet Jacob, and they greet each other amid tokens of genuine feeling. Esau’s anger had gone in the rush of emotion on seeing his brother after all those years of separation. Rebekah was quite right in her knowledge of her elder son’s feelings. He was impulsive, hasty, passionate, but his anger did not last; there was no brooding revenge, no malevolence. And thus, in an instant, Jacob’s fears were proved to be

groundless, and all his elaborate precautions for safety seen to be entirely unnecessary.

After making the acquaintance of Jacob's family, Esau naturally asked the meaning of "all this drove" that he had met. He was told that it was a present, "to find grace in the eyes of my lord." But all this obsequiousness also proved quite unnecessary, for Esau refused the present, saying that he already had enough. Jacob thereupon pressed him to take it, urging as his reason that he was grateful for his favorable reception. He felt that just as God had received him graciously, so Esau's favor was now equally evident, and in token of his gratitude he pressed the gift upon him.

It is, however, hardly possible to avoid seeing in this urgency a desire on the part of Jacob to purchase Esau's goodwill. He knew his brother's fickleness, and was therefore determined to take every possible precaution. We cannot but feel that Jacob does not come quite worthily out of this meeting. After Peniel it does not read well. In the face of that guarantee of power and grace we are disappointed to read of further precautions, manifest fear, obvious fawning, and continued planning. Jacob has still to learn the lesson of absolute trust in his God. It is worthy of note that all the recognition of God was on his side (Genesis 33:5; Genesis 33:10-11), not on Esau's; but in spite of it all we feel that he did not remain on the high level of Peniel, or derive all the spiritual power he might have obtained from that memorable occasion of fellowship with God.

II. Second Step Backward (Genesis 33:12-17)

Esau proposed that they should journey together, he and his men going forward as the escort. This suggestion was another mark of friendliness, and here we cannot help observing how splendidly Esau showed up on this occasion. Warmth, generosity, unselfishness, willingness to help, friendliness-all these features characterized him. Men of the world often put to shame the children of God in the manifestation of the practical virtues of life. Yet this ought not to be so.

Jacob met this generous proposal in a very characteristic way, and thereby gave another revelation of himself. He called attention to the little children and to the flocks and herds with their young, and pleaded quite naturally for a slow journey, as the children and cattle could bear it. But it was a polite though shrewd way of declining his brother's invitation. He was evidently still mindful of the diversity of their temperaments, and feared that if they were long together, some occasion of friction would arise and again sever their friendly relations. There was, quite probably, real worldly wisdom in this attitude of Jacob. He had a keener insight into the facts of the case than his more superficial brother. Yet we would rather have seen a hearty response to the proposal and a more definite trust in God as to the consequences. And certainly we could have easily dispensed with the renewed obsequious. ness that marked Jacob's language to Esau. It was surely unworthy of a brother to a brother, an equal to an equal-yea, rather a child of God to a man of the world. If a believer has to refuse a request to a non-Christian he should not be afraid to give the right reason for his refusal. Testimony to truth, if given in the right spirit and with a right motive, will never be allowed to do harm.

But, whatever may be said of all this, there is one point in the narrative in which Jacob clearly does definite wrong. In declining Esau's invitation to journey together on account of his own need of a slower progress Jacob distinctly promised to rejoin Esau in Seir. Whereupon Esau naturally offered to leave some of his men as a guide and escort. This again Jacob very politely declined (Genesis 33:15), and at length Esau departed. What, then, was Jacob's next step? Actually this:

instead of going after Esau to Seir, which was situated south-east of Peniel, he took his journey in an exactly opposite direction, and went to Succoth, north-west of Peniel. And thus he took the second step backward, deceiving his brother once again. It is surely impossible even to palliate this falsehood. As he had not the courage to give his brother the real reason of his declining the journey together, so also he told an untruth in order to put as much distance as he could between them. We wonder what Esau must have thought when he found Jacob did not arrive. We wonder whether he discounted Jacob's references to God which he had made on their meeting together. What is the use of our pious verbal acknowledgment of God if we deny Him by our actions and give cause to the men of the world to reflect on our profession of religion and even to blaspheme it? How long will it be before we learn that orthodoxy of profession with unreality of conduct is the most deplorable combination in this world?

III. Third Step Backward (Genesis 33:17).

Jacob did not content himself with a temporary stay at Succoth. He "built him a house and made booths for his cattle." Hitherto he had lived the pilgrim life, as his father and grandfather before him; but now he seeks for something more permanent, and builds a house. A tent was no longer sufficient for him. But it may be asked, Was this wrong? Not per se, perhaps, and yet pretty certainly wrong for him. There are many things not essentially sinful which become sinful under particular circumstances. Jacob had forgotten his vow at Bethel (Genesis 28:21), and by making Succoth so evidently his home he was showing himself to be on a very low spiritual level in his forgetfulness of the claim of God upon him. When God revealed Himself in Haran it was as "the God of Bethel" (Genesis 31:13), and the reminder at that time of the vow made by Jacob was evidence of the prominent and even predominant place Bethel was intended to occupy in the subsequent life of the patriarch. He thus fails to rise to the full height of God's purpose. He had overlooked all this, and was settling down, at any rate for a time, in earthly ease and prosperity. There were no fine pastures at Bethel! How easily we forget our Bethels and all that we have promised God! How disappointing to God must be the failures and unfaithfulness of His servants! How sad to ignore in prosperity the vows we made when we were in danger! And yet, alas! how true this is to life today!

IV. Fourth Step Backward (Genesis 33:18-20).

After a time Succoth was left, and Jacob journeyed on. If we read the R. V., he "came in peace to the city of Shechem," which reminds us of his vow (Genesis 28:21, "in peace"), although he did not go back to Bethel. In this case Shechem is the name of the owner of the place (Cf. Genesis 34:2). If, however, we read the A. V., he "came to Shalem," a city in the country or neighborhood of what was afterwards Shechem or Sychar (John 4:5; Acts 7:16). In pitching his tent "before the city" we see another indication of his low spiritual condition. If he had been true to God he would have recognized his danger in the proximity to the inhabitants of the land. And, as we know, this nearness brought untold trouble upon him.

Then, again, he bought some property there, purchasing the land on which his tent was pitched. He was thus actually buying his own promised possessions, the land assured to him by God! Was this necessary? Surely not. Abraham's purchase was for a very different reason. Why could not Jacob trust God, as Abraham had done? It was because his faith could not rise to the occasion. Jacob's motto-was "A bird in hand is worth two in the bush," and even the intercourse with God

had removed it. But that intercourse provided him with the secret and means of victory over it if only he had used the opportunity. God does not always see fit to remove obstacles from our pathway, but He always gives power to triumph over them. Instead, however, of Jacob meeting Esau “in the strength of that meat” received by Peniel, we find him still actuated by fear. Leaving household and cattle as arranged the preceding day (Genesis 32:7-8), he makes a new disposition of his wives and children, placing them in such order that the best-loved are hindermost. Thus he prepares for the worst, still contemplating the possibility, not to say the probability, of Esau’s vengeance. The fear of man still brings a snare.

Then, putting himself at the head of his family procession, he goes forward to meet his brother, bowing with very great deference -far in excess, so it would seem, even of the customary Oriental courtesy. He is intent on showing his brother all possible consideration, and apparently means to acknowledge Esau’s superior prerogatives. This, after obtaining the birthright and blessing is strange, and perhaps is intended as a tacit acknowledgment of his old sin of craft and deceit. But be this as it may, the response of Esau is very striking. He runs to meet Jacob, and they greet each other amid tokens of genuine feeling. Esau’s anger had gone in the rush of emotion on seeing his brother after all those years of separation. Rebekah was quite right in her knowledge of her elder son’s feelings. He was impulsive, hasty, passionate, but his anger did not last; there was no brooding revenge, no malevolence. And thus, in an instant, Jacob’s fears were proved to be groundless, and all his elaborate precautions for safety seen to be entirely unnecessary.

After making the acquaintance of Jacob’s family, Esau naturally asked the meaning of “all this drove” that he had met. He was told that it was a present, “to find grace in the eyes of my lord.” But all this obsequiousness also proved quite unnecessary, for Esau refused the present, saying that he already had enough. Jacob thereupon pressed him to take it, urging as his reason that he was grateful for his favorable reception. He felt that just as God had received him graciously, so Esau’s favor was now equally evident, and in token of his gratitude he pressed the gift upon him.

It is, however, hardly possible to avoid seeing in this urgency a desire on the part of Jacob to purchase Esau’s goodwill. He knew his brother’s fickleness, and was therefore determined to take every possible precaution. We cannot but feel that Jacob does not come quite worthily out of this meeting. After Peniel it does not read well. In the face of that guarantee of power and grace we are disappointed to read of further precautions, manifest fear, obvious fawning, and continued planning. Jacob has still to learn the lesson of absolute trust in his God. It is worthy of note that all the recognition of God was on his side (Genesis 33:5, Genesis 33:10-11), not on Esau’s; but in spite of it all we feel that he did not remain on the high level of Peniel, or derive all the spiritual power he might have obtained from that memorable occasion of fellowship with God.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The awful possibilities of spiritual degeneration.

Jacob’s experiences after Peniel are a solemn reminder that Conversion (Bethel) and Consecration (Peniel) are no guarantees of abiding faithfulness. They need to be followed by Concentration and Continuance. There are frequent hints throughout Holy Scripture of the ghastly possibilities of spiritual relapse after the most exalted fellowship with God. We think of David’s sin after such a revelation as is recorded in 2 Samuel 7:1-29. We think of Simon Peter’s denial after Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:1-28) and after the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-27). And we remember the solemn warning of Hebrews 5:12; Hebrews 5:14, with its revelation of the awful

possibility of spiritual senility, of second childhood, (Hebrews 5:11-12). It is possible for one who has had great spiritual insight, received great spiritual gifts, done great spiritual service, to lose all by unfaithfulness. Backsliding is a terrible and awful fact, and sometimes the higher the rise the lower the fall. Spiritual experience, however true and rich, does not exempt from danger; rather does it call for greater watchfulness. “So Daniel continued.” The grace of continuance is the greatest need of all. Have we not, perhaps, heard of some servant of God who had been honored and blessed, and afterwards fell into sin and shame? Can we not, perchance, think of some who commenced their Christian life, and it may be their ministry, full of hope and promise, but who are now “unfulfilled prophecies,” by reason of lack of faithfulness to the heavenly vision? They have virtually ceased to pray, practically ceased to meditate on the Bible, ceased to be unworldly; they have adopted unworthy methods in their ministry, pandered to worldliness and earthly ambitions, and the result is dullness, darkness, dryness, deadness in life and ministry, souls not being saved, believers not being quickened, everything stale and unprofitable in their service. They are “cast away,” not in the sense of losing their salvation, but of having lost their usefulness. They are “disapproved,” rejected, set aside. While the regenerate can never become unregenerate, he can, alas! become degenerate, and herein lies one of the gravest perils of the Christian life. Moody once said to Canon Hay Aitken that the one thing he feared most was the loss of his testimony for Christ. “I saw that there was a way to hell even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction.”

2. The simple secret of spiritual stability. This lies in obedience to the heavenly vision, faithfulness to the heavenly voice. If only Jacob had kept God first, and refused to listen to the voice of self, how different would have been his record! With absolute trust in God would have come victory over temptation, courage in danger, and preservation from worldliness. We fail because we distrust God, and distrusting we disobey Him. God’s grace is sufficient for every emergency, and the light granted at Peniel would have detected every danger and protected from every disaster. Every spiritual victory lifts us to a higher plane of power and blessing, and thus we go on from “strength to strength,” from “glory to glory.” There is no need for failure, for backsliding, for defeat, but every warrant for progress, power and preservation. We have only to obey the vision vouchsafed to us, to appropriate the grace provided for us, in order to experience stability, strength and ever-growing satisfaction, to the glory and praise of God.

Chapter 64

00A.46 Results of Unfaithfulness Gen_34:1-31

Results of Unfaithfulness Genesis 34:1-31 A CAREFUL comparison of passages shows that Jacob's stay at Succoth and Shechem must have extended over several years. Bethel and his vow (Genesis 28:22) were evidently forgotten or ignored. The pastures at Succoth and Shechem were attractive, his possessions had so largely increased that movement was difficult, circumstances were perhaps conceived of as having changed, making the realization of the vow almost impracticable. And so Jacob settled down to ordinary life, having either put off or else put aside the fulfilment of his promise. He was not prepared for the upheaval that a move to Bethel would involve. Full of resource whenever danger threatened, he seemed to be "settling on the lees," content with his favored position in Shechem and with his profession of religion as indicated by the altar (Genesis 33:20).

"A spiritual experience that is separated from your present by twenty years of active life, by a foreign residence, by marriage, by the growing-up of a family around you, by other and fresher spiritual experiences, is apt to be very indistinctly remembered. The obligations you then felt and owned have been overlaid and buried in the lapse of years. And so it comes that a low tone is introduced into your life, and your homes cease to be model homes" (Dods, Genesis, p. 313 The Expositor's Bible). And this is the man who has seen the Face of God! This is the man to whom the special Divine revelation of grace had been given! This is the man whom God's goodness and mercy had followed all the days of his life! He it is who is on this low ground of unfaithfulness, of spiritual declension, and who has to suffer for it bitterly. So it is always; spiritual leakage means spiritual loss, a lower tone, a cessation of power, a discontinuance of testimony, and, not least of all, an unrest of soul and untold trouble of heart and life. Let us now observe some of the sad effects of Jacob's unfaithfulness.

I. The Grave Danger (cf. Genesis 33:18-20)

It seems clear that the choice of Shechem was largely conditioned by its favorable position for his family and flocks. Jacob pitched his tent "before the city," in close proximity to the people and the place, in the neighborhood of which he could find society and protection, with pasturage for his flocks. The choice of a home or of a school today is not seldom regulated by the same considerations. A professing Christian man is retiring from business, and determines to reside in the country. Where shall he go? What are his requirements? Healthy surroundings, of course. But also a neighborhood where his young people will be able to enjoy the advantages of good society, where they can mix easily and freely on good terms with the "best people," where social intercourse and entertainment abound, and where the family will soon take its place as one of the recognized centers of social influence. All very attractive and delightful; but does it ever occur to the man who is thus choosing his home to inquire as to the spiritual opportunities of the place? What sort of church has it? Ts the Gospel preached there? Is Christ lifted up? Or is it a fashionable church where either formalism or mere intellectualism rules? But, says the man, "You cannot have everything you want; you must do the best you can with your opportunities, and hope for the best."

Be it so; and spiritual trouble will be the result. Unless a family is deliberately going into a spiritually destitute neighborhood to witness for Christ and to win people to Him (in which case they will not be allowed many social advantages by their neighbors!), the first and supreme factor of choice of a new home should be, “What will it do for our spiritual life?” Or it may be that parents have to choose a school for their boys and girls. They are able to send them to the very best known of private schools, and they quite naturally desire for their children the best opportunities, educational and social. But there are well-grounded reports that these particular schools, though socially advantageous, are morally disadvantageous, and attended with risk. What will the father and mother do? Will they take the risk? Or will they definitely make themselves familiar with the religious life of the school before sending their boy? Or will they not rather send him to a less known school, where all is well religiously, and sacrifice the social advantages of the other school for the sake of moral and spiritual safety? On the answer to these questions much will turn. Jacob chose to live near Shechem, with all the risks involved thereby, and no one ever follows his example without suffering quite as definitely, in some way or other.

II. The Great Disaster (Genesis 34:1-2) The inevitable result of living near Shechem was soon seen. Dinah, the only daughter of Jacob (Genesis 30:21), “went out to see the daughters of the land.” It was a perfectly natural thing for a young, inexperienced girl to do. The thought of visiting “the daughters of the land,” was at once novel and interesting. We wonder, however, what Jacob and Leah were doing to allow it. Why did they not warn Dinah of the danger, and prevent her going? Was this inaction due to their lowered moral tone? Did they argue that there was “no danger” and that “we must not be too particular or strait-laced”? In any case, she was allowed to go, with the result that is well known. The sin of Shechem was, of course, in every way inexcusable, for it was against the youth of the girl, as well as against all known laws of hospitality. And yet in view of the fact that he and his people were people of the land, and not followers of the one true God, it would not be regarded by him and his in the same light of heinousness as it was regarded from Jacob’s side. It is very striking that the word rendered “defiled” (Genesis 34:5; Genesis 34:13; Genesis 34:27) means “desecrated,” and is used later to describe the defilement or desecration of the Temple (Psalms 79:1-13). “The dishonor of womanhood and the desecration of the Holy of Holies are regarded with the same feelings and described by the same word” (Strahan, Hebrew Ideals in Genesis). Thus does the Book of God regard personal purity, and denote and denounce the sin that dishonors it. But while we fail not to point out the sin of Shechem, we may not forget the weakness and unfaithfulness of Jacob that made possible his daughter’s shame.

III. The Unexpected Project (Genesis 34:3-12)

Shechem proceeded to make the only possible reparation. He had evidently become genuinely attached to Dinah and wished to make her his wife. He thereupon requested his father to take the necessary steps to this end according to the custom which made it the parents’ business to obtain wives for their sons (Genesis 24:4; Judges 14:2).

Jacob soon heard the terrible news of his daughter’s fall, and as his sons were not then at home he “held his peace.” We wonder why? Was it because of sorrow and shame as he thought of his daughter and of the circumstances that gave opportunity for it? Was conscience stirring within him, reminding him of Bethel? Or was it a case of real indecision, not knowing what to do, and therefore

leaving the matter to be settled by Dinah's brothers? It is true that brothers seem to have had a great deal to say concerning their sister's life (Genesis 24:50 f.), but at the same time Jacob's silence and inaction, as head of the household, are somewhat difficult to understand. The "silence" does not seem to have been in connection with the proposed marriage, but with reference to the sin and shame. At length the brothers heard of it, and at the same time came Hamor's request on behalf of his son. The proposal for marriage was suggested as an opportunity for the beginning of a general amalgamation of the two families and peoples (Genesis 34:9-10). Shechem was also prepared to give whatever "dowry" they asked, the "dowry" being not a gift to the bride, in the modern sense, but a price paid to the parents for their daughter (Exodus 22:16 f.; 1 Samuel 18:25).

These proposals are significant on several grounds. They show clearly the value set by the Canaanites on union with Jacob's family. It was not the first, and it has not been the last occasion when people of the world have thought it advantageous to be united with the people of God. Godliness, even of the kind then shown by Jacob, has promise of attractiveness and value for men of the world. Then, too, we cannot help noticing the true nobility of character shown by Shechem. In spite of his sin, or at least after it, he stands out well by comparison with the rest of the actors here mentioned. And it is a striking testimony to the candour of the Book that it depicts both this Canaanitish prince and the sons of Jacob so faithfully. The frankness of the Bible is not the least proof of its truthfulness and authenticity.

IV. The Unworthy Pretext (Genesis 34:13-17) The request and proposals of Hamor and Shechem were regarded by Dinah's brothers as impossible unless one particular condition were fulfilled. They took up the ground that it would be intolerable to allow an uncircumcised man to become the husband of one who was within the covenant of God, but they were quite ready to agree to the marriage if the Canaanites would agree to all their males receiving the sign of the covenant. Not only so, they would be prepared to enter into other marriages and to become "one people" with the Canaanites. And this sounded quite fair and straightforward. It was taking up a perfectly intelligible attitude, and one that, if based on right motives, would have been not only necessary and justifiable, but would have brought about the best possible ending to the trouble concerning their sister. But it was the absence of the right motive that condemned their proposal. They had no idea of these men entering the covenant on religious grounds. They were proposing to use the sign of the religious covenant as the means of a purely human agreement. Circumcision without faith in the covenant God could not be anything but carnal and earthly. And, worse still, they were about to employ the solemn seal of the Divine covenant for the purpose of wreaking their vengeance on these unsuspecting men. Their suggestion was therefore nothing more than a pretext to cover treachery. There was the appearance of piety with the reality of intended murder. Could anything be more truly terrible? What a light it sheds on the state of Jacob's home life! And why was Jacob silent during all these proposals? True, he could not know the contemplated treachery, but his entire silence is remark. able. Had he no part or power in the matter of his daughter's life? Or was he weak and irresolute, conscious of his own unfaithfulness?

V. The Trustful Acceptance (Genesis 34:18-24) The requirements of Dinah's brethren were at once welcomed by Hamor and Shechem. The latter was prepared for instant acquiescence, so genuine was his love for Dinah. The proposals were also set before the men of the city, and their acceptance urged by Hamor and Shechem. They pointed out the peaceable character of Jacob

and his family, and the size of the land as sufficient for them all to live in and trade together. It was also shown that amalgamation would prove advantageous in the acquisition of fresh possessions, since all would be as one in the event of marriages between the two races. The proposals thus ably urged were accepted, and the men of Shechem submitted to the condition laid down by Jacob's sons. And apart from any consideration of personal advantage urged as one of the reasons for acquiescence, it is impossible not to see the peaceable and trustful attitude of the Canaanites in the face of Jacob and his sons. The "heathen" show up well by contrast with those who were professedly the people of God.

VI. The Treacherous Action (Genesis 34:25-29)

Very soon the true object of Dinah's brethren was revealed. Their apparently religious requirement was seen to be the cloak of vengeance, and at a convenient moment the trusting Canaanites were massacred, including Hamor and Shechem. Then, after taking their sister home, they returned to complete their fell task by sacking the city and capturing all the women, children, and flocks they could find. Thus they avenged sin by greater sin. It is sometimes said that this was all the result of "religious fanaticism," and that in it we have the first example of that Jewish fanaticism for religion which caused the Jews so much trouble (Dods, p. 314 The Expositor's Bible). It does not, however, appear clear that there was anything of religion in it, but only sheer cruelty and vindictiveness exercised under the guise of a religious rite. The men who could plot and wreak such vengeance did not possess one grain of religion, even of a fanatical kind. The story is one of unrelieved savagery. If only they had been actuated by true motives their sister's shame would have been covered, so far as it could be, by subsequent marriage; but as it was, she was robbed of that refuge, and had to live her life and end her days under the cloud of disgrace, due first to herself and then to her brothers' vengeance. And all this in the family of the chosen patriarch! Could anything be sadder or more disappointing? Could Divine grace overrule these awful troubles? Yes, it could and did, though they still stand recorded in all their hideousness, "written for our learning."

VII. The Surprising Rebuke (Genesis 34:30) At last Jacob speaks, having "held his peace" far too long. He rebuked his sons for their action, but the character of the rebuke is very noticeable. Jacob-like, the patriarch looks at the matter solely from his own point of view.

"Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants…and I being few…they shall gather…against me and I shall be destroyed, I and my house." Could anything be feebler or more unworthy? No blame for the sin committed, only for the danger involved. He was afraid for his life, his home, the land he paid for, the possessions he enjoyed. Trouble comes through unfaithfulness, and then circumstances are blamed. Children bring trouble on parents, and perhaps the fault is originally and largely the parents' own.

Weakness and timidity are here as plainly marked as ever, showing clearly the low tone of the man through long-continued unfaithfulness to God. His apprehensiveness of danger shows that there was no spiritual satisfaction or assurance of safety. He had quite forgotten the Divine promise of protection (Genesis 28:14 f). People who live on the borderland between Church and world are like those who lived in the old days on the borders between England and Scotland-they are never safe.

VIII. The Significant Rejoinder (Genesis 34:31) The sons have the last word, and justify their action in words that partake of the nature of a suppressio veri, and therefore of a suggestio falsi. They omit all reference to the action of Shechem by which he would have done reparation and prevented Dinah from living all her days under the shadow of her sin. Their father allows them to have the last word, not that he admits the truth of their position, but perhaps because argument with such men would be useless, and possibly because he is conscious that his own choice of Shechem for a home was contributory in great measure to what had happened. When, however, the end of his life comes, the old man shows that he had not forgotten their action (Genesis 49:6-7), for he stamps it in its true colors as disreputable and wrong in the sight of God.

Suggestions for Meditation The one lesson that stands out from all the rest is that which is associated with the life and character of Jacob at this time. It is the fact and danger of worldliness.

1. Worldliness is a real spiritual peril.

It is doubtless difficult to define “worldliness,” and on this account it is easy to ridicule the idea and put it down to narrowness, straitlacedness, and censoriousness. But in all ages, under a variety of phases, the fact and force of “worldliness” have been felt and acknowledged by all spiritually-minded people. Does not Church history show a difference in the spiritual life of the Church in the second and third as compared with the fourth and fifth centuries? What was the explanation? Three words sum it up: Constantine, patronage, worldliness. We see it again and again in churches and congregations where sensational or other unworthy methods have been used to attract people, with the result that the ministry is robbed of power, prayer meetings and Bible classes yield to concerts, “the hungry sheep look up and are not fed,” and souls are not saved. We see it also in the individual lives of those who once “ran well,” but who have yielded to pressure and have lowered the standard of holiness for fear of being thought too “narrow” or “too particular.” Yes, worldliness is hard to define, but it is very easy to feel, to detect, and to describe. It is an atmosphere, enervating, lowering, poisoning, deadening; and whenever individuals and churches are under its sway, the result, however long delayed, is as inevitable as it is disastrous to the soul and dishonoring to God.

2. Worldliness prevents spiritual blessing. Not only did Jacob’s worldliness lead to danger and disaster to himself and his household, it necessarily hindered him at the same time from bearing witness to God. “The Canaanite was then in the land,” and, like Lot before him, there was no real testimony, because there was no real difference between him and them. What cared they for his altar, so long as he lived with them and did as they did? What good could the altar do in the face of his life day by day as one of themselves? So it is always. Worldliness lowers tone and prevents testimony. The banner is not displayed, because the life is not true. The standard is not maintained, and blessing is not obtained. There never has been a case where the adoption of worldly methods has justified itself by spiritual blessing. In the Middle Ages the Pope boasted to Thomas Aquinas, as he showed that great scholar the treasures of the Vatican, “The Church cannot now say, `Silver and gold have I none.'“ “True,” said Thomas, “and neither can it say, ‘In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’ “

3. Worldliness can only be prevented by separation. The Master in His High Priestly prayer (John 17:1-26) gives us the true (sevenfold) attitude of the believer and the Church to the world, and thereby reveals the safeguard against this insidious peril. We are given to Christ “out of the world”

(John 17:6) ; we are “in the world” (John 17:11) ; we are “hated by the world” (John 17:14) ; we are “not of the world” (John 17:14) ; we are “not to be taken out of the world,” but “kept from” its evil (John 17:15), and we are “sent into the world” (John 17:18) to witness to it as our Master did, “that the world may know” (John 17:23) who and what He is. All this can only be realized through true spiritual separation, and, however difficult it may be to define exactly the limits of separation, the fact and necessity of it are undoubted. The principles, ideals, and methods of Christianity cannot possibly be mixed with those of the world without contamination; and if only we abide in Christ and continue in His love we shall live in an atmosphere of purity and power which will be our constant safeguard and our sufficient warning. One thing is perfectly clear: no one can read and study the teaching of the New Testament as to “the world” without becoming conscious at once of the danger and of the safeguard, of the enemy and of the protection, of the warfare and of the secret of perpetual victory.

Chapter 65

00A.47 Bethel at Last Gen_35:1-15

Bethel at Last Genesis 35:1-15 A CRISIS had arrived in the life of Jacob. His stay at Shechem was a time of spiritual unfaithfulness and therefore of spiritual unfitness, but the time had come when through a variety of circumstances he was to be brought back to God. “The thirty-fourth chapter of Genesis is God-less; “the thirty-fifth is full of God. The former describes the Shechem life of the Hebrews; the latter their Bethel life. The contrast between a believer’s and an unbeliever’s life is scarcely more marked than the contrast between a half-hearted and a whole-hearted believer’s life” (Strachan, Hebrew Ideals, in loc.). When a believer is out of spiritual condition and is not living in spiritual touch with God, God does not leave him alone. In one way or another he is stirred up, troubled, and dealt with in discipline until he returns to his true life of fellowship. This, as we shall now see, was Jacob’s experience.

I. The Urgent Call (Genesis 35:1).

“And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up 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.” Bethel was only thirty miles away from Shechem, and yet it was quite ten years since Jacob’s return into Canaan. And it was over thirty years since he had made his vow to return to Bethel and acknowledge God’s hand if he were brought back in peace. The conditions had been exactly and completely fulfilled years ago, but the vow was yet unpaid. Now at length came the Divine call, for God could not let His servant rest in disobedience. He must bring him back to the point and place of faithful obedience. The only possible means of restoration after backsliding is the old familiar gateway of repentance and faith.

There was also a personal as well as a Divine reason for returning to Bethel. It was impossible for Jacob to detect the true state of affairs as long as he remained in Shechem. The atmosphere was impregnated with worldliness, and while he continued there he could not detect aright his unspiritual and sinful condition. We might have supposed that it was quite unnecessary for God to command him to go to Bethel “and make there an altar,” for was there not already an altar in Shechem (Genesis 33:20) ? But, as we have before seen, that altar had long lost all spiritual power for Jacob and his family, since their daily living was for the most part a direct contradiction of its testimony. If that altar had been of any real service we should not have had the awful story of the savagery of Jacob’s sons (Ge 34). It is scarcely too much to say that children brought up in an atmosphere of worldliness are the very hardest to impress with the realities of spiritual religion, even though they may attend a place of worship week by week. The life of worldliness during six days is far too powerful for anything that happens on the seventh day to counteract it.

There was also yet another and social reason for Jacob’s removal. He and his family were henceforward in constant dread of trouble and danger from their Canaanitish neighbors. Up to that time everything seemed to be going quietly, and, in their judgment, satisfactorily ; but now it was seen to be absolutely essential to make a move, for it would be no longer safe to abide near Shechem in view of the almost assured certainty of blood revenge on the part of the Shechemites.

These three reasons-the Divine, the spiritual, and the social-combined to lead Jacob out of Shechem. It was doubtless hard, and certainly it must have been costly and troublesome, but it had to be done.

II. The Special Preparation (Genesis 35:2-4) At length Jacob was thoroughly roused, and promptly set about obeying the Divine and urgent command. The first thing to be done was to make due spiritual preparation, and he called upon his household to put away the strange gods that were among them, to purify themselves, and to change their garments. What a revelation this is! It shows at once the true state of affairs. There had been spiritual declension, and Jacob clearly knew of, and had evidently connived at, the presence of idols and idolatrous practices in his household. His love to Rachel had led him to tolerate what he knew perfectly well was contrary to the mind and will of God. It is sad to realize that all this was true of the man who had been brought face to face with God at Peniel. It shows again the awful possibility of spiritual declension, even after the most exalted fellowship with God.

It is very striking to read of Jacob's influence at this time. His appeal to his household at once elicited a whole-hearted response. They saw that he was in earnest, and they gave to him "all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all the earrings which were in their ears." The household gods and amulets were all freely surrendered, and Jacob did the very best possible thing with them; he "hid them under the oak which was at Shechem." Shechem had been the place of spiritual trouble, and these causes of spiritual trouble were appropriately left behind there. It would not have been safe to have allowed them to remain a moment longer in the household. Surrender is the supreme secret and condition of spiritual blessing. As long as there is any mental or moral reservation, there cannot be any real satisfaction in the soul, strength in the character, or service for God. It is noteworthy that there are certain things in connection with the spiritual life that must be entirely given up and destroyed, for it is impossible to sanctify or consecrate them. They must be buried and left behind, for they cannot possibly be devoted to the service of God. It is this that gives point to our Lord's well-known words, "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off." (Matthew 5:30) There are things that have to be cut off and cannot be consecrated. Books have to be burned (Acts 19:19). Evil habits have to be broken. Sin must be put away. There are things that are beyond all reclamation. The dearest idol I have known, Whate'er that idol be;

Help me to tear it from thy throne, And worship only Thee.

It is impossible to avoid noticing the astonishing alacrity and remarkable power of Jacob at this juncture, especially in contrast with his weakness and powerlessness as recorded in the former chapter. He asserted his authority, and his position was accepted without any question even by his strong-willed and savage sons. Even they could not help being impressed with the fact that their father was now on the right ground before God, and was showing the truth of the wonderful revelation at Peniel that when a man has power with God he soon has power with man.

III. The Remarkable Journey (Genesis 35:5)

"And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob." This is a wonderful verse, and is another testimony to the astonishing power of a life that is right with God. "When a man's ways please the Lord He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." So deeply impressed were the Canaanites

round about them that there was no attempt whatever to hinder or injure the departing family. The supernatural fear that came upon them prevented them from taking revenge on the sons of Jacob. We see again the absolute necessity of separation from evil if there is to be true testimony for God. As long as they were at Shechem, there was no real witness; but now that they were separating themselves from it the people were impressed with the supernatural character of the travelers, and “the terror of God” was manifestly experienced by the Canaanites. What confidence this must have put into the heart of Jacob as he received the assurance that he was now at length in the pathway of God’s will! “If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”

IV. The Noteworthy Arrival (Genesis 35:6)

“So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him.” Jacob’s sincerity is very evident in the way in which he accomplished his journey. There was no halting, and no lagging behind, for everything that belonged to him arrived with him; “he and all the people that were with him.” He had become thoroughly aroused to his true position and duty, and at last after thirty years’ absence he was once more back at the place of the Divine vision (Genesis 28:1-22). What memories the place must have called up as he reviewed the past with all his varied experiences! And how thankful he must have felt to be at length in the pathway of God’s will, and assured of peace, rest, protection, and blessing!

V. The Prompt Obedience (Genesis 35:7-8)

“And he built there an altar, and called the place El-bethel: because there God appeared unto him when he fled from the face of his brother.” This was the way in which Jacob fulfilled his vow (Genesis 28:22). The name of the altar is worthy of special note in comparison with that of the altar at Shechem (Genesis 33:20). In Shechem the altar bore witness to God’s relation to Jacob himself, “God the God of Israel”; but at Bethel self is entirely lost and God alone is mentioned, “the God of Bethel,” or “God of the House of God.” This was a higher and nobler thought. Instead of thinking of God in relation to himself, Jacob thought of God alone. His spiritual condition being higher, his conception of God was higher also. The constant recurrence of this name of God, “El,” in Jacob’s history is very interesting. It will be remembered that Abraham built an altar near Shechem (Genesis 17:7), though his altar was not built unto El, but unto Jehovah. In the case of Jacob there had been a special revelation of God under this name of El, both at Bethel and at Peniel, which was incorporated in the new name of Israel; and now once more at Bethel a new emphasis is placed on this name after all the years that had elapsed since Peniel. The reason assigned for the erection of this altar is very striking: “Because there God appeared unto him when he had fled from the face of his brother.” Jacob was conscious of that far-off day in the past, of which he speaks on another occasion as “the day of his distress.” It is always well for us to go back to earlier experiences and refresh our memories by the recollection of some former blessing from God. This is probably one reason why thanksgiving is so strongly emphasized in the New Testament. “Lest we forget.” The remembrance of past mercies in the times of trouble, distress, and danger is one of the greatest encouragements to renewed confidence in our ever-faithful, unchanging covenant God.

It was just at this time that a very precious link with the past was broken. Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died while Jacob was at Bethel, and was buried under an oak-tree there. She very appropriately united together the two visits to Bethel, the day when he started out from home and

the day of his return.

VI. The New Revelation (Genesis 35:9-13)

“God appeared unto Jacob again . . . and blessed him.” How striking is this word “again”! Reconciliation had been accomplished. There was now no cloud between the patriarch and his God, and the Divine appearance which was not permitted him in Shechem comes with its blessed assurance of renewed favor and sunshine after rain. This was not only a Divine command (Genesis 35:1), but a Divine appearance, a manifestation visible as well as audible (Genesis 35:13). The revelation of Peniel was thereupon renewed and the name Israel once more given. Not only so, but a fresh revelation of God was also granted to Jacob: “I am God Almighty.” The same name of EL Shaddai - God Almighty which had been revealed to his grandfather (Genesis 27:1) was now confirmed to him as the assurance and guarantee of his fruitfulness and the marvelous increase of his family and household. It is surely not without point that from this time forward Jacob’s household increased in a very remarkable way, until at length, as we know, the family became a nation in Egypt (Exodus 1:1-22). This Divine revelation not only renewed the experience of Peniel (Genesis 27:10), and encouraged him with assurance of power (Genesis 35:11) ; it also confirmed what had already been said by God at Bethel (Genesis 27:13). It linked Jacob with his father and grandfather in the Divine promise of the land to him and to his seed. Truly the sun had burst forth in glorious splendor as the wandering patriarch was once more in full fellowship with God.

VII. The Grateful Memorial (Genesis 35:14-15)

Once again Jacob sets his seal to the Divine revelation and raises his “Ebenezer.” Not only did he set up a pillar of stone, but he poured a libation thereon -the first instance of drink offerings in Scripture-and then anointed it with oil. He, too, has his work of confirmation. as God had His, and once more he called the name of the place Bethel. Repentance and faith always rejoice to set up their memorials, to which they can recur in gratitude and thankfulness for all the marvelous mercies of God.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. God’s unutterable love.

All the time that Jacob was living away from true fellowship with God he was not forgotten. God seemed to have left him entirely alone, but in reality was working all the time in various ways to bring him back again. So is it always. While we are backsliding we are apparently left to ourselves, but it is not really so. God will not forsake His children. They may sin and wander, but He watches, waits, and endeavors to win them back. The old lessons have to be learned again and again in various forms until His purpose is accomplished. God bears with us in tender love and over-ruling mercy, and gives us no real rest until He brings us back to a right relation to Himself. Jacob may go to Succoth and stay at Shechem, but circumstances will arise to stir up his nest till at length he is impelled-nay, almost compelled -to go to Bethel. How marvelous is the long-suffering, tender love of our God! He knows what is the right and best thing for His children. “Who teacheth like Him?”

2. God’s absolute justice. In bringing Jacob back to Himself God made no allowance for His servant’s sin. If it be possible, God is stricter with His own children than with others. Jacob had made a solemn vow and promise that if God would be with him and bring him back to his father’s

home in peace, God should be his God and Bethel a Divine memorial. All, and very much more besides, had been completely fulfilled by God, and yet Jacob's part had not been performed. It was necessary therefore first and foremost that the wrong should be righted. This is always God's method of recall after spiritual declension. "Repent and do the first works" (Revelation 2:5). When the children of Israel arrived in Canaan the very first things required of them were the renewal of the covenants of circumcision and of the Passover, in order that the people might be on the true footing of relationship and fellowship with God. And so it must ever be. Whatever can be put right must be put right, if our fellowship with God is to be renewed; and as long as we are unwilling to set right that which is wrong God will have a controversy with us, and there cannot be any spiritual rest or satisfaction of soul.

3. God's restoring grace.

It is truly marvelous what the grace of God can do even for a repentant believer and a returned backslider. It is perfectly true that the failure and backsliding of His children prevent them from ever being exactly what they would have been apart from these faults. At the same time it is equally true that God's overruling grace can work wonders. We think of Manasseh after his idolatry, of David after his sin, of Peter after his fall; and while we dare not say, as some would teach, "We may be all we might have been, we can say with absolute certainty that "We may be something that we should never otherwise have been," because of the new elements that have entered into our life through the bitter experiences of backsliding. These things never excuse or even palliate our fall, and the repentant and restored believer will always be severe against himself by reason of his former backsliding; but we can say, and dare to say, that Divine grace takes up the threads even of our darkest experiences and weaves them into the pattern of our life from that time forward. Nature knows no forgiveness and no restoration, but grace is the mighty miracle of the universe; and if only we yield ourselves wholly and utterly to the hand of God, our lives, whatever the past may have been, shall be monuments, miracles, marvels of the grace of God.

He came to my desk with a quivering lip- The lesson was done.

"Dear teacher, I want a new leaf," he said- "I have spoiled this one " In place of the leaf so stained and blotted I gave him a new one all unspotted. And unto his sad eyes smiled- "Do better now, my child."

I went to the Throne with a quivering soul- The old year was done.

"Dear Father, hast thou a new leaf for me?

I have spoiled this one." So took the old leaf, stained and blotted, And gave me a new one all unspotted, And into my sad heart smiled- "Do better now, my child."

Chapter 66

00A.48 The School of Sorrow Gen_35:8; Gen_35:16-29

The School of Sorrow Genesis 35:8; Genesis 35:16-29

GOD has many ways of making permanent in our lives the lessons of His providence and grace, and one of these is the discipline of sorrow. “Sweet are the uses of adversity,” as we are now to see in the unfolding of the story of Jacob. There is nothing in its way more striking than the fact that from the time Jacob fulfilled his vow in Bethel to the day that he learnt of Joseph’s preservation in Egypt he was scarcely ever out of “the furnace of affliction.” Some of the earliest of these experiences will now come before us.

I. The Death of an Old Servant (Genesis 35:8) No sooner had Jacob reached Bethel than Deborah, the aged nurse of his mother Rebekah, died. First referred to in connection with Rebekah’s coming to be the wife of Isaac (Genesis 24:59), she is here mentioned again very many years after. How, why, and when she became associated with Jacob’s household we know not, for there is no record. It is probable that she joined him in Mesopotamia on the death of his mother. She was a very interesting link with the past, recalling his mother and his own earliest days in the old home. What many a man owes to a faithful servant! How fine are the obituary notices from time to time of “So-and-so, for many years the faithful servant and friend of _____ “! Now the link is broken, and Jacob has one connection less with the days of his youth. As time goes on, and friend after friend passes upward, we find ourselves more and more severed from the past and more and more united with the future. It is in such ways that we are led to think of the future, and to fix our hope on things to come. “But Deborah died.” That is, notwithstanding the fact that Jacob was now at Bethel and in fellowship with God. Faithfulness to God does not exempt us from sorrow.

II. The Death of a Beloved Wife (Genesis 35:16-20)

Residence at Bethel (Genesis 35:1) was, it would seem, completed with the fulfilment of his vow, and Jacob was apparently free to move southward towards Mamre, the home of his father. He and his household had not gone very far when another great sorrow came upon him, the deepest of his life. He lost his beloved wife Rachel, who died in giving birth to her second son. In her pain and anguish she was cheered by the encouraging news of the birth of another son, but the end of her earthly life was at hand. Just as she was dying she called the newly-born child Benoni (“son of my pain”), in token of the gain of a son even through sorrow. But her husband, to cheer her and himself to the end, would not allow so ill-omened a name to remain, and changed it to Benjamin (“son of the right hand”), indicative of his faith in the blessing and prosperity that should accrue from his birth. Thus we have the first record of death at child-birth, and the entire narrative is full of simple pathos and exquisite beauty. Rachel’s life had had its share of sorrow, and the end itself was in no way different. Robbed at the outset of the entire love of one whose wife she was expecting to be, she found herself the victim of jealousy in that unhappy home at Haran. Nor did she seem to have, at any rate until late in life, the full consolation of the worship of the true God, for she was given to superstition (Genesis 30:14), and the worship of false gods (Genesis 31:19). It is probable that these influences were not wholly extirpated until the removal to Bethel (Genesis

35:2; Genesis 35:4). She had hoped for another son in addition to Joseph (Genesis 30:24), but her unwise and passionate prayer of years ago (Genesis 30:1) now received a very unexpected answer. She had indeed a son given to her, and died at the time of the gift.

Once again Jacob set up a pillar, this time in memory of his love and sorrow (Genesis 35:20), just as he had at Bethel in memory of the Divine love and grace to him (Genesis 35:14). His love for Rachel was remarkable in its depth and constancy. Even long years after her death the memory was keen and poignant (Genesis 48:7). It is one of the most striking features of Jacob's character that he could love so devotedly and tenaciously. Such a strong nature as this was capable of great things, whatever sins and errors were on the surface.

III. The Sin of a Firstborn Son (Genesis 35:21-22) From the sad scene of his great bereavement Israel journeyed on towards Mamre. The word "Israel" is noteworthy here. It is the first occurrence of the new name as applied to Jacob after the confirmation of it at Bethel. Like the usage in Genesis of Jehovah and Elohim, which are invariably employed with discrimination, the terms Israel and Jacob are always to be carefully observed, for not seldom it is possible to see a real meaning in the particular one used. Here it seems to suggest that he journeyed in the strength of that power with God which was his heritage as the Prince of God, and by means of which he faced and bore his sorrow. He spread his tent between Bethlehem and Mamre, "beyond the tower of Edar," the tower being one of those frequently found as at once the center and safeguard of flocks and herds (2 Kings 17:9).

Another and terrible sorrow now falls on the patriarch in the awful sin of his eldest son Reuben. By this fearful sin (Leviticus 18:8; 1 Corinthians 5:1) he lost the birthright (Genesis 49:4) and incurred endless shame and infamy. Thus by a curious coincidence, and perhaps with some inner meaning, the record of the birth of Jacob's youngest son is brought into close association with the sin of the eldest son. In the light of the subsequent history of the tribes of Benjamin and Reuben we can see here another illustration of the great principle that "the last shall be first and the first last." Rachel's sons come to the front in due course. At first she, the beloved and rightful wife, was without children (Genesis 30:1), and every advantage seemed to be with Leah, who had been deceitfully pressed upon Jacob. But at length Rachel's turn came, and not only did she have two sons, but these sons came to their own in God's good time. Joseph in his two sons, and Benjamin also, had tribal territories allotted to them, and Ephraim was leader of Israel for centuries, while Reuben lost the birthright which would have been his as firstborn son. No one can seriously question the fact of a Divine Providence in human life, a Providence that sees justice done and wrongs righted, even though the progress may be slow and the time long.

We can easily imagine the anguish and shame that filled the patriarch's heart as he became aware of this sin of Reuben. Coming so soon after his great sorrow, it must have caused tenfold grief to a heart already wrung with pain. And yet the record simply but significantly states, "and Israel heard it." Mark the phraseology: "Israel," not "Jacob." That is to say, he heard the terrible news in the quiet strength of the new name and power implied and guaranteed by his recent revelation from God (Genesis 35:10). This is the only real way to meet sorrow, pain and shame-"in the strength of the Lord God." Whatever the emergency, we may rest on the Divine assurance: "My grace is sufficient for thee."

How veracious is the record of Scripture! No mere human history would record the sins of notable men so fully and unflinchingly. The candor of the Bible is one of its chief claims to be Divine. At this point we are given a full list of Jacob's children, though the names do not appear in order of birth, but according to motherhood. The children of Leah and Rachel come first, and then those of Bilhah and Zilpah. The reason for the insertion of this list here is probably because the long section of the "generations of Isaac" (Genesis 25:19) closes with this chapter, and new sections are about to open with the generations of Esau and Jacob (Genesis 36:1 and Genesis 37:2). The house of Isaac is therefore regarded as complete, and the subordinate position of Jacob will henceforth be changed for that of the head of the patriarchal house and line. In this connection, as we see again and again in the history, it is worth while to observe the remarkable differences between the sons of Leah and those of Rachel. They appear to be absolutely opposed in temperament and habit. Two sisters, and yet such astonishingly different children. Students of heredity will find here material worthy of their attention.

IV. The Death of an Honored Father (Genesis 35:27-29)

Jacob arrives home again at last. "Jacob came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre...which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned." What memories must have been called up by that return! How he must have missed his mother as he remembered the past and all their life together there! His children, too, would be keenly interested in meeting their grandfather and the head of the family. There are few places that stir the heart more deeply than the old home of our childhood, and all the dear memories of days long gone by. Isaac, too, must have recalled the day, over thirty years before, when he spoke of himself as old and uncertain of life (Genesis 27:2), and then thought of all that had happened as the result of that unhappy suggestion to Esau. But all was swallowed up in the joy of reunion, and, as we cannot doubt, in the joy of the recital of the way in which God had led both father and son all those long years of separation. In order that the record of Isaac's life may be rounded off mention is made at this point of his death, though as a matter of fact he lived until Joseph was quite thirty years old, or thirteen years after his sale in Egypt. The statement is put in here, after the analogy of earlier accounts (Genesis 11:32 and Genesis 15:8), to prepare the way for dealing solely with the record of Jacob as the head of the family. Isaac was spared for over forty years beyond the time when he expected to die (Genesis 27:1-2), and the years after Jacob's return must have been a very precious time of fellowship with God and his son as he waited the call of God. The description of his death is noteworthy: "he gave up the ghost," he yielded up the spirit to God Who gave it. The phrase used of Rachel (Genesis 35:18) is worth comparing: "as her soul was in departing." The difference is suggestive of their different ages and the circumstances of their deaths, but the idea is essentially the same. To "depart" or to "give up the ghost" is not to be annihilated, but to enter upon a new state, a new life in the presence of God. The old fathers did indeed look for more than transitory promises. They had respect unto the living God, and to the city which He had prepared for them. Isaac was also "gathered to his people," which gives another beautiful suggestion of the life to come-that of reunion with those whom we have loved and lost awhile. And so, with the spirit at rest with God and at home with our loved ones, we learn something of what heaven is. "With Christ" and "with them," all must and will be well. At the grave of their father the two brothers, Esau and Jacob, met again. With what thoughts they must have paid the last tribute of filial love and borne their father's body to its resting place! Already reconciled (Genesis 33:1-4), this sorrow must have confirmed their friendship and made

their hearts increasingly tender to each other as they recalled the past with sins and errors on both sides. Death is a wonderful healer of breaches. Happy are they who find over the grave of a loved father or mother the opportunity of reuniting severed ties. Thrice happy are they who at the graveside of a loved one have not to reunite ties, but only to deepen and confirm them in the love and grace of God. The life of Isaac, as we review it, is in striking contrast to those of his father and his sons. In their case we have lives full of incident; in his little but quietness and peace. Except for two occasions of sin (Genesis 26:1-35 and Genesis 27:1-46), there is nothing in the record to disturb the impression that Isaac's life was of the pastoral, quiet, restful, contemplative type which based itself on the promises of God (Genesis 26:24) and lived peacefully, waiting the development and progress of the Divine purpose. One word, used twice by Jacob, seems to give the clue to Isaac's character. Jacob speaks of God as "the Fear of Isaac" (Genesis 31:42; Genesis 31:53), a striking term, especially when contrasted with the customary usage, "the God of Abraham." Isaac's nature was contemplative, quiet, reverential, full of awe. God was his "Fear," not slavish dread, but filial awe. And it was this that impressed Jacob, whose nature at its root was so like that of his father. Jacob had a profound sense of reverence for God and divine things, and it is well that he had, for with him and with us all "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." "Holy and reverend is His Name."

Suggestions for Meditation The cloud of sorrow hangs heavily on these verses. There are three graves and one sin recorded, and it is in connection with the sorrow caused by these events that Jacob was taught some very precious lessons. Shall we not try to learn them for ourselves?

1. Sorrow is not always sent as punishment.

We often bring sorrow on ourselves through our sin, but this is not always and necessarily the case. The death of Deborah came when Jacob had put himself right with God. The death of Rachel and the sin of Reuben do not appear to be traceable to any wrong-doing of Jacob. So is it today. Sorrow is not necessarily punishment. It may be just the opposite. It all depends on the state of our spiritual life how we understand and take sorrow. If we are right with God, we shall meet sorrow as "Israel," not "Jacob," and find in it the message God intends for us. Every affliction may be viewed in two aspects; and what from one viewpoint may he thought a Benoni, may from another be seen as a Benjamin. It all depends on our faith; and if that be real and true, then "Faith can sing through days of sorrow." We shall certainly "faint" if we do not "believe to see the goodness of the Lord" in the time of sorrow and pain.

2. Sorrow is often used for spiritual training.

Chastening is very different from punishing, and "it is for chastening ye endure" (Hebrews 12:7) There is a very clear connection spiritually, as well as etymologically, between discipleship and discipline. We only become real disciples through discipline. The word rendered "chastening" in Hebrews 12:1-29 is literally "son-making." God makes us truly His sons by subjecting us, or allowing us to be subjected, to training and discipline; and it is for this reason that we read "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." When Archbishop Tait, as Dean of Carlisle, lost several children in quick succession, in the short space of a few weeks, his friend Francis Close, then at Cheltenham, wrote quoting this text to the bereaved and heartbroken father, adding, "He must love you much to chasten you so much."

3. Sorrow is intended to yield the peaceful fruits of righteousness. Who shall say how much this discipline had to do with Tait's noteworthy episcopate in London and his splendid service as Archbishop of Canterbury? Many a Christian can say with David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn" (Psalms 119:71). "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now…(Psalms 119:67). In the description of the life of the believer in Rom. v. we must not overlook the place given to "tribulation." May it not mean that one of the ways which God takes to make our experiences real is the way of suffering? As the Son of God was made "perfect through suffering," so the sons of God are brought to glory in the same way. Just as the pattern on the china vase is made permanent by being put into the fire, so the impressions of God's truth and grace become part of our character by our being passed through the furnace of affliction. As gold must be tried in the fire, So the heart must be tried by pain. And so, though our outward man perishes, our inward man is renewed day by day. Let us therefore yield ourselves to the Divine Potter, to be made into "vessels unto honor" and conformed to His image and likeness in order to live to His glory.

00A.49 A Profane Person Gen_36:1-8

A Profane Person Genesis 36:1-8

THERE is perhaps no greater contrast in Scripture than that seen in the characters of Esau and Jacob. The one on the surface was interesting and attractive, the other on the surface was unattractive and often repellent, at least for a large part of his life. And yet as we include in our view of the two men the whole Bible testimony concerning them, and study with all possible care and completeness that which lies below the surface, we cannot help coming to the very opposite of our first conclusion. We obtain the deep impression that characters are not to be judged by superficial impressions but by a careful inquiry into the right principles of life. It will be convenient at this point to gather together the various references to Esau which we find in Genesis, and then attempt to obtain a true idea of his real character.

I. Esau's History. The circumstances of his birth foreshadowed a remarkable history, and whenever he appears before us we cannot help being struck with the man as he reveals himself in the record. The first event brought before us is the sale of his birthright to Jacob (Genesis 25:29-34). It is unnecessary in the present connection to repeat the details of the story which have already come before us, nor is it to the point to dwell upon Jacob's share in this unhappy transaction. For our present purpose it will suffice to call attention to the simple but significant comment of the writer: "So Esau despised his birthright." Whatever fault we may attribute to Jacob, and however great our contempt may be for his underhand dealing, we must not overlook the fact that in parting with his birthright Esau revealed his true character. He had already come to the conclusion, long before the time that Jacob made the offer, that his birthright was of no value to him. We must look beneath the surface from the very outset of the story of Esau, and when we do this we discover that his horizon was bounded by earth and that he had no conception whatever of the glory of the promises to Abraham and to Isaac which were associated with the birthright.

Esau comes before us next in connection with his marriage to the two Canaanitish women (Genesis 26:34-35). This deliberate association with the people of the land was another significant revelation of his true nature. Not only did he introduce into his father's family the untoward and dangerous element of polygamy, but he went his way by himself without any consultation with his parents and married into the Canaanites, and thereby led to an intermixture which it had hitherto been the special endeavor of Abraham and of Isaac to avoid. No wonder that this action of their elder son caused great grief and bitterness of spirit to Isaac and Rebekah. Once again the real man showed himself in this deliberate setting at naught of some of the most cherished principles and hopes of his people. The next time that Esau appears before us is in connection with the blessing. Having deliberately and of set purpose bartered away his birthright, it is clear that he had subsequently come to a different mind as to its importance. Consequently. when his father wished to bestow upon him the patriarchal blessing, Esau was quite ready to enter into the plot and obtain back again by craft what he had lost by a deliberate act of his own. We do not overlook the sin of Isaac, or Rebekah, or Jacob, in calling attention to the simple fact that Esau must not be absolved

from a share in this blame. We can see still further what he really was, for after he had lost the blessing, he in his rage and fury determined to kill his brother when a suitable opportunity occurred. He was a man of ungovernable impulse, without any fixed principle, never constant for long to any one thing.

Another event further revealed Esau's true character (Genesis 28:8-9). When he saw that Jacob had departed with his father's blessing to find a wife outside the land of Canaan, and from his own kith and kin, he endeavored once again to obtain an advantage at his brother's expense by taking to himself a third wife, this time a daughter of his kinsman Ishmael. Esau seems to have been fully awake at last to the importance and value of the position of the eldest son, and he sets to work to try to retrieve his position in the eyes of his parents. Even here we cannot help noticing his practical failure, for although Ishmael was the half-brother of his father, it had been made perfectly clear that there was to be no part or lot to Ishmael in the inheritance of promise and blessing to Isaac. When Jacob returned after the years of separation in the house and country of Laban, Esau again appears as he comes with a retinue of men to meet his brother. It would seem clear that at the outset he had determined to take his revenge, but he little knew what was happening at the ford Jabbok, and how God in answer to prayer was already at work breaking down the barriers, and preparing for a full reconciliation between the brothers. Esau's hot impulses were quickly cooled at the sight of his brother, and the anger died down as they met and settled their differences in a loving reconciliation. Esau's warmheartedness shines out at this point and makes us all the more sorry that it played so small a part in the entire experiences of his life. The brothers met again, and probably for the last time, at their father's death (Genesis 25:29), but they met only to separate permanently one from the other. The land was not large enough to maintain the households of both of them, and Esau therefore took all that he possessed and went into a land far away from his brother in the country afterwards known as Edom (Genesis 36:1-8). Thenceforward the two tribes and afterwards the two races were kept apart not only geographically but in almost every other respect, and, as we know, Edom showed hostility to the people of Israel as the latter made their way from Egypt to Canaan.

II. Esau's Character The startling mystery of human nature is remarkably illustrated in the case of Esau. There was an undoubted attractiveness in his temperament and character. He was evidently of a happy and bright disposition. Nothing appeared to worry or trouble him. He took life easily and never seemed concerned with its shadows and difficulties. He was also of an affectionate disposition. His devotion to his father is evident in the narrative, and the fact of his father's devotion to him must be put to his credit. Even his impulsiveness had the elements of good and promise in it, for he was manifestly capable of generous and warmhearted dispositions. Not least of all there was a forgiving spirit in the man. Jacob had undoubtedly done him serious and irreparable wrong, and we should not have been surprised from the purely human standpoint if he had remained permanently embittered against the supplanter; but the opposite happened, and when they met after that long separation there was no trace of anger or revenge on the part of Esau, but every indication of forgiveness and personal reconciliation. This attractiveness, however, was almost entirely on the surface, and when we look below we are bound to confess that there was much that was objectionable and even repulsive. The passionateness of the man is clear as we read the narrative of his attitude to Jacob. He was also in the literal meaning of the word a "sensual" man, that is, a man whose life was lived within the region of his senses and

purely physical desires and tastes. He lived for personal enjoyment at the present moment, and was evidently prepared to sacrifice everything else to gratify his own desires. Whether we think of his willingness to barter his birthright for food, or contemplate his ill-advised marriage with two Canaanitish women, we see how entirely earth-bound he was, and how fully he lived for himself alone and for his own enjoyment. But all this was only indicative of what was at the root and foundation of his life. He had no true conception of the value of things spiritual. When we are told that he “despised his birthright” we are not to understand any mere impulse, or that he was merely victimized by a craftier nature; he had been leading up to this despising of the birthright by the purely secular life that he had been living. The promises of God had made no impression on him. The spiritual ideas associated with the Covenant were as nothing to him. He was in every sense earthly and earthbound. This as we have seen is the meaning of the significant judgment in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Genesis 12:16), he was “a profane person.” His life was purely secular, there was no sacred enclosure in it. Everything in him was of the world and the flesh, and no part of his life was devoted to God. This was at the root of his trouble. God was not in all his thoughts.

Suggestions for Meditation The story of Esau and the revelation of his character, as indicated by the events, carry their own personal application, but it may be worthwhile laying special stress upon some of the outstanding messages of this sad and disappointing life.

1. Superficial attractiveness is not enough.

There are many natures and temperaments which are interesting and even fascinating on the surface, full of real charm of manner and disposition, and yet all the while they hide an underlying indifference to God which easily leads to a definite hostility. The young ruler who came to our Lord had the splendid advantages of age, position, wealth, opportunity, earnestness, and even moral integrity, and yet when he was put to the test he revealed his deliberate unwillingness to surrender to Christ and to allow the Lord Jesus to be the Master of his life. We must never be deceived by outward attractiveness in itself, though when such attractiveness springs from genuine spiritual relationship to God it is without question the most beautiful thing on the earth.

2. Divine grace is absolutely essential.

There are some natures which by environment, culture, and refinement seem to tend towards the ideal. They make people wonder whether after all true religion is essential to real life. Experience however goes to show in an ever-increasing way that nothing but Divine grace can guarantee a permanent character. While it is doubtless true that “character is three-fourths of conduct,” it is equally true that the other fourth represents the source, spring, and guarantee of conduct itself. “Without Me ye can do nothing” is a truth of absolutely universal application, and whatever education, circumstances, opportunity may do for us we can never dispense with Divine grace. Esau’s life was lived entirely on an earthly plane. The purely natural elements were supreme, and when the test came he sacrificed the spiritual opportunity that might have been his and so brought about irrevocable disaster. Grace is as much needed for character as it is for salvation, for the simple reason that character must necessarily be based upon salvation, which in turn depends upon the new nature of the divine life which is ours by faith in Christ Jesus.

3. Opportunity comes to all.

While it is perfectly true that God intended Jacob to inherit the spiritual blessings of the Covenant, it is equally certain that Esau had a sufficient opportunity of enjoying blessing at God's hands. His boyhood was spent at home under the influence of his father and mother, and it is evident from the sequel that he became aware when it was too late of the blessings that he had missed. This shows that he had been trained and taught to value those blessings, but had deliberately set them aside and despised them. No one will be able to say in the great day of account that he had no opportunity of being good. God is righteous, and will never allow any man to be at a disadvantage. Opportunity comes to all, but, alas! opportunity may easily be lost through unfaithfulness. When Esau afterward desired to inherit the blessing he was rejected, for he found no way of changing his father's mind, though he sought a blessing earnestly with tears (Hebrews 12:17). There is a solemn and loud warning in this word "afterward," for it tells of an awakened conscience and blighted hopes that were never realized. A man looking back upon his past life said that a great deal of his time had been spent in raising tombstones over the graves of lost opportunities. To every one of us comes the solemn word of the Master, "How often would I . . . and ye would not."

4. The marvel and mercy of Divine Grace.

While we may not and must not set aside and think lightly of life's great moral responsibilities, we are encouraged by the revelation of God in Christ to believe that Divine grace can nevertheless do much to enable us to retrieve our character. While it is true that we never can be what we otherwise might have been, yet grace can do much to overrule our mistakes and even our sins. Esau always had to be content with God's second best, but even for him there was a future not unmixed with mercy and blessing. It is perfectly true that what is done cannot be undone, but it is equally true that what is done can be mended by Divine grace. Let us therefore be encouraged, in spite of our past, to put ourselves afresh into God's merciful and loving hands, feeling sure that His discipline will deal with us faithfully and lovingly, and in spite of all our sins and shortcomings bring glory to His Name out of the remnant of our life. The "afterward" of Esau's experience (Hebrews 12:17) may be met by the "afterward" of Divine mercy and grace (Hebrews 12:11), and our lives yet be used of God as we walk humbly and go softly, remembering the past, trusting for the present, and hoping in Him for the future.

Chapter 68

00A.50 Joseph's Early Life Gen_37:1-36

Joseph’s Early Life Genesis 37:1-36 WITH the story of Joseph we come to the last division of Genesis, though the heading is “These are the generations of Jacob” since Jacob was the head of the family. The development and progress of the household of Jacob until at length it became a nation in Egypt had Joseph as a pioneer, and it is almost entirely to this development under Joseph that the remainder of Genesis is devoted. At the same time the story is not concerned with Joseph only (see Genesis 38:1-30), but with Jacob and all his sons. The fullness of the narrative is worthy of consideration. Far more is told us of Joseph than of any of the patriarchs preceding him. There is a fourfold value and importance in the record of Joseph’s life:

(1) It gives the explanation of the development of the Hebrews. How was it that they who came originally from the valley of the Euphrates were found at length as a colony in Egypt? How came it to pass that they, a nomadic people, lived in possession and enjoyment of the richest province of Egypt for generations? The story of Joseph gives the answer to these questions.

(2) It is a remarkable proof of the quiet operation of Divine Providence, overruling evil and leading at length to the complete victory of truth and righteousness.

(3) It affords a splendid example of personal character. Joseph’s life is one of the very finest recorded in Scripture.

(4) It provides a striking series of typical illustrations of Christ. There are few more remarkable points of contact and coincidences with the life of our Lord than those found in the story of Joseph. In concentrating attention on the life of Joseph it is impossible to avoid noticing the various aspects of faith represented by the leading characters in Genesis. Thus, Abel illustrates redemption through faith; Enoch stands for the walk of faith; Noah bears witness to the confession of faith; Abraham expresses the obedience of faith; Isaac is an example of the patience of faith; Jacob reveals the training of faith; while Joseph exemplifies the testing and triumph of faith. In the chapter before us we have the commencement of the story which is so familiar and precious to all lovers of Holy Writ.

I. Joseph’s Home Life (Genesis 37:1-4).

Joseph was the elder son of Rachel (Genesis 30:24). Of his early life nothing is recorded. He could not have been more than five or six years old when his father left Gen. Mesopotamia. He was therefore the child of Jacob’s later life, and escaped all the sad experiences associated with the earlier years at Haran. He comes before us in this chapter at the age of seventeen. His companions were his half-brothers, the grown up sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. From all that we have hitherto seen of them they must have been utterly unfit companions for such a youth. Jacob’s elder sons had naturally been affected by the life in Haran, by the jealousy at home, and by the scheming between Laban and Jacob. They had been brought up under the influence of the old Jacob, while Joseph had been the companion of the changed Jacob or Israel. There are few people more unfitted for influence over younger brothers than elder brothers of bad character. The

difference between the elder brethren and Joseph and Joseph was accentuated by the fact that Joseph his brethren brought unto his father the evil report of his brethren. What precisely this meant we do not know, but from the wording in the original it was evidently something that was well known and notorious in the neighborhood. It may have been dishonesty, but most likely it was something much worse, in view of all that we know of them. It is sometimes thought that Joseph is blameworthy for telling tales; but there does not seem any warrant for regarding him as a mere spy. It is an utterly mistaken sense of honour that keeps people from giving information when wrong-doing is involved.

Far from being mean and cowardly, such action is not only justifiable but necessary. Tale-bearing pure and simple is, of course, always despicable; but there is a time to speak, and on such an occasion silence is criminal. The lad had been brought up amid the more godly influences of Jacob's later years, and it is quite easy to understand the shock that would be given him at meeting with this wickedness away from home on the part of his elder brothers. So long as there was no exaggeration, no malice, and no personal ends to serve, there could be nothing blameworthy in Joseph bringing his father their evil report.

There was, however, something much more than this to account for the differences between Joseph and his brethren. Israel had a special love for this child of Rachel, and he did not hesitate to show it in a very definite way. The gift of a coat of many "pieces" (not colours), or rather the tunic with sleeves, was about the most significant act that Jacob could have shown to Joseph. It was a mark of distinction that carried its own meaning, for it implied that exemption from labour which was the peculiar privilege of the heir or prince of the Eastern clan. Instead of the ordinary work-a- day vestment which had no sleeves, and which, by coming down to the knees only, enabled men to set about their work this tunic with sleeves clearly marked out its wearer as a person of special distinction, who was not required to do ordinary work. Whether Jacob exercised sufficient prudence in showing such undisguised partiality for Joseph is an open question. It was in any case a very natural thing for him to do. He was the child of his old age, the son of his beloved wife, and without doubt a sympathetic, responsive listener to all that the patriarch had to say about the promises of God to himself and to his fathers. It was impossible after Reuben's great sin (Genesis 35:22) for the transfer of the birthright from him to be disguised from the others, and it was equally natural for Jacob to appoint for Joseph the privileges of the firstborn. And so when his brethren saw these marks of special favour they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. Although he was so young and they were grown men, their jealousy had been excited, for they readily saw all that it meant. Nor may we overlook the remarkable difference in their lives and conduct, a fact which must have rebuked the elder brothers and added fuel to the fire of their envy and jealousy. Joseph's purity of life and moral growth must have rankled in their hearts.

II. Joseph's Dreams (Genesis 37:5-11). The hatred of the brothers was soon intensified through the dreams that Joseph narrated to them. The first dream was that of the sheaves in the field. He dreamt that the sheaves of his brethren made obeisance to his own sheaf. This, in true Eastern fashion, was interpreted by the brethren to mean his dominion over them, and as a consequence they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words. Not only did they feel annoyed at his telling them his dream, but their animosity was stirred by reason of the dream itself. Again he dreamed, and this time his father and mother were included: "Behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. Joseph told this to his father as well as to his brethren,

and Jacob at once checked him, expressing astonishment that anything of the kind could possibly come true. Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" The reference to the mother seems to be to Leah, who had taken the place of Rachel, and had become a mother to her sister's children. Yet, although the father rebuked the boy, he could not help being impressed. His father observed the saying. Like Mary in after years, there was something that even Israel could not understand (Luke 2:19, Luke 2:51). The repetition of the dream seems to imply certainty of fulfilment (Genesis 41:32), and the dreams were at once natural and supernatural. They were natural in form as distinct from any Divine vision, and yet they were clearly prophetic of Joseph's future glory.

It is sometimes thought that Joseph made a mistake in telling his brethren these dreams or at any rate, that he was wrong in telling the second. He does not seem to have been actuated by self-consciousness or vanity, or perhaps he would not have told what he had experienced. Whether this was so or not, the effect was disastrous to him, for it only added fuel to the fire, intensifying his brother's animosity.

How true to life are these dreams of the youth! Youth is the time for visions of the future. Young men cannot help dreaming dreams, for they would not be young men if they did not do so. A youth without ideals is a youth without inspiration; and when, as in Joseph's case, it is susceptible to spiritual intuitions, there is indeed the promise and potency of a fine manhood.

III. Joseph's Mission (Genesis 37:12-17). In the course of their work as shepherds, Jacob's elder sons went to Shechem, about sixty miles from Hebron; and, in view of all that had happened at Shechem, it is not surprising that Israel wished to know how it fared with his sons and with the flocks. He thereupon commands Joseph to take the journey of inquiry. His orders met with a ready and full response, Here am I. The words of Jacob should be noted: "Go, I pray thee; see the peace of thy brethren and the peace of the flocks." Jacob might well wish to know whether there was peace, considering the danger to which the brethren and flocks were liable in going back to the neighborhood of Shechem. Joseph, however, has to go several miles further, for the brethren had gone on to Dothan, which was on the southern slope of Mount Gilboa (Genesis 37:17). Perhaps even they felt that it was scarcely safe to remain too long in Shechem. This promptness and thoroughness of obedience Joseph's on the part of Joseph is very characteristic of him, and should be carefully noted all through his history. It has often and truly been pointed out that Joseph seems to have combined all the best qualities of his ancestors the capacity of Abraham, the quietness of Isaac, the ability of Jacob, and the personal beauty of his mother's family. It is interesting to note that the same word is used of the mother and the son (Genesis 29:17 and Genesis 49:6).

IV. Joseph's Brethren (Genesis 37:18-28). The sight of Joseph in the distance was sufficient to stir up again all their animosity, and even before he came near unto them they conspired against him to slay him. They were prepared to go the whole length of murder, and had their answer ready for their father. Some evil beast hath devoured him. We can almost see the grim smile with which they said, We shall see what will become of his dreams. The conspiracy was all very simply but quite cleverly concocted, every point was met, the wild beast and the ready explanation. At this point Reuben intervened, and in view of the fact that Joseph had superseded him in the position of firstborn, we must not fail to observe the magnanimity of his appeal. He begged them not to kill

him but to cast him into the pit, he himself intending to rescue him and deliver him to his father again. So far the proposal was good, but it possessed obvious elements of weakness. There was no decision about it, and no guarantee that it could be carried out. “The flighty purpose never is o’ ertook, unless the deed go with it.” And then was seen another exhibition of their callousness and cruelty. They stripped the lad of hat tunic which was such a bugbear to them, and cast him into one of the pits in the neighborhood, while they themselves sat down to eat bread. Thomas Fuller quaintly remarks, “With what heart could they say grace, either before or after meat?” There within earshot was their own brother, his appeals for mercy having fallen on deaf ears. It was to this fearful hardness and cruelty that the prophet referred ages afterwards, when he spoke of those who drink wine in bowls . . . but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph (Amos 6:6). We can also understand still more of their savagery when we remember that twenty years afterwards they recalled this moment, and said that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear (Genesis 42:21). Those who had butchered a whole family in Shechem were not likely to trouble themselves about the piteous cries and pleas of a mere lad whom they so cordially hated. In the course of their meal another suggestion Joseph sold, occurred to them. They saw in the distance a company of Ishmaelite merchants on their way to Egypt, and Judah had what must have been thought a happy idea. There was an opportunity of avoiding the sin of murder and at the same time of making a little profit by selling him to these merchants. They shrank from slaying, but not from enslaving their brother. It was something of honour among thieves. He was not to be killed, because he was their brother and their flesh; but slavery did not matter in the least, even though he was their brother and their flesh. Nor are we surprised to read that his brethren were content with Judah’s proposal that is to say, they “hearkened” (Heb.) with perfect acquiescence. Circumstances sometimes seem to turn out favorably for bad men as well as good, and this shows that it is impossible to believe that circumstances alone are necessarily the voice of Providence. They must be judged by principle; and if circumstances are wrong in themselves, no happy coincidence or association can make them right. There is a great deal of danger in interpreting circumstances, lest we should bend them to our will instead of reading them in the light of God’s eternal truth.

Thus the first two proposals, to kill Joseph out right (Genesis 37:20), and to cast him into a pit and let him die there (Genesis 37:24), were set aside for a third, and he was sold as a slave to the Midianites (Genesis 37:28). They therefore took him out of the pit, and in a short time he was on his way, as a slave, to Egypt, while they doubtless rejoiced in his removal and in their own possession of twenty pieces of silver (about 2l.10s.).

V. The Outcome (Genesis 37:29-36).

Reuben seems to have been away when the proposal to sell Joseph was made and carried out. People are often away when they are most needed. If he had taken the bolder course earlier in the day, the result might have been very different. He seems to have been true to his character, unstable as water, and when he returned to his brethren he was doubtless soon made aware of what had happened, and apparently entered into the plan with the rest of them. They carried out their ideas with great thoroughness. They found it convenient that they had not sold Joseph’s coat, and taking it up from where they had thrown it, they dipped it in the blood of one of the kids, ready to show their father. When they arrived home Jacob soon recognized his son’s coat, and realizing that Joseph had been devoured by an evil beast, rent his clothes and mourned many days; and

though all his sons and daughters tried to comfort him their efforts proved unavailing, for he refused to be consoled. We Jacob's cannot fail to note the unutterable grief of the aged patriarch. There was a time, not long before, when he met the awful sorrow and shame connected with his firstborn with dignity and trust in God (Genesis 35:22), but now he seemed to be utterly overwhelmed by his sorrow. There was no expression of submission to the will of God, no testimony of faith in God, and no allusion to the new name Israel in the narrative. How often in the course of experience a great sorrow has so overwhelmed a soul that it has lost the peace and strength and comfort that should have been derived through faith and fellowship in God! So it was with Mary of Bethany, who sat still in the house overwhelmed with her grief when she knew that the Master was near (John 11:20). Not only did she thus miss the glorious revelation that Martha obtained (John 11:25-26), but her weeping even caused trouble to our Lord. For He observed her and the Jews utterly prostrate and overwhelmed with grief in the presence of physical death, forgetful of Himself and his own power over it (John 11:32-33, Greek). There are few occasions on which the reality and power of Christian experience are shown more clearly than by the way we meet the shock of bereavement and death.

Meanwhile the chapter ends very significantly by telling us what happened to Joseph. The Midianites soon got rid of him, and sold him to Potiphar, a high official in Egypt.

Suggestions for Meditation The chapter is full of contrasts between man's sin and God's grace, and calls for special attention.

1. The Sin of man. The root of all the trouble recorded in this chapter is envy (Acts 7:9), a sin that has characterized human nature all through the ages. Neither be thou envious is the counsel of the Psalmist (Psalms 37:1); and it was the experience of an earnest man in the moment of temptation who said, "I was envious . . . when I saw" (Psalms 73:3). The crowning example of envy was that of the Pharisees against our Lord (Matthew 27:18); and Christians are counseled against it in the New Testament, Not in strife and envying (Romans 13:13). The difference between envy and covetousness is that we envy persons and covet things. We are dissatisfied with our own lot, and we are annoyed and angered that others should be superior to us in the possession of certain things. The results of envy are many and varied, and our familiar Litany rightly gives us the train of consequences: Envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. Everything recorded here of Joseph's brethren their anger, malice, conspiracy, cruelty, callousness, deceit sprang originally from envy. So it is always. (Cf. Romans 1:29; 1 Timothy 4:4; Galatians 5:21.) Envy is the root of almost every sin against our brethren. And whenever it is harbored, there is an end of all peace, rest, and satisfaction. Envy is the rottenness of the bones (Proverbs 14:30), and no one can stand against it (Proverbs 27:4). Where envying is, there is confusion and every evil work (James 3:16).

2. The grace of God.

If only God had been first in the lives of these men, there would have been no envy; for when He fills the soul with His love and grace, there is no room for anything unworthy and wrong (1 Corinthians 13:4). That is why the Psalmist is not content with the negative exhortation, Neither be thou envious, but goes on to the fourfold positive counsel, "Trust in the Lord," "Delight thyself also in the Lord," "Commit thy way unto the Lord," "Rest in the Lord" (Psalms 37:3-7). Not only are we to lay aside all envies, but we are also to receive the Word of God into our hearts (1 Peter 2:1). It is

by the expulsive power of this new affection that we are protected at all points from the sin of envy. But the grace of God is also seen in this chapter in the way in which sin is defeated and the Divine purposes accomplished. Sin may hinder God's plans, but it cannot ultimately defeat His purposes. Sin is never necessary, though it may be used and overruled by God. It is absolutely impossible to bring good out of evil; for there never has been any good in evil, in spite of the familiar saying about the soul of goodness in things evil. But good can be brought about in spite of evil, and so it came to pass that the very steps Joseph's brethren took to defeat God's purposes were used to fulfill those dreams. We shall see what will become of his dreams. They were to see this to some purpose. For right is right, since God is God, And right the day shall win. To doubt would be disloyalty, To falter would be sin.

Chapter 69

00A.51 A Family Shame Gen_38:1-30

A Family Shame Genesis 38:1-30

WE instinctively ask why this story is found here? Why is the record of these events given, and given in such plainness by details? Why is the story of Jacob and Joseph interrupted at this point? We may be perfectly sure that in a book marked by so definite a purpose and characterized by so spiritual an aim, there must be some good reason for the inclusion of this sad and unsavory episode. Let us see whether we cannot discover what this is. It occurs in that part of Genesis where we find recorded the steps of the Divine Providence which led to the transfer of Jacob's family into Egypt. This was to be accomplished, by Joseph as the instrument, through famine as the occasion, and through Divine power as the cause. And in this chapter we can see the need of it, the entire justification of the deportation, as we contemplate the state of the people revealed by this story of Judah. We are very sharply reminded of the grave moral dangers that surrounded the chosen family as long as they remained in Canaan; and the practical, and perhaps utter, impossibility of their being preserved pure unless removed to some shelter from such fearful contamination. We seem to have this fact suggested by the significant chronological note (Genesis 38:1). And it came to pass at that time, i.e. at the period of Joseph's sale into Egypt.

It is quite unnecessary and indeed impossible to dwell upon the details of the story. It carries its own meaning and message to all who read it. The initial trouble lay in Judah going out of his way to associate himself with the people of Canaan. If he had remembered his father's and his grand father's experiences he would have saved himself and others from these unhappy and awful experiences. But up to this time there was no sign of grace in Judah s heart, and no thought of the covenant-God of his father influenced him in the slightest degree.

We are not surprised that from this wicked association wicked sons should have sprung. The first born was so wicked that he came under the Divine displeasure and the Lord slew him. The second son was as bad if not worse, and was guilty of that sin to which his name has ever since been given, and of which it will suffice to say that it is perhaps the very deadliest of all sins as affecting definitely body, mind and soul, and as having slain its thousands in all ages of the world's history. The sin of Judah and of Tamar is the culminating horror of this fearful story, and the only redeeming feature about it is Judah's tardy repentance, if such it may be called, when he discovered what he had done.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The awful possibilities of human sin. Can anything be more terrible than this record? Here is a man brought up amid opportunity of godliness, surrounded by good (if also by evil) influences, and yet sinning in these fearful ways, and becoming the occasion (and almost the cause) of the sins of others. Well for us if we realize from the narrative the plague of our own heart and the awful extent to which sin may lead any one of us. But for the grace of God, who is there that dare say this might not be true of him?

2. The justification of Divine Providence.

It is abundantly clear from this story what was the moral condition of the Canaanites, and how essential it was for the family of Jacob to be safeguarded from such evil. The sale of Joseph into Egypt seemed on the face of it arbitrary and devoid of moral meaning, but God was overruling the evil to bring about much good to His people. And here we can see something of the Divine meaning and purpose. It was absolutely necessary for Israel to come out and be separate, and in this story we have the proof of it vividly and awfully brought before us.

3. The severity of Divine Righteousness. The Divine absolute candour of the Bible is an almost constant marvel. And this in turn rests on the absolute justice of the God whose book it is. Here is the sin of one of the chosen race depicted in all its hideousness. Here is the human ancestor of the Messiah revealed in all his blackness. Behold, therefore, the severity of God. He is no respecter of persons. The sin of His sons is as faithfully dealt with as that of anyone else. There are no favorites with Him. Sin is sin at all times, and by whosoever committed. Well for us if we learn and heed this solemn lesson.

4. The Marvel of Divine Grace. It is simply astonishing that God could take up the threads of this very tangled skein, and weave them into His own pattern. First of all He dealt with Judah, and we know how great was the transformation of his character. And then, greatest marvel of all, God permitted the human descent of the Messiah to come not only from Judah, but even from Tamar. It is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah (Hebrews 7:14), and Judah begat Pharez and Zarah of Tamar (Matthew 1:3). Now it is clear as it can be that no man would have done this, even if he could. Only Divine grace could dare to take up these sorry elements of human life and use them for its own blessed purpose. There is nothing more marvellous than the power and possibilities of grace. Grace forgives, uplifts, transmutes, transforms, and then uses for its own glory. Shall we then sin that grace may abound? God forbid.

We may not, must not, dare not. And yet, if any man sin we have the blessed assurance that grace will not leave us in the mire of degradation, defeat and despair. While it is eternally true that what is done can never be undone, it is equally true that what has been broken can be mended, and the glory of grace is its power to heal broken hearts and mend broken lives. While life can never be as though sin had not been committed, yet the alchemy of grace has wonderful transforming power. Nature knows nothing of this, and can only tell of law broken and penalty exacted. But the Gospel comes to hearts broken by sin and despairing of redemption, and tells of pardon, peace and purity, in the blessed healing and transforming influences of Divine mercy, love and grace.

00A.52 In Egypt Gen_39:1-23

In Egypt Genesis 39:1-23

EACH scene in the record of Joseph's life reveals some distinctive trait of character elicited by means of a crisis. We have already seen his passive submission to an awful wrong at the hands of his ruthless brothers. We naturally try to realize something of what he felt, but except for the allusion twenty years after to the anguish of his soul nothing is told us; no word of accusation falls from his lips, not a word of appeal or reproach finds its place in the story. This silence is surely remarkable, and tells its own tale of quiet strength and sublime power. The record continues to reveal Joseph's character. The boy who suddenly exchanged the place of a petted and favorite son for that of a slave of foreign merchants is once again raised to high position, and as suddenly falls from honour, and is cast into prison. The revelation of his character is very striking, and deserves the closest possible study and attention.

I. In Prosperity (Genesis 39:1-6). From the hands of the Midianite traders Joseph passed into the possession of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, chief of the executioners. So from the pit into which he was cast by his brothers he passes into the pit of slavery in Egypt. It is a fine test of character for a young man when he is brought suddenly face to face with adversity, for the way in which he meets his difficulties will at once reveal and practically guarantee his future life. The young slave filled his position to the very utmost of his powers and abilities. Instead of complaining that God was unjust to him, that his lot so far away from home was utterly hopeless, he put his whole power into the work that he had to do, and we are not surprised to read that the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man. Observe this use of the Divine Name, Jehovah, the God of the Covenant, Who had not left him, and Who, still more, would never forsake him. He was a prosperous man is a phrase that reads curiously in connection with a slave. How could he be prosperous in such a position? The explanation is that prosperity is not due to circumstances but to character, and character in turn depends upon faithfulness to God. His life soon became evident, for in some way or God's other his master observed that God was with him and was prospering him. Not that Potiphar had any spiritual insight into the ways of Jehovah, but being in some sort a religious man, he became convinced that Joseph's powers must come from a Divine source. It is one of the finest and most glorious results of true piety when those around us who may not be of our way of thinking are enabled to see the reality of our life in our daily work and conduct.

We are therefore not at all surprised to read that Joseph "found grace in his master's sight," and that he was made overseer over the house and over all his master s possessions. Them that honour Me I will honour is one of the great fundamental principles of life which find clear illustrations all through the centuries. The crowning point of all was that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. It is not the only time that God-fearing servants have brought spiritual blessing to the life and home of their masters. So thoroughly did Potiphar trust Joseph that he left

all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. This absolute confidence in Joseph's trustworthiness and capability is very striking, the one limitation being that of food, which was doubtless due to the great care of the Egyptians about ceremonial defilement (Genesis 43:32).

Thus Joseph lived his life in Potiphar's house hold, bearing testimony to God and bringing blessings to his master. The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man. Mr. Eugene Stock (Lesson Studies in Genesis, p. 119) calls attention to the rendering of He was a prosperous man in Wycliffe's version, "He was a luckie felowe," and makes the valuable point that a "luckie felowe" is not the rich man, but the man of character, the man of whom it can be said The Lord is with him. Circumstances can never by themselves produce or guarantee prosperity. The prosperous man is the man who lives according to genuine hope, and this is only possible when our hope is based on God.

II. In Peril (Genesis 39:7-12).

All was now going well with Joseph. He was trusted by his master, and blessed of his God. How things would have turned out in the usual way we know not, but an event occurred, which, however forbidding and surprising in itself, was nevertheless used as the link in the chain of that Divine providence which is so marked a feature of the story.

Joseph was young, manly and physically attractive. He had not a little of his mother's beauty (cf. Genesis 29:17 with Genesis 39:6), and this was the occasion of fierce temptation which came from an unexpected quarter. As he was Potiphar's property why should not his master s wife do what she liked with the living chattel? And so the temptation came upon him in all its attractiveness and awful power. In a way it was a fine testimony to Joseph's power and influence that the wife of his master should have noticed one of her husband's slaves. Temptation is one of the great tests of life and character. It transforms innocence into virtue. Sin lies not in being tempted, but in yielding to it. The way in which Joseph met this fierce onslaught is full of meaning. "He refused." There was his power. He met the temptation by a definite act and attitude of will. There was no dallying, no hesitation, but a great refusal. This refusal was based on rational grounds. Behind the will were the intellect and the conscience. The first reason for his refusal was the consciousness of duty to the master who had trusted and honored him. Very plainly Joseph told the temptress that she, as his master's wife, was the one and only exception to his full sway and power in the house. The perfect faith of the master called for the perfect faithfulness of the servant. Gratitude, trust, honour, devotion to such a master demanded, and should have, the uttermost integrity of which he was capable. But above and beyond all this, duty to God reigned supreme. He could not and therefore would not, commit this great wickedness and sin against God. To him God was first. The lessons of the old home had not been forgotten in spite of all the treatment he had received. On the contrary the way in which the Lord God of his father had been with him and prospered him in his servitude was an additional reason for loyalty and integrity. And so on the highest ground of his relation to God, he faced this temptation and won the victory. But sin was not to be daunted. The temptation was continued long, "for she spake to Joseph day by day." Temptation once only, and temptation continued daily, are very different experiences, and many who resist at first succumb at last. There was much more than the merely sensual in this conflict. We need not suppose that a man of Joseph's nature and circumstances was immune from the grossness of the peril; but we

may be perfectly certain that this was not the deepest and strongest aspect of the foe. Dr Marcus Dods, in one of those penetrating and searching delineations of character which make his studies of the patriarchs so valuable, very truly and acutely says:

“It is too little observed, and especially by young men who have most need to observe it, that in such temptations it is not only the sensual that needs to be guarded against, but also two much deeper-lying tendencies the craving for loving recognition, and the desire to respond to the feminine love for admiration and devotion ... a large proportion of misery is due to a kind of uncontrolled and mistaken chivalry (Dod’s Genesis, p. 344).” At length the woman’s passion overreached itself, and in the attempt to force Joseph to yield she was signally and wholly defeated. When he was faced with this crowning attempt he did the very best indeed, the only possible thing, he fled and got him out. Flight is the only safety from certain forms of temptation. Some temptations we resist by meeting them, but we can only resist others by flight. Safety is found in putting distance between us and our foe, and there is not only nothing ignoble in such flight, but on the contrary, it is the highest and truest form of virtue. And then the woman’s disappointed passion changed from love to hate. “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.” Taking the garment that Joseph had left behind him in his flight, she used it as a proof of his guilt; and first to the servants and then to her husband she made out a case against the Hebrew slave. The way she spoke of her husband to the servants (Genesis 39:14) shows the true character of the woman, and perhaps also the terms of her married life; while the fact that Potiphar only placed Joseph in prison instead of commanding him to be put to death is another indication of the state of affairs. For appearance sake Potiphar must take some action, but the precise action taken tells its own tale. He evidently did not credit her story. And thus Joseph was victorious. Her rank did not flatter him; her allurement did not entice him. In the strength of the presence of his Covenant God he was more than conqueror.

There is scarcely anything finer in Scripture than this picture of youth tested and triumphant. The simplicity, dignity and reserve of the narrative; the vividness of the portrayal of the parts played by Potiphar, his wife, and Joseph and the unmistakable force of the presentation of truth and righteousness, command our interest and elicit our admiration. It is the typical story for young manhood, conveying its own clear and blessed message. Young men need not sin, can be pure, shall be victorious, if only they will face their foe in the spirit and power of Joseph. Jehovah is the same to-day, and His covenant of grace is ordered in all things and sure.

III. In Prison (Genesis 37:13-23).

We are now to notice an instance of the victory of slander. It is often a great mystery that evil forces are allowed such freedom in a world that is controlled by a righteous and almighty God. Joseph was a victim of false accusation. There have been many such since his day. When Potiphar’s wife told her story, first to the servants and then to her husband, it is possible that they may have had certain doubts of the truth of what she said, and yet were not prepared to deny altogether the likelihood of what she charged against Joseph. Perhaps those servants said among themselves, “Well, there must be something in it.” How often people have said this on hearing a charge which they were not able to prove. Those well-known sayings, There is no smoke without some fire, and There must be some truth in it, are here absolutely disproved; and if these things were untrue of Joseph, may they not be untrue of many to-day? Yet insinuations continue to be

made, suggestions rankle in the mind, inquiries are not made, and perhaps the trouble is never removed. How easy it is to do mischief with the tongue! And if the accused, like Joseph, keeps silence, we may easily blast a character by reason of our suspicion that there must be something in it. Joseph's silence is once again remarkable. As Silence amid on the former occasion when his brothers cruelly mistreated him, so now he says nothing in self-defense. He will not rob his master of his wife in order to save himself. A word from him might easily have settled the matter, especially because, as we have observed, it seems pretty evident that Potiphar did not altogether believe in his wife s story. Yet to save her honour, Joseph was absolutely silent. There was no recrimination, nothing but a quiet endurance of the wrong. How he could do this is only explicable by that which is found no less than four times in this chapter Jehovah was with him. In the prison his experiences soon repeated themselves, for the prisoner continued to do what the slave had been doing in the time of prosperity. He filled this post also to the utmost of his ability, and it was not long before he was exactly in the same relation to the keeper of the prison as he had been to Potiphar, for the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. What magnificent rectitude and persistent faithfulness! By sheer force of character he won his way into the confidence of his keeper, and we may say that already other sheaves were making obeisance to his sheaf. The spiritual vitality of the man is simply astonishing, and again illustrates with magnificent force the truth that God blesses and honors those who are true to Him.

Suggestions for Meditation

Out of the wealth of material found in this chapter it may be worth while dwelling upon the element of difficulty as part of the training and discipline of human life.

1. The Value of difficulties.

"It is good for a young man to bear the yoke in his youth." It is easy to read this text, and not difficult to agree with it as a matter of theory; but it is quite another matter to accept it while the yoke is upon our own shoulders. And yet if only we could believe it at that time it would do incalculable service to the cause of Christian character. There were three yokes that Joseph bore: the yoke of slavery, the yoke of temptation, the yoke of suspicion and slander. Each of these by itself would have been heavy, but all three must have pressed deeply upon his soul. It is the worst possible thing for a young life to be made easy, to have everything done for it, to have a good time. Yokes borne in youth have at least three results; they prove personal integrity, they promote spiritual maturity, and they prepare for fuller opportunity. In Nature and in human life the best things are not the easiest but the hardest to obtain. "Blessed be drudgery" is universally true.

2. Duty in difficulties.

How nobly Joseph comported himself amidst all these trials and hardships! He might have sulked and become embittered; but instead of this his spirit was unconquerable by reason of its trust in God. He steadfastly refused to be unfaithful to his God, whatever might be the consequences. In duty he was loyal, in temptation he was strong, and in prison he was faithful. When this spirit actuates our life, difficulties become means of grace and stepping-stones to higher things. On the other hand, if difficulties are met in a fretful, murmuring, complaining, disheartened spirit, not only do we lose the blessings that would otherwise come through them, but our spiritual life suffers

untold injury, and we are weakened for the next encounter of temptation whenever it comes. There is scarcely anything in the Christian life which reveals more thoroughly what our Christianity is worth than the way we meet difficulties by the use of the grace of God.

3. Assurance in difficulties. The secret of Joseph's power was the consciousness of the presence of God. God had not forgotten him, though it might seem to have been the case. The very incident that was apparently the most injurious was the link used by God to bring about his exaltation. One of Horace Bushnell's great sermons has for its title, "Every Man's Life a Plan of God," and to the man who is sure that he is in the pathway of God's will there will come the consciousness of the Divine presence and blessing which will be an unspeakable comfort as he rests in the Lord and waits patiently for Him. God will bring forth his righteousness as the light and his just dealing as the noonday. The very troubles that seem to overwhelm will prove blessings in disguise and before long the Divine justification of His servant's faithfulness will be seen and manifested to all men. Evil may have its temporary victories, but they are only temporary. Good and right and truth must prevail, and it is for the servants of God to wait quietly, to go forward humbly, to live faithfully, and to trust boldly until God shall justify them by His Divine interposition, and glorify His grace in their lives.

However the battle is ended, Though proudly the victors come With fluttering flags and prancing nags And echoing roll of drums, Still truth proclaims this motto In letters of living light No question is ever settled Until it is settled right.

Though the heel of the strong oppressor May grind the weak in the dust. And the voices of fame with one acclaim May call him great and just, Let those who applaud take warning And keep this motto in sight No question is ever settled Until it is settled right.

Let those who have failed take courage, Though the enemy seemed to have won, Though his ranks are strong, if he be in the wrong, The battle is not yet done;

For, sure as the morning follows The darkest hour of the night, No question is ever settled Until it is settled right.

Chapter 71

00A.53 In Prison Gen_40:1-23

In Prison Genesis 40:1-23 THE outstanding feature of Joseph's life was faithful loyalty to God under all circumstances. He carried his convictions with him and lived them out. The well-known phrase, "When in Rome do as Rome does," has brought infinite trouble upon those who have followed its guidance. Joseph never compromised his position, and as a consequence he never lost spiritual power or weakened his witness for God. Someone has said that true independence is to act in the crowd as one thinks in solitude. Joseph had already influenced the keeper of his prison, and we are now to see still more strikingly the proof that the Lord was with him.

I. Working (Genesis 40:1-4). In the course of Joseph's incarceration two very notable people became inmates of the same prison, the chief of the butlers and the chief of the bakers of Pharaoh, King of Egypt. To these two men Joseph was appointed as servant, and in this simple fact was found one of the main links in the remarkable chain of providences associated with his life. None of us liveth to himself, and no one could have foreseen that the association of these two important servants of Pharaoh with the Hebrew slave would have brought about such far-reaching results. The smallest circumstance in life has its meaning, and it may be literally said that we do not really know the profound significance of many of the simplest details. Happy is the man whose eye is open to see the hand of God in every-day events, for to him life always possesses a wonderful and true joy and glory.

Again we observe the characteristic of faithfulness to duty which actuated Joseph at all times. Although the circumstances were hard, and his own position was the result of gross injustice, it made no difference to the faithfulness and loyalty with which he did his duty. The circumstances were all the harder because, as it would seem, it was none other than Potiphar (Genesis 40:4) who appointed Joseph to attend to these prisoners. A wounded spirit who can bear? And yet there is no trace what ever of any bitterness, but on the contrary, a magnificent and even massive silence amid all the misunderstanding, slander, and injustice. There are times in life when silence is indeed golden, and when to speak would be to demean one's self. Joseph had learned the secret of suffering uncomplainingly, and in the strength of his personal trust in God he won the victory over self.

It is also well worth noticing that Joseph's faithful loyalty to his religious convictions did not stand in the way of his earthly promotion. The men of the world are not slow to detect real character, and to take advantage of it. Other things being equal, a business man, although utterly irreligious, will trust a true Christian as an employee before one who makes no such profession. Genuine loyalty to God will always express itself in absolute faithfulness in every-day duty.

II. Watching (Genesis 40:5-19).

Once again Joseph was to be associated with dreams, for his two prisoners, the chief butler and the chief baker; each dreamed a dream in one night. Dreams were regarded as of great significance in Egypt, and we are therefore not surprised to read that the men were puzzled and

sad by reason of their inability to understand the meaning of what they had dreamed. Joseph was quick to see their sad countenances, a simple but significant testimony to his attitude of cheerfulness and the absence of self-consciousness. He possessed that finest of all gifts, a heart at leisure from itself, to soothe and sympathize. Very quickly he inquired of them as to the reason of their sad looks, and he was told the cause. Now if Joseph had been in the habit of looking on life with the eyes of a cynic he would have had nothing more to do with dreams. He might have said that he had had personal experience of the futility of such things in the fact that his own dreams had been so entirely dissipated by his experiences. But so far from this spirit being shown, Joseph at once invited the chief butler and the chief baker to tell him their dreams, saying that interpretations belonged to God. How real God was to Joseph all this time! He never went back from his early convictions, but was true to his home-training in spite of everything that he had suffered. It takes a real man to hold fast to his integrity in the midst of suffering such as Joseph experienced, and to keep the spiritual life free from fret, strain, hardness and despair. Does not all this put us to shame as we contemplate, perhaps with astonishment, the profound reality of the consciousness of God in the life of Joseph? Not the least remarkable point in his character was the combination of ability and agreeableness. By sheer force of personal power he raised himself, or rather was raised by God, to a position of trust, and at the same time manifested such personal amiability and attractiveness that he became acceptable to those around him. It is not often that we find so delightful a combination of personal characteristics. Sometimes we find ability without attractiveness, in which case the man is admired and even respected, but is feared, and people are apt to keep him at a distance. On the other hand we sometimes find agreeableness without ability, which gives the man an attractiveness for a while, but his superficiality at length becomes evident and his amiability counts for very little in the eyes of earnest and serious people. When, however, ability and attractiveness are combined, we have a man of real power whose influence for good can scarcely be limited.

Joseph’s readiness in approaching Pharaoh’s two officers is a striking illustration of the need of faithfulness in little things. He did not wait for some great occasion, but was found faithful in the path way of every-day service. True life will always strive to be at its best, and instead of waiting for great occasions, will make every occasion great. The combination of Joseph’s testimony to God with reference to interpretation, and his invitation to them to tell him the dreams, is another interesting feature in his life. God was the Source, but His servant was the channel of the interpretation. This has always been God’s method of revealing His will. The human interpreter has always been necessary and doubtless will be to the end of time.

First the chief butler’s dream was told and interpreted, and after the revelation of forthcoming restoration for the butler we have an exquisite human touch which reveals the heart of Joseph. But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: for indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon. Joseph rightly took the opportunity of appealing to this man to use his influence to get him out of the prison. Hitherto we have been impressed with the marvellous silence and self-control of the prisoner, but these verses clearly reveal what he felt, and go to prove the truth of the Psalmist that the iron entered into his soul.

Then came the chief baker's dream, and he, elated by the favorable interpretation of the former dream, fully expected a similar happy ending to his imprisonment. We observe here the remarkable faithfulness of Joseph, who told the baker quite frankly that a very different issue awaited him. The courage shown in this faithful revelation is noteworthy. Not even for his own advantage would Joseph swerve one hair's breadth from the pathway of truth. That which God revealed to him he passed on to the chief baker without addition or subtraction.

III. Waiting (Genesis 40:20-23).

It is, perhaps, not unduly imaginative to think of the day when the prison-doors were opened and the butler was allowed to go free. We may picture him bidding him farewell to Joseph with an assuring look and an encouraging word, and telling him that he would not be forgotten. And then again the doors were closed, and Joseph was still inside, wondering, doubtless, how long it would be before he would find deliverance. The story closes with the pathetic words, "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgat him." This must have been a terrible experience, for it was the deepest pit of his humiliation. Joseph must have been tempted to hate the world and surround himself with a wall of hardness and selfishness. Instead of this, we do not find that there was any feeling of bitterness or rebellion, or desire for revenge. Two years elapsed, and we doubt not that they had a steadying effect on Joseph's character as he waited for the fulfilment of God's purpose concerning him. He learned that there was something far more satisfying than recognition by man, the consciousness of doing the will of God. This is without exception the deepest joy in life.

These two years of waiting must also have had the effect of maturing whilst steadying Joseph's character. It is not too much to say that the self-possession and dignity which he showed when he stood before Pharaoh had their foundations laid during these two years. From time to time he would doubtless hear what was going on in Egypt, and perhaps in connection with the Court, and yet day after day passed without any remembrance from the one whose dream he had interpreted. But we are perfectly certain that he never regretted putting God first and allowing God to take care of His servant's interests. If only we take care of our character, God will take care of our interests and reputation. Daily faithfulness in ordinary duties is the very best preparation for future service.

Joseph found plenty of work to do and was enabled to bear his own sorrows and troubles in ministering to the needs of others. These two years were in some respects the most vital and critical in his life. The deeper the foundation, the more durable the building; and in these two years the foundations of his future influence were laid deep and strong. Some might have thought that the forty years spent by Moses in Midian keeping sheep, were unworthy of the man's position; but the keeping of the sheep was the making of Moses. So also these two years of quiet endurance in prison went far to make Joseph the fine man he afterwards became.

Suggestions for Meditation The one dominant thought that runs through the chapter is the relation of God to the ordinary everyday life of His people, especially in the time of suffering, sorrow, hardship and disappointment.

1. God's way is wisest. The prison was a place is where Joseph was fitted for his life-work. Men of the world would have described this as hard luck: but to Joseph it was part of the providence of God. God always sends His servants to school in order to fit them for future work, and it is

necessary that they should have a thorough education. Training, whether physical or moral, must necessarily be attended with hardship; and those whom God uses most have to be trained in the hardest schools. No chastening is pleasant at the time; but in the retrospect of experience no servant of God would ever be without the discipline which has enabled him to enter more thoroughly into the purposes of God and to help more really his fellowmen.

Pain's furnace heat within me quivers, God's breath upon the flame doth blow, And all my heart in anguish shivers And trembles at the fiery glow. And yet I whisper, As God will! And in His hottest fire hold still.

He comes and lays my heart, all heated, On the hard anvil, minded so Into His own fair shape to beat it With his great hammer, blow on blow! And yet I whisper As God will! And at His heaviest blows hold still.

He takes my softened heart, and beats it; The sparks fly off at every blow.

He turns it o' er and o' er, and heats it, And lets it cool, and makes it glow. And yet I whisper, As God will! And in His mighty hand hold still.

Why should I murmur? for the sorrow Thus only longer-lived would be; Its end may come, and will, to-morrow, When God has done His work in me. So I say, trusting, As God will!

And, trusting to the end, hold still.

He kindles for my profit purely Affliction's fiery, glowing brand; And all His heaviest blows are surely Inflicted by a Master-hand. So I say, praying, As God will! And hope in Him, and suffer still.

2. God's time is best. When Joseph was taken from home and sold into slavery everything seemed to be against him. When he was cast into prison as the result of calumny, again everything seemed to combine to crush him. When the hope of deliverance through the influence of the chief butler was deferred until at length there seemed to be no hope of freedom, everything must have appeared dark and forbidding. And yet probably Joseph never forgot those early dreams at home of the sheaves making obeisance. God was working His purpose out; and though it was impossible to realize it at the time, we know that afterwards Joseph fully understood that God's time of deliverance was by far the best. God is never before His time but He is never behind. The clock of Divine providence keeps strict time, and has never been known to vary either in one direction or the other.

3. God's grace is sufficient. In spite of everything that was against him, Joseph was victorious by the grace of God. Whether it was silence after calumny and injustice, whether it was cheerfulness amidst hardship, whether it was quick sympathy with the sorrows of others, whether it was patient endurance amidst hopes deferred, he was more than conqueror; and the secret of it all was, the Lord was with him. The test of character lies in the spirit being unprovoked, though faced by constant friction and opposition; and the test of ideal service is its continuance when unrecognized. True life consists in going on, without placing any limit to goodness of character or faithfulness of service, even though neither should be acknowledged on earth; and this is only possible by the grace of God. In a certain coal-mining neighborhood, where almost everything was covered with coal-dust, there was a beautiful white flower perfectly free from dust. When someone who was strange to the place remarked that the owner must take very great care of the flower to

prevent it from being covered with coal-dust, another who was standing by threw over the flower some dust which at once fell off, leaving the whiteness and beauty as exquisite as ever. The explanation was that the flower had on it what might be called an enamel which enabled it to receive the dust and throw it off without feeling anything of the effects. So it was with Joseph. His character was covered with the enamel of Divine grace, and all these sorrows and troubles came upon him and left him untouched except for the increased strength and power that came to him from God. And so the message to us all is that we are to wait for God. Let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing (James 1:4). Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise (Hebrews 10:36). “In patience ye shall possess your souls” (Luke 21:19, R.V.). And the secret of waiting for God is waiting on God. By simple trust and constant prayer, by loving fellowship and faithful obedience, we are enabled to wait for God so as to be ready when He calls. His summons to higher service comes in unexpected ways and at unexpected times, and if it does not find us ready we shall inevitably be passed by. So while we wait patiently for Him let us rest in the Lord, and then, like the servants of David, we shall be able to say, Thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall appoint.

Chapter 72

00A.54 Exaltation Gen_41:1-40

Exaltation Genesis 41:1-40

TRIALS may be viewed from two standpoints, and it will make all the difference to our spiritual life and peace which of these two points of view we take. From the human side Joseph's suffering was due to injustice on the part of Potiphar, and ingratitude on the part of the butler. From the Divine side these years were permitted for the purpose of training and preparing Joseph for the great work that lay before him. If we look only at the human side of trial we shall become discouraged, and it may be irritated and angered, but as we turn to look at it from the Divine side we shall see God in everything and all things working together for our good. How truly all this was realized in Joseph's case we are now to see.

I. The Dreams of the King (Genesis 41:1-7). The essentially Egyptian character of this section, and indeed of the entire narrative of Joseph, is worthy of constant notice, for it provides us with one of the watermarks of the Pentateuch, enabling us to perceive its historical character and its truthfulness to life. It is not too much to say that at no period after the time of Moses could anything so true to Egyptian life have been written out of Egypt by a member of the community of Israel.

Pharaoh dreamed, and his dream was associated with the River Nile, on which throughout the centuries the land of Egypt has depended for its very life. The dream was twofold: first that of the fat and lean kine, and then that of the full and thin ears of corn. In each case the dream was associated with the needs and conditions of the country.

II. The Failure of the Magicians (Genesis 41:8). The mighty monarch soon realized his limitations, for he was utterly unable to interpret his dreams. Like all Egyptians, he was profoundly impressed with the thought that the dreams had great significance, and his spirit was troubled. He thereupon summoned to his presence all the magicians of Egypt and all his wise men, but there was none that could interpret. In ancient days when so many natural phenomena were unknown and their true meaning not understood, there was great and constant opportunity for cleverness on the part of able and not too scrupulous men. The result was that a class sprang up which undertook to satisfy the cravings of men for knowledge; and, while there was doubtless not a little of perfectly legitimate information afforded by these magicians, in the course of time they became associated with chicanery and deceit. Here was an opportunity for them to reveal their knowledge, and inasmuch as the coloring of the dreams was essentially Egyptian it might have been thought that they would have had no real difficulty in giving some plausible interpretation; but their failure was complete, and Pharaoh was still without the relief he so earnestly desired.

III. The Recollection of the Butler (Genesis 41:9-13). The law of mental association was, however, at work in the mind of one of the monarch's attendants, and suddenly he remembered the days that were past and his own experiences in the prison. He thereupon confessed his faults and reminded Pharaoh of what had happened two years before, and then told him of the young Hebrew who had interpreted his dream which had so literally and wonderfully come to pass. How

simple and yet how truly remarkable is this link in the chain of circumstances by means of which God fulfilled His purposes for Joseph! On how little does very much often depend!

IV. The Call of the Prisoner (Genesis 41:14-16). The Call did not take long for Pharaoh to summon the prisoner Hebrew prisoner into his presence. Joseph was brought hastily out of the prison and quickly stood before Pharaoh. What a picture it must have been the mighty monarch and the unknown slave! It is evident that Pharaoh considered Joseph was of the same class to which his own wise men and magicians belonged; and inasmuch as such knowledge of dreams was regarded as obtainable by human powers, it seems pretty certain that Pharaoh regarded Joseph as one who was an adept in the work which his own wise men had failed to do. But the very first words of Joseph showed Pharaoh the true state of the case. It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace (Genesis 41:16). Mark the self-forgetfulness of these words: “Not in me: God.” Utterly regardless of himself or his own fate, he had one thought only the glory of God. Had he been a time-server or a place-seeker, or even concerned for his own personal safety, he might have fenced with the question and brought about his own deliverance. Had he been a proud man and eaten up with vanity, he might have shown eagerness to obtain personal credit. All these things were utterly alien from his mind. The supreme and overmastering thought in Joseph’s life was God. His spiritual vitality was inwrought and deep-seated, and nothing could shake his integrity and fearlessness, as he faced the great monarch and witnessed to his God.

V. The Interpretation of the Dreams (Genesis 41:17-36).

Pharaoh thereupon told his two dreams of the kine and ears of corn, and at once the interpretation was given. The two dreams referred to one subject, the double dream merely indicating the certainty of the occurrence (Genesis 41:32). Seven years of plenty were to be succeeded by seven years of famine, and Joseph thereupon urged Pharaoh to appoint a man who would take action to prevent the famine from causing suffering. He advised precaution being taken during the seven years of plenty: all the food of these good years that could be kept was to be stored up against the seven years of famine. This in substance was the interpretation and the advice based upon it. Not a word was uttered about himself, nor does there seem any hint that he considered himself to be the man whom Pharaoh should appoint. Joseph does not seem to have cared about himself at all. The frankness Traits of with which he told the King the dream, the quiet Character, dignity with which he gave his counsel, the perfect balance with which he stood before Pharaoh and his Court, are striking features of this splendid character. Six traits stand out which constitute him one of the models for all time: integrity, conscientiousness, diligence, nobility, courage, humility. He is one of the all-round, symmetrical characters of the Bible, always ready, ever conscientious, never sacrificing principle, faithful and fearless at every crisis.

IV. The Reward of the Interpreter (Genesis 41:37-40). The Pharaoh and his servants quickly saw the real Reward of value of this advice and at once accepted it. Still more, the King went much further and said that Joseph should be the one to accomplish this task. Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? Pharaoh was so deeply impressed with Joseph’s wisdom that he recognized his possession of Divine powers. Whatever precisely the King understood by the Spirit of God, it is evident he realized that Joseph was possessed of superhuman ability. The relation of the Spirit of God to certain men whose lives are recorded in the Old Testament is worthy of careful study.

Joseph, Joshua, and Daniel in particular are referred to as men in whom the Spirit of God dwelt (Genesis 41:38; Numbers 27:18; Daniel 5:11). And it is particularly important to observe the connection between the Spirit of God and the gifts for practical life that are exemplified in Joseph. Thus he possessed the spirit of observation. He had not lived for thirteen years in Egypt without knowing something of its needs, and it was the spirit of wisdom that enabled him to see how those needs were to be supplied. Just as sin dulls the mental and moral faculties, so the Spirit of God cleanses and refines them. A life of faithful obedience always guarantees true insight. There is no necessary contradiction between Christianity and genuine business powers. To be clear-headed does not mean to be soft-hearted. Christianity gives clearness, far-sightedness, mental perception and balance. It is perfectly true that the Gospel cannot, or at any rate does not, make an intellectual man out of one who does not possess any powers at all; it does not give faculties to those who do not possess them; but it certainly increases the capacity and refines the faculty. It does not diminish, but on the contrary increases mental life and genuine manhood. The gifts possessed by Joseph were not only intellectual but moral. What marvellous self-possession was his! Such a change from the prison to the Court would have killed a small nature; but Joseph's head was not turned, because of his moral rectitude. We also observe what remarkable decision of character he showed. There was no hesitation he knew what to advise, and stated his policy with absolute clearness and frankness. Not only so, but he proved once again that he possessed the gift of management. He had been faithful in that which was little, and had thereby qualified himself to be faithful in much.

Best of all, he had spiritual gifts. What endurance was his as he had learned to obey during those thirteen years of testing! How disinterested and unselfish he was, having no personal ends to gratify, no thought of bargaining before giving his interpretation! And thus his religion was supremely practical, and was not a hindrance to him, but a help. The Holy Spirit of God had taken full possession of every faculty of his nature, and intellectually, morally, and spiritually had been training and preparing him for this eventful moment.

Suggestions for Meditation The chapter speaks of life in various aspects, and carries its own messages for everyone of us.

1. The purpose of life.

God has some sphere for every one of us to fill. "To every man his work," and Joseph at last found his proper place. What a dignity it gives to life to realize that God has something for each one of us to do!

2. The discipline of life. The most unlikely circumstances are part of our education. Joseph had spent thirteen years in Egypt, and most of those years had been spent under a cloud. What was there to show as the result of all this time? Apparently nothing, and yet really everything. All his experiences had been tending in the direction of training. Some dreams take a long time to fulfill.

3. The duty of life.

We cannot help wondering whether Joseph ever showed any impatience with his lot. At any rate, nothing is recorded. In spite of much to try him, much that pressed upon him again and again, he held fast his integrity. Loyalty to his master, faithfulness to his God, heartiness in his work, constituted for Joseph his duty. So it must be always. It is required of stewards that a man be

found faithful.

4. The assurance of life. The secret of Joseph's loyalty was the consciousness that God was with him and was working on his behalf. He little knew how God could accomplish His will and bring about the fulfilment of the dreams; but God has marvellous facilities, and many ways of working. A monarch's dream, a butler's recollection, and everything else is brought about. How true it is that God worketh for him that waiteth! (Isaiah 64:4, R.V.) 5. The glory of life.

Joseph exemplified this in his constant living for others. Whether it was for Potiphar, or the jailer, or the prisoners, or Pharaoh, he laid himself out to serve others. This is the real meaning of altruism, and in it is the greatest glory of life. True influence over our fellows always comes sooner or later to the genuinely sincere man, who is devoid of all merely personal ambitions, the man who has no axes to grind. There are men to-day full of shrewdness and possessing great abilities who are nevertheless not trusted and loved, but either feared or suspected or at most admired at a distance! There are others who are without great intellectual powers, but who are absolutely genuine, truly sincere, and without any arriere pensee, and men trust them, love them, and find themselves helped by their sympathy, sweetness, and strength. The message for us all is to live close to God, to be ever on the watch for God's will, to find our happiness in carrying out that will, to say from the heart, "I delight to do Thy will" and then to go forth spending and being spent in the service of others. When this spirit actuates us, all difficulties, trials, and hardships will be found only the means of training, testing, and preparing us for living to the glory of God in the service of our fellows.

What only seemed a barrier, A stepping-stone shall be, Our God is no long tarrier, A present Help is He.

If all things work together For ends so grand and blest, What need to wonder whether Each in itself is best? Our plans may be disjointed, But we may calmly rest;

What God has once appointed Is better than our best.

What though we seem to stumble He will not let us fall, And learning to be humble Is not lost time at all.

Chapter 73

00A.55 The Prime Minister Gen_41:41-52

The Prime Minister Genesis 41:41-52

ONLY twelve years stood between the Hebrew shepherd boy and the Egyptian Prime Minister. It was a wonderful change by which, at one bound, Joseph leaped from the position of a slave in prison to that of the second ruler in the country. The story before us is the record of unchanged faithfulness amidst greatly changed surroundings. Circumstances alter cases, and even alter persons, but there was no alteration made in Joseph's character in spite of the very great change in his circumstances.

I. His Appointment (Genesis 41:37-45).

It is worth dwelling once again on the grounds of this appointment. We naturally wonder whether Pharaoh's quickly-conceived and strong impression that Joseph was the very man for the post was warranted by the facts of the case, and the more thoroughly we seek to penetrate beneath the surface the more clearly we see the monarch's decision was justified. Joseph's ready apprehension of coming danger, together with his foresight in propounding a plan to meet it, deeply impressed Pharaoh and those with him. Not less evident were the quiet resourcefulness and genuine capacity with which the young Hebrew dealt with a gigantic matter which concerned the whole of Egypt. But beneath these marks of power lay the elements of character which were at the root of Joseph's real life. From the very first uprightness had marked all his conduct in Egypt. If he had been a schemer intent on gaining his own selfish ends he might have easily avoided the prison, but from the time he was sold into Egypt to the moment that he stood before Pharaoh he had been honest, straightforward, and true. Then again Joseph had learned the secret of patient submission. In the face of injustice and cruel wrong he accepted his lot without murmuring, and endeavored to make the best possible use of it. The way upward often lies by a downward path through the valley of humiliation. Nor may we forget the magnificently bold use of the powers that God gave him. Whether it was interpreting dreams, or showing sympathy, or organizing a national policy, he put into fine practice his divinely-given faculties, and in their exercise he found the best possible way of preparation for his life-work.

It is at once easy and profitable to dwell upon the afore-mentioned elements of Joseph's character and manhood. We must never forget, however, that they in turn need explanation, and this is to be found in what Pharaoh spoke of as the indwelling of the Spirit of God (Genesis 41:38). Character is undoubtedly the secret of power, but God is the secret of character. Pharaoh was therefore perfectly correct when he said, ("God hath shewed thee all this" (Genesis 41:39). From first to last it was the grace and power of God that made Joseph what he was.

Pharaoh very promptly gave Joseph definite proof of the appointment by putting upon him his own ring, arraying him in vestures of that characteristically Egyptian product, fine linen, putting a gold chain about his neck, making him to ride in the next chariot to his own, and calling upon the people to do him honour (Genesis 41:42-43). The familiar words "Bow the knee" representing the Hebrew

“Abrech,” have been the cause of not a little discussion. The A.V. rendering dates as far back as the time of Jerome, but Professor Sayce is inclined to favour a Babylonian interpretation meaning seer. It is therefore very interesting to note that some thirteen years ago a letter appeared in the Record mentioning that in modern Egypt Ibrik is in common use in the present day by camel-drivers when they want their camels to get down on their knees, and slave-mistresses in the harems say Ibriky when they order a slave-girl to get down on her knees and confess repentance for wrong-doing (Expository Times, vol. v., p. 435). It would seem therefore that there is still good reason for the old rendering.

Again, we cannot but mark the astonishing change in Joseph’s circumstances, and we wonder whether he ever thought of the coat of many pieces with its significant meaning given to him by his father years before. Only once before, so we are told by the inscriptions, was a subject thus raised to a high position in Egypt.

Further assurance was given to Joseph by Pharaoh in the solemn promise that he should be kept from harm (Genesis 41:44), and in the new name bestowed upon him, Zaphnath-paaneah. Here again we are in the region of conjecture. By some it is thought to mean “The Revealer of Secrets,” by others, “The Support of Life,” and yet again modern Egyptologists are said to favour “God spoke, and he came into life” (Driver’s Genesis, p. 344).

Joseph’s wife was also given to him by the king, and in marrying Asenath, the daughter of the Egyptian priest, we see how thoroughly Pharaoh intended Joseph to become identified with Egypt and its life. He thus became naturalized in his new country; and if we are inclined to wonder whether he had any scruples in marrying into such a family we may perhaps remember that there was no such clear severance between the Hebrews and other nations at that time as there was in subsequent times.

II. His Life (Genesis 41:46-52). The new Prime Minister was not long before he took up with characteristic promptitude the work which lay before him. First of all he made a tour throughout all the land, and in the seven plenteous years he gathered up all the food and laid it up in store houses. He carried out his policy with thoroughness and success.

Meanwhile personal and domestic happiness was coming to him. God gave to him two sons, and true to his constant recognition of the Divine blessing, he acknowledged God’s mercies in the names that he gave to them. The firstborn he called Manasseh (which means “Forgetting”); for God said he, “hath made me to forget all my toil, and all my father’s house.” Everything in life had a profound significance for Joseph, though we are not to take these words literally, as though all his early life had become entirely obliterated from his memory. The true meaning is that now he had a new outlook, and was able to view things from the standpoint of his own home rather than that of his father’s. Hitherto his thoughts had naturally gone back with intense longing to the old home and his old father. Now, however, he had home, wife, work and interests of his own, and everything was henceforth to be judged from this new point of view. The prosperous years were doing their office in Joseph’s life. They were making changes in the man. They were working off the depression, the anxiety; the wistfulness of that sorrowful past; they were filling his soul with more ample conceptions of God’s goodness; they were causing him to forget all his toil. . . . His father’s house, loved as it still must be, could not rise in his mind as the sole form of welfare, the sole image of good; nor could his expectations of home happiness take that form now. That, too,

had gone from the present to the past. . . . God had made him feel that the career of deliverance and comfort might, and did, take another shape. He filled the present for him with other scenes, and the future with other expectations; and he enriched all with a great sense of enjoyment, of peace, and welfare given and blessed by God (Rainy, Expositor, series 3, vol. IV. pp. 401-411). The name of the second son Joseph called Ephraim (“Fruitful”); “for God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.” If the birth of the first son reminded him of the negative side of his life’s experiences, enabling him to blot out the memory of the past, the birth of the second son suggested the positive side of his life in the abundant blessing that God had vouchsafed to him. How beautiful it is when life is interpreted in the light of God’s dealings, and when everything, dark or light, has its own Divine significance! There was no resentment, no murmuring, no occupation with personal ills, no concern with mere second causes. Everything in Joseph’s experience was illuminated by light from heaven. Not the least important point derivable from the story at this juncture is that when Joseph became Prime Minister of Egypt he did not forget his religion, and set it aside as a thing of the past. On the contrary, he used it in the fulfilment of the duties of his important office. If Divine grace was needed in the time of his affliction, much more was it needed in the moment of prosperity. If ever Joseph needed protection, it was at this time. His self-possession arid his perfect accommodation to his new surroundings could only have come through absolute dependence upon God. Prosperity therefore made no difference to him. He was the same Joseph that he had been in the days of adversity. He acknowledged God’s hand and goodness, and thereby proved that he had learned some of the deepest lessons of life in the school of discipline.

Suggestions for Meditation The story of Joseph’s life and work as Prime Minister of Egypt can, as we have seen, be regarded from the point of view of religious manhood, genuine character, and splendid work. We prefer, however, to look at it from the standpoint of the Divine purpose, and see in it lessons about God in relation to His servants.

1. God’s Providence exemplified.

Again and again we shall find it profitable and important to recall the links in the chain which led from Canaan to Egypt, from the old home to the royal court. Jealousy by brothers, sale as a slave, faithfulness under temptation, sympathy with sadness, endurance of ills, loyalty to God, the dreams of a monarch, the memory of past mercies these were the slender but sufficient threads which linked the pit in Canaan with power in Egypt. Not one of these links of connection was unnecessary. Each one was essential, and formed one of the “all things” that worked together for good. How often we find this so in life! A multitude of minute events, not even one of them great or striking or marvellous, and yet at the end a truly astonishing revelation of the working of God. Let us never hesitate to believe in Him Whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth.

2. God’s Righteousness revealed.

It was a long time from Egypt back to the youthful dreams of the boy Joseph, but now they were in a measure fulfilled and were yet to be completely realized. How true it is that them that “honour Me I will honour!” God will justify Himself at last. His providence often appears like a piece of tapestry looked at from the wrong side, but the pattern is there and only needs the true standpoint to perceive it. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” In the Great Day when everything is

seen clearly it will be the testimony of every one of God's servants that "He hath done all things well." Meanwhile it is for us to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, and He shall bring forth our righteousness as the light and our judgment as the noonday.

3. God's Wisdom justified.

During those years God's of trial, life must have been a great mystery to Joseph. The misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and persecution were unusually severe and protracted, but they brought the needed discipline for the subsequent years of exaltation. He had learned, and so could teach. Our best work is always the result of long preparation, and it is only thus that we can pass on the lessons that God teaches us. There is a plant which takes a century to develop, and flowers but for a short time. So it is with human character. The process of training is long, but the power which results is great. It took Moses eighty years to get ready for the one night of deliverance from Egypt.

4. God's Grace manifested. This is the supreme lesson which meets and impresses us at every stage of Joseph's history. In adversity he trusted his God and waited God's time. In prosperity he leaned upon his God and found His grace sufficient. And thus the balance was preserved. His heart was not tried by humiliation nor his head turned by exaltation. When the Lord exalts His servants to positions of importance it is because He has prepared them by discipline. In moments which appeal to human pride and self-sufficiency the believer needs nothing less than Divine power to keep him humble, simple, and faithful, and for all this there is no school like the grace of God.

Let us therefore make God real in our daily life, and ever put and keep Him in the foremost place in all our interests and hopes. In darkness or in daytime let us live in Him, and then we shall be enabled to live for Him. The darkness may be great and prolonged, but He is our Light. The sunshine may be fierce and dazzling, but He is sufficient. Whatever our pathway, be it shadowed or bright, He is near, He will keep, and He will make our lives strong, sweet, beautiful, fragrant and blessed.

Chapter 74

00A.56 The Awakening of Conscience Gen_42:1-38

The Awakening of Conscience Genesis 42:1-38

WE now take up again the thread of God's direct purposes with Israel as exemplified in the story of Joseph in Egypt. More links in the wonderful chain of Providence come before us. The famine was affecting other lands besides Egypt, and it was the need of Jacob and his household that brought Joseph and his brethren once more together.

I. The Journey (Genesis 42:1-5). In some way or other Jacob had been informed that there was corn in Egypt, and in view of the great need of himself and his family he expostulated with his sons, and urged them to go down thither. The brethren were evidently perplexed and undecided. Their father's words, "Why do ye look one upon another?" may possibly have reference to their awakening consciousness of what Egypt might mean to them. The name clearly called up memories which they would much prefer not to have brought before them. However, the pressure of need brought their in decision and hesitation to an end, and they started from home to go down and buy corn in Egypt. Only ten of Joseph's brethren took the journey, for Jacob would not allow his youngest son Benjamin to accompany them. He was the last and only comfort of the old man's life, and it would have been the crowning disaster and sorrow if anything had happened to him. We can well imagine the feelings of the ten brethren as they journeyed to Egypt and recalled the events of twenty years before. They little knew what was in store for them, and it was well that they did not, for it might easily have led to troubles of various kinds for themselves and their father. It is a merciful Providence which hides the future from our view, and calls upon us to take one step at a time, and to learn the spiritual meaning and significance of each event in the retrospect of experience.

II. The Meeting (Genesis 42:6-25). At length the brethren came face to face with the great Governor of Egypt, and they bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth. Thus all unconsciously they fulfilled his early dreams (Genesis 37:7) which had been such a cause of offence to them. It is not at all surprising that they did not recognize Joseph, for the changes in his appearance between the ages of seventeen and thirty-eight, together with his Egyptian language, appearance and position, would effectually prevent them from associating their young brother with the great personage before whom they stood. His hard treatment of them has been criticized as at once unnecessary and unworthy, but it still remains a question whether he did not do the very best for them under the circumstances. Joseph was undoubtedly prompted by principle in taking these steps, and it would have been weakness of the highest and most culpable kind to have revealed himself prematurely before discovering the real character of the brothers after the long lapse of time. It is an old saying that the longest way round is the shortest way home, and we have a striking example of this in Joseph's treatment of his brethren. In view of the fact that God was so real a power in his life, there does not seem much doubt that he was divinely guided in what he did. It was essential that their character should be tested, and if there was no change in them that an endeavour should be made to bring about an improvement. Joseph thereupon

charged them with being spies come to see the unfortified and unprotected position of the land. Their answer was to repel with earnestness this charge, and their language is very significant when they say, “Thy servants are twelve brethren . . . the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.” If this reference to Joseph represents their true mind, they evidently believed that he was dead, but the phrase “twelve brethren” is very suggestive, and even beautiful. Like Wordsworth’s “We are Seven,” they considered that the family circle was still intact, notwithstanding their brother’s death. Is there not some hint here of an improvement in their spiritual condition?

Joseph lets them understand that he is not prepared to take their bare word of denial, and requires a definite proof of their sincerity and truthfulness. He makes a proposal that one of them shall return home and fetch their youngest brother, in order that it may be evident that they are speaking the truth. Thereupon he puts them in prison for three days, doubtless to give them time to consider and consult about this proposal. It is impossible to avoid associating the pit into which they thrust him with the prison into which he put them, and it would seem as though Joseph himself had this association in mind. In any case, we know that the memory of the past became acute, and their sin was brought vividly before them. At the end of three days they had their second interview with the Governor of Egypt, and at the outset there was a note of encouragement in Joseph’s assurance that he feared God. The way in which God is associated with the life of Joseph, as expressed in his words, is one of the most beautiful features of the narrative. Several instances have already come before us, and there are more to follow. Thus we remember how he said, “How can I do this . . . sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9). “Do not interpretations belong unto God?” (Genesis 41:8). God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace (Genesis 41:16). God will shortly bring it to pass (Genesis 41:32). God hath made me forget (Genesis 41:51). Everything in Joseph’s life was guided and controlled by the thought of God. He there upon makes another proposal to the effect that one of them should be left behind and the others return home and bring their youngest brother down to Egypt. At this point the brethren cannot refrain from connecting what they were then suffering with what they had caused Joseph to suffer over twenty years before. Conscience was now awake, and in the presence of the Governor of Egypt they admitted their guilt concerning their brother. Time does not blot out sin, nor has it any power over the conscience. Why these men should have had this sin so vividly brought to their recollection at this time is a point of very real interest. The law of association was undoubtedly at work. They were in Egypt; a simple fact that called up the memory of the Midianite merchantmen and their journey thither. They were all together in a strange land; another fact that might have had influence in calling to mind the deed which was done as the result of a former meeting together. Then again, they were in the power of a stranger whose force was infinitely stronger than their own; and this in turn may have had the effect of reminding them of the utter defenselessness of their young brother as they plotted his ruin and thrust him into the pit in spite of the anguish of soul and his cries for pity. The elements of true repentance as seen in these words of the brethren are very striking (a) Conscience: “We are verily guilty”; (b) Memory: “We saw the anguish”; (c) Reason: “Therefore is this distress come upon us.” At this point Reuben rebuked them and reminded them of what he himself had done. It was a case of weakness reproaching badness, and was not of any great moral value. Reuben was the unstable one, and it is easy for such a character to say, I told you so, while not having lifted a finger to remove the injustice or right the wrong. The whole tone of the brethren is, however, very striking in the change which had evidently been wrought during the twenty years in their thought of

Joseph. In the old days he was scornfully stigmatized as this dreamer, but now he is our brother and the child. The mocking attitude had been changed for at least something of interest and sympathy, and they seem to be already experiencing a little of the truth that blood is thicker than water.

All this time they were, of course, perfectly unconscious that Joseph understood every word they were saying, and we can see his real feeling towards them in the fact that he was overcome by his emotions, and had to retire to weep in silence and to avoid recognition. On his return, as they had accepted his proposal, Simeon was the one selected to be kept, and he was thereupon bound before their eyes. We do not know exactly why it was that Simeon was chosen, but from the fact that Jacob on his deathbed could say nothing of good concerning him it is very probable that he was the ringleader in the action against Joseph, as he had been in the treachery against Hamor and Shechem.

Joseph's command to restore every man's money into his sack and to give them provision for the way is another indication of his true feelings towards them. There is nothing more striking in the character of Joseph than the utter absence of revengeful feeling, whether it was against his brethren, or against Potiphar, or against the chief butler. At each step of his journey he shows the true forgiving spirit of the man to whom God is a supreme and blessed reality. There are some people who never seem to get over slight and injustice. They brood over them and take almost every opportunity of pouring out their wrongs and indulging a revengeful spirit. To such people "Revenge is sweet" and they take a pleasure in repaying people in their own coin. Not so with Joseph. To revenge may be human, but to forgive is Divine.

III. The Return (Genesis 42:26-38). The brethren had not gone far away before they discovered the money in their sacks, and when they found it their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us? They of course felt that they had no right to the money, and it is noteworthy that for the first time in the record God is brought into their life. Conscience was still making cowards of them, and they could not but associate the circumstance of the money in the sack with their past wrong-doing. At length they arrived home and told their father all that had happened unto them. There were no lies this time, no deception of their aged father, and once again we are conscious of a decided improvement in the moral character of the men. Everything was told, and in particular the condition laid down by the Governor in Egypt about bringing their youngest brother with them. Their father felt the same fear that they did when he saw the money in their sacks, and the words of the old man show how keenly he took all this to heart. We wonder whether his words, "Me have ye bereaved of my children" (Genesis 42:36), really expressed his deep conviction, in spite of what they had told him, and of the coat which they had brought home (Genesis 37:33), that they had really put Joseph to death? Or it may be a mere general expression that it was through their instrumentality he had lost his beloved son.

We cannot help feeling sorry for this exhibition of faithlessness on the part of Jacob. It is a case of the old Jacob once more, and not the new Israel. As he had done very often in days gone by, he was looking entirely on the human side, and never thinking of the possibility of God having some wise purpose in all these events. All these things are against me was his sad and really faithless outburst, when as a simple fact all these things were definitely and directly in his favour. Four

mistakes the old man made. He said Joseph was dead, when he was not; he seems to have thought Simeon could not remain alive in Egypt, when he was perfectly safe; he interpreted the taking of Benjamin as a loss to himself for ever; and then, as the crowning error, said that everything was against him. How short-sighted it is possible for a true believer to be! God's never failing providence was as much at work at that moment as it had ever been in the early days of the patriarch's chequered history.

Reuben now gets the better of his characteristic instability, and boldly offers his two sons as hostages if Benjamin is not brought safely back. It was a noble and generous offer, though, of course, it is difficult to see what power he could have to bring Benjamin back out of Egypt, or what good it would be to his father to slay the two sons if Benjamin did not return. But the father would not be persuaded, and by his refusal he not only delayed the truest and best interests of himself and his family, but hindered the development and progress of the Divine purposes of love and grace concerning them.

Suggestions for Meditation The chapter is full of varied lessons for life. Divine mercies and human experiences are crowded into almost every part.

1. The persistence of the Divine purpose.

Once again we observe the onward sweep of God's providence concerning Joseph and Israel. There is no halt, no resting, but a constant, steady movement. Event after event is taken up and weaved into the plan; nothing is outside the Divine purpose, and everything is made to subserve it. Whether it be the lack of food to Jacob, or the power of memory in the brethren, or the opportunity of mercy in Joseph, everything tends to reveal the loving kindness of God and to realize His projects for them all. At the risk of repetition for the subject is full of it at every point we must not fail to cling closely to our belief in the constant providence of our Father in heaven. In these days, when law is said to reign supreme, when science can only speak of cause and effect, or at least of continuity, and Christian people are apt to concentrate attention on methods, principles, and laws rather than on the Source of all these things, it is particularly necessary to hold fast the old foundation belief that There is a Divinity that shapes our ends, Rough hew them how we will.

2. The strength of human affection.

Twenty and more years had elapsed since Joseph had experienced the cruelty and injustice of his brethren, and yet when he meets them again it is with feelings of deep affection. All that he says and does is really prompted by his devoted love for them and their best interests. There is nothing stronger in this world than human love. Its persistence, its forbearance, its self-sacrifice are writ large on the annals of the human race and constitute its noblest feature. And when, more over, this human affection is inspired and prompted and controlled by love to God, it is in truth the greatest thing in the world. Now, if human love is so great, so mighty, so enduring, what must Divine love be, of which the human is only a faint though blessed echo? If human love is the greatest thing in the world, Divine love is the greatest thing in the universe.

3. The power of a guilty conscience.

There are few passages more striking in the record of Holy Writ than the revelation of the power of conscience in the brethren of Joseph. The greatest punishment that a man can suffer is that which

is within, and comes from a consciousness of guilt. The marvellous way in which circumstances combined to recall with intensity the events of over twenty years before is one of the most striking and significant features of the story. What a wonderful chain of simple ordinary events led to the revelation of the sin of the brethren! That they should be called to go into Egypt of all places, that they should endure hard usage at the hands of the Governor, that they should be cast into prison, and that they should be so manifestly under the absolute control of the power and mercy of the great personage, were so many links of memory that brought back to them their sin. Conscience is the knowing part of us that which knows together with God, and agrees with the revelation of right which comes from Him “con-science”. It is worth while observing the seven different aspects of conscience referred to in the Scriptures a weak conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7), a defiled conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7), an evil conscience (Hebrews 10:22), a seared conscience (1 Timothy 4:2), a pure conscience (2 Timothy 1:3), a good conscience (1 Peter 3:16), a beautiful conscience (Hebrews 13:18, Greek). The last point is of very special importance. There are consciences which, while intrinsically good, are not outwardly attractive to others, because they are full of scruples rather than principles. The true conscience will recommend itself by its moral beauty, and this is the kind of conscience men ought to see in the children of God. This is only possible when the conscience is kept pure through the blood of Christ by the Eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14).

4. The nature of true repentance.

We see in the story the remorse and sorrow of the brethren. Why were these not sufficient? Because a consciousness and even a confession of sin is no true evidence of an altered character. Joseph saw their change of mind as to the past, but it was necessary for him to know it with regard to the future as well. To be aware of sin is not repentance, for everything proves useless if the sin should be committed again. Right views of sin are one thing, to stop sinning is quite another. Joseph could not see this until the return of the brethren to Egypt, but we can observe in the narrative (Genesis 42:29, Genesis 42:37) the elements of a better life. Repentance, therefore, is a change of mind as to the past, and this we call penitence; it is also a change of will as to the future, and this we call obedience. In our childhood s days many of us learned what are still the very best definitions of repentance. One is in the Church Catechism, Repentance whereby we forsake sin. The other was in our hymn-book, though it is not often found in children’s hymn-books to-day:

Tis not enough to say, I m sorry and repent, And then go on from day to day Just as we always went.

Repentance is to leave The sins we loved before, And show that we in earnest grieve By doing them no more.

5. The short-sightedness of human reason. At the end of the story we see this in the experience of Jacob. The old man made a list of his troubles, and on the face of it, all that he said was in a sense verbally true; and yet he made deplorable mistakes by drawing wrong deductions. We may put our own record of life in one column and argue accordingly, but we do not know all and we ought therefore to wait until we can put God’s record in the opposite column. Through judging by appearances Jacob proved himself to be utterly wrong; and while we dare not blame him for we ourselves do the same so often faithfulness compels us to observe that his earlier experiences

might well have taught him to believe more truly in the unwearied faithfulness of God. He said “All these things are against me,” and that is what we say as we continue to be occupied solely with circumstances. If, however, we would but look up above circumstances, we should see things as they really are, and thus be able to cry out with the Apostle, “All things work together for good.” And we should say this because of our strong confidence that “all things are yours.” The message is therefore clear. We must look up to God through and beyond circumstances. It was when Peter took his eyes off Christ and occupied his attention with the waves that he lost his faith and began to sink. Circumstances are only things that stand round us, and they can never do more than this. They do not shut out the sky or stand over us; and if only our gaze is ever fixed on God, and we believe to see the goodness of the Lord in spite of circumstances, we shall never be put to confusion.

Rest in the Lord, my soul;

Commit to Him thy way.

What to thy sight seems dark as night, To Him is bright as day.

Rest in the Lord, my soul;

He planned for thee thy life, Brings fruit from rain, brings good from pain, And peace and joy from strife.

Rest in the Lord, my soul; This fretting weakens thee.

Why not be still? Accept His will;

Thou shalt His glory see.

Chapter 75

00A.57 Divine Discipline Gen_43:1-34; Gen_44:1-34

Divine Discipline Genesis 43:1-34; Genesis 44:1-34 THE great detail of the story of Joseph's relations to his brethren is a noteworthy feature, and sheds not a little light on the fundamental purpose of this section and of the Book of Genesis as a whole. It is history written from a religious standpoint, and in these chapters now to be considered everything seems to be subservient to the Divine testing, revelation, and development of the character of the brothers under the stress of the discipline administered to them. In view of the great particularity of the story it is impossible to do more than touch upon its salient features; but it will repay the closest attention as a striking manifestation of Divine action and of human character.

I. The Dire Need (Genesis 43:1-14).

It was not very long before the need of food was as great as ever in Jacob's family at Hebron. The famine continued, and Jacob thereupon urged his sons to go again to Egypt to buy food. Judah at once represented to his father the utter impossibility of going without taking Benjamin with them, because of the definite and solemn words of the Governor of Egypt. With perfect plainness he told Jacob that they would not go down unless he was prepared to send Benjamin.

One significant and suggestive touch of the old native shrewdness seems to come out in the reply of Jacob: "Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?" (Genesis 43:6). That is, Why did you need to say anything about it; why not have kept silent? His sons told him that this was an utter impossibility, for the man asked pointed questions which admitted only of equally pointed answers.

Once again Judah appealed to his father and urged him to yield the point. He promised to be surety for Benjamin, and expressed his willingness to bear the blame for ever if he did not return with him in safety. At length Jacob recovered his spiritual equilibrium, and consented to let Benjamin go. He also told them to take a gift to the great man in Egypt. In the old days he had tried to appease his brother Esau and here again he adopted the same policy. Not only so, they were to take double money in their hand, and the money that was brought again in their sacks. He also commended them to the "God of Power" (El-Shaddai), praying that the Mighty God would give them mercy before the man and send back Simeon and Benjamin. The old man s closing words indicate a fine spirit of acceptance of the Divine will: "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

II. The Notable Reception (Genesis 43:15-34). The men soon arrived in Egypt and stood before Joseph, and the sight of Benjamin was more than enough to make Joseph decide to receive them and show them hospitality in his own house. The fear of the brethren immediately on their arrival is very striking, and they at once told the steward of Joseph's house what had happened about the money found in their sacks. The answer of the man is deeply interesting: Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money. Simeon was thereupon restored to them, and we can well imagine the feelings with which

they waited for the appearance of their host. On Joseph's arrival they once again fulfilled his Again they early dreams "as they bowed themselves to him to the earth." His keen inquiries after their father was yet another opportunity for them to acknowledge his supremacy, and they bowed down their heads, and made obeisance. How simple is the narration, and yet how remarkable is the way in which God s providence had brought about the fulfilment of the dreams! The sight of Benjamin was too much for Joseph, and the narrative gives a beautiful touch in describing Benjamin as his mother's son. Joseph's feelings compelled him to turn aside and weep in private; but recovering himself, he went back to his brethren, and at once the feast commenced. He had not overlooked the order of their seniority, and as they sat, placed according to age, we are not surprised to read that l the men marvelled one at another. It was also a very significant act that Benjamin s mess was five times so much as any of the others, for it gave Joseph an opportunity of discovering their feelings towards Benjamin, and whether there was anything like the same jealousy and towards him as there had been towards the brother with the coat of many colours. The time passed with hilarity and satisfaction, their fears proving groundless, and everything promised well for their journey home as one united company to greet again their aged father.

III. The Significant Plan (Genesis 44:1-17).

Joseph's orders were to provide the men with as much corn as they could carry, to put every man's money into the mouth of his sack, and to put the silver divining-cup in the mouth of the sack belonging to Benjamin. It is not certain what the process was in which divining-cups were used. Some think that small pieces of gold were thrown in the cup and demons invoked. Others think that the cup full of water was taken out into the sun, and that as the sun played upon the water the figures made were interpreted as omens, good or bad. It would seem clear from the narrative that Joseph was in the habit of using the art of divination.

They started at the break of day; but before they had gone very far they were overtaken by the steward and rebuked for taking away the silver divining-cup that did not belong to them. We can picture the scene. They were returning happy, if not exultant, with Simeon free and Benjamin safe. Suddenly, however, their elation was destroyed, and fear once again possessed them. They protested with all earnestness that they were innocent, and urged in proof of it that they brought again the money which had been found in their sacks mouths on the former journey. They were also perfectly ready - so conscious were they of innocence - that the one with whom the cup was found should die, and the rest would be slaves to the great Egyptian Governor. The steward would not allow this for a moment, only claiming that he with whom the cup should be found must become a slave, the others being free to return home. We can well imagine the consternation when, after examining into every sack, it was found in the last of all, Benjamin's. Instead of allowing Benjamin to go while they returned to their father, they determined to cast in their lot with him, and so they all returned to Egypt. Once again they found themselves in the house of Joseph, and fell before him on the ground. Joseph asked them solemnly and severely what they had done, and whether they did not know that such a man as he could certainly divine. Judah's words are very striking: "What shall we say unto my lord? . . . God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord's servants, both we and he also with whom the cup is found." If these words refer to Judah's belief in the guilt of Benjamin, it is very striking that he speaks of the iniquity of thy servants, as though they were all included in his sin. But it may not be without some allusion to the iniquity of the old days, which they now at length confess that God hath found out.

Joseph, however, would not permit of Judah's proposal that they should become his slaves. All that he required was that the man in whose sack the cup had been found should be his slave: the res t of them could go up in peace to their father. It would seem as though Joseph's purpose in this stratagem was to test the brethren in relation to Benjamin, and to see whether they would be prepared to sacrifice him to their own safety. It may also be that he wished to retain Benjamin alone, at least for a time, to gratify his own intense love by having him in Egypt as a companion. But the outcome was soon to prove very different.

IV. The Earnest Intercession (Genesis 44:18-34).

Then Judah drew near and interceded on behalf of his brethren, and in the course of these verses we have one of the most exquisite pieces of literature in the whole world. We observe in the first place the deference and humility with which Judah approaches Joseph another striking fact, in view of those early dreams. We also observe the beautiful simplicity with which he tells the story of his father and the child of his old age his youngest one who alone is left of his mother, his brother being dead. The pathos of the recital is also deeply touching and almost perfect as he goes on to show how the old man, bereaved of his two favorite sons, will be brought down to his grave in sorrow. Then the appeal closes with the heroic offer to become a bondman in the place of Benjamin, to sacrifice himself on behalf of his brother. "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." No further words are necessary in connection with this touching and beautiful story except to call attention to the way in which it reveals the changed character of Judah and the brethren. Assuming that Benjamin was guilty, his act had brought disgrace upon them all, and if the men had been as they were of old it would have been perfectly easy to settle the question by killing Benjamin on the spot and thereby clearing themselves of all complicity. But this was exactly what they did not and would not do. At once they returned to Egypt, and more marvellous still, there was actually no reproach of Benjamin. They were doubtless conscious of their own greater guilt, and so they returned to suffer together. At last they were a united family; and Judah's pathetic appeal was the crowning proof that they were now docile and disciplined, and ready for God s further and higher purposes concerning them.

Suggestions for Meditation The entire section is filled with striking and suggestive illustrations of human life under the training of Divine discipline.

1. The recovery and victory of faith. The way in which Jacob recovers himself is deeply interesting. At first he would not hear of Benjamin going down. Reuben s appeal (Genesis 42:37-38) was utterly powerless, and was doubtless due, in some measure at least, to Jacob's knowledge of his instability of character; but Judah proves more successful, and at last the old man gives his consent. Now, indeed, he is Israel, and not Jacob. Faith is sometimes checked and even defeated as we look on the dark side of things; but as we continue to face the facts, and realize that after all God is Almighty, faith regains strength, courage is restored, and victory becomes ours. Like Jacob, we face the contingency of sorrow, not with mere passive resignation, but with the consciousness that everything that comes is included in the Divine will, and must be among the all things that work together for our good. "This is the victory that overcometh . . . even our faith."

2. The moral power of fear.

There is scarcely anything more interesting and striking in the story of Joseph's brethren than the way in which they were impressed and actuated by fear from first to last. Fear possessed them on their first journey; fear actuated them when they found the money in their sacks (Genesis 42:28); fear continued to affect them as they once again appeared before Joseph (Genesis 43:18); and the crowning fear was seen when the discovery was made of the cup. God uses fear to recall the heart to Himself. Fear probes, searches, warns, purifies, and keeps the heart tender and true, sensitive to God's will, and ever shrinking from that which is evil. The fear of the Lord has two sides a shrinking from sin and an intense desire to be true to God and it is because of these things that it is the beginning of wisdom. There are few subjects more worthy of careful and prolonged attention and practical meditation than the fear of the Lord as it is revealed in Holy Scripture.

3. The necessity of prolonged discipline. As we read the story of the length of time, from the moment the brethren were first tested to the time when Joseph revealed himself to them, we cannot but be struck with the almost continuous discipline which they experienced, and we naturally ask why it was necessary that so thorough, persistent, and deep a work was attempted. The answer is probably to be found in the need of thoroughness of moral and spiritual training. When a large building is to be erected, it is important that there should be not merely a wide, but also a deep foundation; and it is the same with spiritual building. There are old corruptions to be swept away, there is the power of habit to be removed; and not the least result of God's work in the sanctification and purification of the soul is to deepen the consciousness of our own nothingness, to arouse and maintain in our souls an increasing sense of His all-sufficiency. This is doubtless the reason why God deals with believers by bringing to their memory old sins and causing them to learn the same painful lessons over and over again. God's work must be thoroughly done, and it is for us to bow before Him and become malleable to His will.

4. The naturalness and unconsciousness of moral testing. The brethren little knew that all these ordinary events in their life were proving the occasion of the most searching and thorough examination of their character. It was the most natural thing in the world for them to go down into Egypt to buy corn and to return; and yet all the while, and quite unconsciously to themselves, they were being subjected to the severest scrutiny on the part of Joseph. How true this is to daily experience! We think of the way in which Gideon's men were tested by the simple way in which they drank from the river. This ordinary act was made use of by God to separate the three hundred from the rest. In like manner the ordinary insignificant events of daily life are the very best test of a man's true character. It is comparatively easy to shine on great occasions when we are conscious that the eyes of others are upon us; it is not by any means so easy to shine when we are free from the constraint of other people, when we are alone in our room doing the duty of the moment with equal need of faithfulness to God. Still more, we are being tested most thoroughly by those around us in our ordinary life when we are absolutely unconscious of anything of the kind. Some years ago a gentleman expressed his deep indebtedness to the silent influence of another gentleman whom he did not know, but who, lunching each day at the same restaurant, quietly bowed his head to say grace before meat. Miss Havergal, in one of her books, prays that her unconscious influence might be all for Christ. One of Bushnell's sermons is on the deeply interesting subject of "Unconscious Influence." What a glory all this gives to every-day life! There is nothing trivial nothing which cannot, and perhaps does not, test and reveal character. The Christian is always on duty.

5. The danger of misinterpretation.

We see how true this is as we think of Jacob's first impression that everything was against him, and that nothing but sorrow and trouble could come of Benjamin's being allowed to go into Egypt. We see it also in the utter unconsciousness of the brethren that all that was done to them by Joseph was actuated, not by severity, but by sympathy. We are not blaming them for this lack of knowledge, but only calling attention to the simple fact that the same action may be quite easily interpreted from two points of view. This is the case in daily life. God's providence in our every-day affairs may easily be misinterpreted. What we think is actuated by severity may really be prompted by the truest loving kindness. The believer often mistakes chastisement for punishment, and there is perhaps no lesson that is harder to learn than the fact that our Heavenly Father deals with us, not punitively, but in discipline. How often we are tempted to misinterpret the ways of God with us! "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself;" and yet, if only we could and would see things in their proper light, we should understand that whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and that this is done that we might be partakers of His holiness. Let us not misunderstand and misinterpret God s attitude to us, but let us seek in fellowship with him to understand his ways; for we shall find that the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.

6. The necessary condition of spiritual blessing. The one requirement in the case of Joseph's brethren was the proof of their repentance. It was necessary for Joseph to see the reality of their changed life. The long period between the first and second visits might well have been regarded by him as suspicious, and it was therefore essential that they should be subjected to a proper test upon their return to Egypt. Everything was thus leading up to repentance and to the proof of it. Consciousness of sin must always issue in conversion from sin. God cannot act without our repentance. There will always be a barrier to His blessing unless we are prepared to turn from sin with a hearty and true repentance. It is perhaps specially essential to emphasize this need of repentance to-day, for we are naturally too apt to lay stress on believe without preparing for faith by insisting upon repentance. It is not too much to say that no blessing can come unless there is that change of mind which issues in a change of will, and enables us to forsake sin and renounce our evil ways.

7. The marks of deepening character.

While the proofs of great moral change are found connected with all the brethren, they are especially visible in the case of Judah. His name had been given to him at his birth amid circumstances of hope on the part of his mother, for Judah means Praise (Genesis 39:35). His early youth did not, however, afford any proof whatever that he was living up to his splendid name. On the contrary, the part that he played in the sale of Joseph (Genesis 37:26) and the choice of his wife among the Canaanites (Genesis 38:2), together with the subsequent sad events following his association with the Canaanites show that his life was altogether different from what it ought to have been as the son of his father and the bearer of such a name. But when he appears before us in these later chapters it is evident that there had been a remarkable change. He comes to the front in these emergencies with great force of character, and the whole tone of his exquisite appeal on behalf of Benjamin shows that he is now living up to his name. We are not at all surprised to read later on that its meaning is once more emphasized and acknowledged as true to life (Genesis

49:8). There is something very striking in the study of Judah as he appears in the Book of Genesis, and in particular in the revelation of his character in the chapters now being considered. God's Spirit was at work, testing, training, transforming him. There is nothing like the discipline of life to elicit and to deepen character. The pressure of poverty, the stings of conscience, the deepening of family love, the shaking of self-confidence, are a few of the ways in which Judah was brought into the line of true life and enabled to take the lead in these family troubles and sorrows. Let us therefore never shrink from any discipline that God may put upon us, only seeking for grace and wisdom to learn every lesson, to make permanent every impression, and then to manifest His grace in our lives as we endeavour to live to His praise. No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous: "nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed."

Chapter 76

00A.58 Reconciliation Gen_45:1-28

Reconciliation Genesis 45:1-28

THERE was no need of further delay on the part of Joseph in making himself known to his brethren. Judah's touching appeal had shown conclusively that the character of the brethren was entirely altered. The prolonged tests had proved satisfactory and the moment had come for the surprising manifestation.

It is scarcely possible to comment on this passage without robbing it of its charm and power.

If the writer of this inimitable scene of Joseph's reconciliation with his brethren was not simply an historian, he was one of the great dramatic geniuses of the world, master of a vivid minuteness like Defoe's, and able to touch the springs of tears by a pathetic simplicity like his who painted the death of Lear. Surely theories of legend and of mosaic work fail here (Maclaren's Genesis, p. 261).

I. The Revelation (Genesis 45:1-8). The intensity of his feelings overcame Joseph as he listened to the earnest pleading of Judah, and he ordered all the Egyptians to go out, leaving him alone with his brethren. It was impossible for him to reveal himself before others. He needed the sacredness of privacy for so special and noteworthy an occasion. It is not difficult to understand Joseph's tears as he wept aloud. He had been for years accustomed to the solitary life of Egypt, and now his pent-up feelings burst forth and the true man revealed himself. Overcome and vanquished by his own love, he was unable to control himself any longer. Then he cried: "I am Joseph: doth my father yet live?" Brevity, force, and pathos are here strikingly combined. His first thought is about the aged parent who had loved him, and whose love he had never forgotten. The brethren met this disclosure with silence and fear. His brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. We are not surprised at this, for it must have been an astounding revelation to hear the words I am Joseph spoken by the great ruler before whom they had bowed themselves, and in whose hands their lives had been.

Joseph at once recognized this hesitation and fear and said to his brethren: "Come near to me ... I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt." He did not hesitate to acknowledge his relationship even while he was compelled to remind them of what they had done against him. "I am Joseph your brother." Yes; the same, and yet not the same. He was a very different Joseph from the lad whom they had cast into the pit. Twenty years of varied experience had made their mark on him, and into the old nature had come all the enlargement of capacity and depth of experience consequent upon his prolonged trials and altered circumstances.

It is beautiful to notice that there was not the slightest word of reproach uttered as he revealed himself to the brethren. On the contrary, he urged them not to be grieved or angry with themselves, telling them that in spite of everything God had overruled their sin to bring about a blessing. "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance." How characteristically Joseph bore his testimony to God, as he had done so often before! To his brethren he said: "Not you . . . but God;" just as years before he had said to

Pharaoh: “It is not in me;” God shall give. He also called their attention to his own position in Egypt as a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

II. The Commission (Genesis 45:9-13).

Based upon this manifestation of himself and the statement of his authoritative position in Egypt, he urged them to hurry back home and tell his father what had happened. Thus saith thy son Joseph was what they were to say. He is not ashamed of his aged father, notwithstanding his exalted position in Egypt. There is perhaps nothing more pitiable than to see a son who has attained to a high position ashamed of his father who has remained in a humble walk in life. At all points Joseph stands out as the true man, because he was a man of God. They were also commanded to bring their father down to Egypt, with the promise of a safe and sheltered home and the assurance that he should be near his son. The special reason alleged for this command was that there were still five years of famine, and it was therefore essential that they should be protected against poverty and want. Even Joseph did not realize the full meaning of the contemplated journey into Egypt. He thought of it quite naturally, as simply a preservative against famine; but God knew that it was the way in which the promise to Abraham was to be fulfilled and the family transformed into a great nation. How significant it is that our actions are left perfectly free, and yet all the while we may be unconsciously accomplishing the great and far-reaching purposes of Divine wisdom! It gives a dignity to life to realize that nothing is trivial and without meaning.

Joseph added some strong encouragement that they were to convey to their father. They were assured by the sight of their own eyes that it was their brother who was speaking to them; but not only so, they were to tell their father of all Joseph’s glory in Egypt. Joseph evidently knew that his father would be impressed by these outward and visible marks of power, for not once or twice had Jacob been impressed and influenced by the tangible and visible, as distinct from the purely spiritual and non-material elements of life.

III. The Reconciliation (Genesis 45:14-15). With these words of encouragement and command Joseph fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. The tears of joy on both sides were the only and fitting expression of the meeting after all those years of severance. Moreover, we read with profound suggestion that he kissed all his brethren and wept upon them. Mark the phrase, all his brethren; Simeon, Reuben, Judah, and the rest who were responsible for his being cast into the pit and sold into Egypt were all kissed and wept over by the forgiving brother against whom they had done what might have seemed irreparable injury. Nor are we surprised to read that: After that his brethren talked with him. They could hardly have done otherwise, for he surely gave abundant proof, not only of his identity, but of his entire good- will to them.

IV. The Departure (Genesis 45:16-24). The news of all that was going on soon came to Pharaoh’s ears, and it pleased Pharaoh well and all his servants. There was something very fine about the character of the king. From the moment that he came into contact with Joseph we observe truly admirable points in him, and at this juncture we find him urging Joseph to send a hearty invitation to his father and family to come into Egypt, and to be assured of the royal protection and favour. They were not to regard their stuff; that is, they were not to have any anxiety about the property they were leaving behind, since everything in Egypt would be at their disposal.

Then Joseph gave them wagons and provision for the way, according to Pharaoh's command; and it is noteworthy that while he gave each man changes of raiment, to Benjamin were given 300 pieces of silver and five changes of raiment; no doubt in order to make some reparation for the period of anxiety that Benjamin had recently passed through in connection with the supposed theft of the cup. It is also interesting to observe the generous present sent to his father. This was according to the usual marks of courtesy of that day, though at the same time it would help to assure his father of the reality of the messages sent by the brethren.

We may not overlook his parting counsels to the brethren: "See that ye fall not out by the way." We might at first suppose that there was some irony in these words, as though Joseph, knowing of old the quarrelsomeness of his brothers, gave them these counsels as a parting shot; but it is much more likely that he had a genuine fear that they might not readily accommodate themselves to the new experiences when they had left him and were once more by themselves. It might easily have been that their former dispositions would have reasserted themselves and caused trouble. We shall have occasion to see later on in the story that they were by no means so thoroughly conformed to the new state of affairs as to make such a counsel altogether unnecessary. It was all so strange and unlike their former days. A new and wonderful vista had opened out before them.

V. The Result (Genesis 45:25-28). Their safe arrival home was, we doubt not, a great satisfaction to their aged father, more particularly as he caught sight of Simeon and of his beloved Benjamin. The circle was complete. The brethren had brought back a plentiful supply of provisions, and there seemed to be nothing more needed by Jacob. What then must have been his surprise when he was told that Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. No wonder "Jacob's heart fainted" and he believed them not. The news was far too good to be true, and Jacob, who had never been particularly strong in believing without seeing, was not prepared to accept so astonishing a piece of information when they told him Joseph's words; but "when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived." What a remarkable touch this is, "When he saw the wagons." Their word without the wagons does not seem to have been sufficient. Jacob was always a strong believer in the truth expressed by the well-known cynical phrase, "Seeing is believing." All through his career it was the actual, tangible, material, and visible that impressed him, and the infection thereof remained even in the regenerate. Why was it that the wagons had this impression on him? It is more than probable that in the quiet ordinary pastoral life of Jacob wagons were unknown, and it may also be that they formed part of the royal equipage of Pharaoh, and thus their very strangeness impressed the patriarch with the assurance that something out of the ordinary must have happened to bring these wagons to his home. It is also deeply interesting to observe the exact words of the text. The spirit of Jacob revived; and Israel said. Jacob thus once again becomes Israel, and it is the Prince of God who makes this resolve to go down to sec his son Joseph. He had had his doubts, but these had been removed, and with belief had come prompt decision. "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die."

Suggestions for Meditation

It is impossible to read this story without associating with it the spiritual ideas connected with Him of Whom Joseph was a type. Later on we shall have occasion to consider this typical aspect of Joseph's life in its entirety; but meanwhile, as we consider the disclosure made by Joseph to his

brethren we may see in it some of the most precious truths concerning the revelation of Christ to the soul.

1. The fullness of the revelation.

Joseph's manifestation to his brethren was the disclosure of one whom they had rejected; but one also whose love had remained all through the years and had now conquered. It was love stooping, love conquering, love blessing. The condescension of love for the purpose of uplifting the lives of others is one of the most beautiful features in human life, and much more is it the case when we think of the Divine love. The highest serves the lowest, and God's love expresses itself in self-sacrifice on behalf of mankind.

2. The method of the revelation.

We observe the privacy with which Joseph disclosed himself to his brethren. This is also true in the spiritual realm. The revelation of Christ to the soul is one of the most private of experiences. There are things far too sacred at such a time for any eye witness or any record. At the first thought we naturally desire to know what happened between our Lord and Peter on the morning of the Resurrection; but second thoughts are best, and we are glad that something sealed the lips of the Evangelist. Not only was it private, it was personal. I am Joseph. So is it always; the revelation is not of a truth, or an institution, or a philosophy, or a code of ethics; but of a Divine, living, loving Person. Christianity has well been defined as devotion to a Person, and it is so because of that personal revelation of Christ to the soul. This revelation is not only private and personal, but affectionate. Joseph kissed his brethren and thereby proved beyond the shadow of a doubt the reality and intensity of his feelings towards them, and the Divine disclosure to the soul is, above all things, a proof of God's persistent, everlasting love; the Love that will not let us go.

3. The power of the revelation.

We cannot but be impressed with the splendid magnanimity of Revelation. Joseph notwithstanding all that they had done. There is no word of reproach or rebuke, but only of encouragement and cheer. How like this is to God's method of manifesting Himself to the sinner. There is no reproach on the part of God; but it is the sinner who learns to reproach himself as he becomes conscious of the love of God towards him. We are not surprised that Joseph's brethren were full of fear, for the revelation was too much for them. It is often the case that the consciousness of sin becomes more acute after the revelation of God's mercy in Christ than it ever did before. The consciousness of God's long-suffering love breaks down the soul, deepens our penitence, and enables the heart to see things as it could not see them before conversion. Not only so, but in this revelation of Joseph to his brethren they found their true life. Up to that time they had been haunted with the ghost of their former sin. They had tried to leave it behind them; their characters were manifestly improved, and yet the sin clung to them and at almost every turn they were reminded of what they had done. But after the revelation of Joseph and their reconciliation to him, new hopes, new ideas sprung up in their lives, and they were enabled to see things in their proper light and find peace in regard to their former wrongdoing. Joseph did not reproach them, but they reproached themselves, and in that self-reproach was one of the guarantees of avoidance of sin in future.

4. The outcome of the revelation.

We cannot observe that the immediate results of Joseph's disclosure of himself were threefold:

(a) It brought peace to the brethren; peace between Joseph and them; peace among themselves; and peace with their aged father,

(b) It also assured them of protection. They were to be safe from that time forward under the guardianship of their brother,

(c) It also guaranteed to them plenty, for everything in the land of Egypt was to be placed at their disposal. How true this is to New Testament teaching needs hardly more than suggesting. Reconciliation with God brings peace between God and the soul, peace in the soul itself, peace between the soul and others. And not only so, but there is also the guarantee of protection and provision for all emergencies. When the prodigal returned to the father's house he received the kiss of reconciliation, followed by the robe and all the other proofs of reinstatement in the old home. Those who have been reconciled by the death of God's Son are certain to be kept safe in His life. (Cf. Romans 5:10.) 5. The responsibility of the revelation.

Joseph laid one burden upon his brethren. They were given a commission. They were not to keep the news to themselves but to go back at once and tell their father three great facts: (a) that Joseph was alive; (b) that he was in an exalted position; (c) that he was willing to receive his father and all of them. This commission was faithfully carried out, and thus they fulfilled their brother s will. In the same way the reconciliation of the soul with God involves obedience to what we speak of in the New Testament as the Great Commission. It is for us to go far and near with the same message, that our Lord is indeed alive and risen from the dead; that He is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour; and that He is willing to receive all that come unto God by Him. This is our bounden duty, and if we have been reconciled to God it will be for us to carry out this commission and fulfill our responsibility. And so we praise God for His great revelation of Himself in Christ. All of Christ's is ours, and all of ours ought to be Christ's. Nothing must, and nothing need, come between us and our Saviour. We may draw from his fullness and use it; we must assimilate His image and reflect it, and then show day by day by a humble, loving, lowly, earnest life that we love much because we have been much forgiven.

Chapter 77

00A.59 Into Egypt Gen_46:1-30

Into Egypt Genesis 46:1-30

ALTHOUGH hitherto the story of Joseph has been full of great detail we are now reminded that Jacob is still the head of the family, and that everything in the record is to be regarded as subservient to the development of the promises of God concerning him and his house. The message from Joseph, as we have seen, proved successful, and Jacob decided to go down into Egypt.

I. The Journey (Genesis 46:1-7).

We are not surprised to find in this later period increasing references to the name of Israel rather than to that of Jacob, though the latter is not altogether displaced. “Israel took his journey with all that he had.” It was a very definite change and transplantation. He had been many years in Canaan, with all that it meant of settlement and stability. Besides this, the grave of his beloved wife was not far away from his home, and it must have meant a real up rooting to leave the land. Above all, it was the Land of Promise which God had assured to him and to his father and grandfather before him. We can well understand therefore the mixed feelings with which he left a country so full of blessed memories and strong ties. On his way he halted at Beersheba, and it would seem as though the memory of the place impelled him to offer sacrifices and worship to the God of his father. It was in Beersheba that Abraham had had a special revelation of God (Genesis 21:23), and where he lived after the offering of Isaac (Genesis 22:19). It was there also that Isaac his father lived, and where he too received a manifestation of the Divine presence (Genesis 26:24). It was also the place of Jacob’s own home in those early days before he set out to Haran (Genesis 28:10). We can therefore fully appreciate the reasons which prompted him to approach God on this occasion. The Divine revelation was quickly given in response to his worship. God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” Observe how God uses the old name of Jacob, and calls him twice, just as He had called His grand father before him (Genesis 22:11). The prompt answer of Jacob is also noteworthy, “Here am I.” It was a phrase that sprang spontaneously to the lips of those who were in true and full fellowship with God (Genesis 22:11; Exodus 3:4).

God revealed Himself by a twofold name. “I am EL” (“the Mighty One”) and “I am the God of thy father.” Thus was Jacob encouraged by a revelation of the Divine character and attitude, and this encouragement was further emphasized by the words, Fear not to go down into Egypt, followed by a fourfold promise of what should happen there: (a) I will there make of thee a great nation. (b) I will go down with thee. (c) I will also surely bring thee up again. (d) Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes. This fourfold promise is very striking, and, as we shall see, extends far beyond the temporary circumstances connected with the famine and the need of going into Egypt for food. The real object of Israel going down into Egypt was much more than temporary and accidental; it was a definite and very significant step by which the family became transformed into a nation. For many years the chosen race had been a mere handful of people. Abraham had long to wait before

Isaac was born, and Isaac had only two sons. One of these was still only the father of a comparatively small number, and if the promise to Abraham about being as the stars of heaven for multitude was to be fulfilled, something very special and definite must take place. Although many years had elapsed since the promise of the land and the seed had been given to Abraham, there was as yet no sign of the one, and not much of the other. Added to this there was the constant danger of attack from the Canaanites, and the possibility of the comparatively small number of the chosen seed being entirely destroyed. To obviate all these difficulties, and at the same time to allow the family to grow in safety, events were overruled to bring about the journey into Egypt, where they would have all possible safety and all necessary separation from others. Not only this, but these plain, simple, pastoral men would in Egypt come in contact with civilization, established government, and the administration of law. Every advantage of training and discipline would be theirs, and we cannot help observing in the light of the subsequent history how true were the words of God, I will there make of thee a great nation. It was to be done there, or, humanly speaking, it would not have been done at all. (Cf. Dod, Genesis, pp. 321 ff.) With these promises ringing in his ears, Jacob rose up, and all his family with him, and journeyed towards Egypt.

II. The Family (Genesis 46:8-27.) At this juncture the compiler of Genesis felt that it would be appropriate to give a list of the names of the children of Israel which came into Egypt. The enumeration includes some who were doubtless born in Egypt. The number is seventy, and we cannot help observing the symbolism of this figure when we recall the seventy nations into which the earth was divided according to the Jewish view, the seventy Elders of Israel, and the seventy Disciples of our Lord. The number seventy seems to suggest a completed development, and it is probably for this reason that the complete list of Jacob's descendants is given in this section.

"It is clear that our list contains not only Jacob's sons and grandsons already born at the time of the emigration, but, besides this, all the sons that formed the ground of the twelve-tribed nation or, in general, all the grand and great-grandchildren that became founders of mischpa-hoth, or in dependent, self-governing families. Thus only can the fact be explained the fact otherwise inexplicable that in the days of Moses, with the exception of the double tribe of Joseph, there were, in none of the tribes, descendants from any grandson or great grandsons of Jacob that are not mentioned in this list (Keil)."

According to the Septuagint the number of those who came with Jacob into Egypt was seventy-five, and this number was used by Stephen (Acts 7:14). The additional five seem to be the grandsons of Joseph, who are mentioned in the Septuagint version from which he quoted.

III. The Meeting (Genesis 46:28-30).

We can well imagine the feelings both of Jacob and of Joseph as the time drew near for the meeting. Jacob sent Judah before him to direct his face to Goshen. Judah was once again honored. He had proved his worth in his attitude to Joseph in the matter of Benjamin, and his father was now able to trust him and lean upon him as the firstborn. And then Joseph came to meet Israel his father, and presented himself unto him, and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. This loving reunion after all the years that had elapsed, and in view of all the circumstances of Joseph's life, is one of the most beautiful episodes recorded in Holy Scripture. No wonder that Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive. How much there is summed up in these touching words! They show, among other

things, that the general idea of death ushering the soul into the gloom of the unseen world was not the sole conception of the patriarchs. Jacob clearly implies by these words that there was nothing further to live for and that he was perfectly ready to depart, having once again seen his beloved son.

Suggestions for Meditation As we review the entire circumstances of Jacob's life from the moment that Joseph was taken away from him and sold into Egypt we cannot but be impressed with the wonderful revelation of God's providence, grace, and truth to his servants.

1. The greatness of God's purpose. When Jacob was told in Beersheba that God would make of him a great nation in Egypt he was also given the Divine promise, I will also surely bring thee up again, and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes. We cannot help wondering whether Jacob fully understood these words. We feel that he naturally expected soon to return out of Egypt when the famine was over; and yet his family was there for at least two, if not for four, centuries. I will also surely bring thee up again. God did so, but it was his dead body that was brought up, and the promise about Joseph putting his hand on his father's eyes doubtless refers to his closing the eyes in death. We clearly see from this the importance of taking large views of God's purpose. While Jacob and Joseph naturally thought that the family was in Egypt as a protection against famine, God was using these temporary circumstances to bring about His own wonderful purposes concerning Israel. The love of God is broader than the measures of man s mind. Thy judgments are a great deep, and yet the obscurity is not in God but in ourselves. As we contemplate the stretch of God's providence and the width of His wonderful purpose, shall we not continually pray, "Open Thou mine eyes?"

2. The reality of God's guidance.

Whether we think of Joseph or of Jacob, God was leading them step by step, sometimes by outward circumstances, sometimes by special visions. The guidance was the same all through, and as real as it was precious and blessed. When Jacob put himself into God's hands at Beersheba, the assuring vision came that God would be with him, guide him to Egypt, and bless him there; and Jacob, as we know, realized at every step of his journey that it was not man but God Who was guiding. The guidance of God is as real, as certain, and as precious to-day as ever. "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." It is for us to remember that the Word is behind us, and that we are therefore not to go on too far, or too fast, lest we should fail to hear the Divine Voice." When He putteth forth His own sheep He goeth before them. As someone has well said, "You can always tell the way by the fact that the path is smoothed." I will guide thee with Mine eye is the promise for every believer; and if he will abide closely with God, the meek will He guide in judgment, the meek will he teach His way.

3. The wisdom of God's love.

Mark carefully this thought. Sometimes we are tempted to think that God's love is not wise. Circumstances happen to us which we find very difficult to reconcile with the love of God. Jacob had had the promise of the land of Canaan, and yet he was called upon to depart into Egypt. Not only so, but his family were out of that land for centuries; and as the days and years went on, it must have been a problem how to reconcile their continuance in Egypt with the assurance of Canaan for a possession. But they did not see the end of the Lord. There was nothing arbitrary in

God’s dealings. Jacob yielded up his possessions in Canaan temporarily, to receive them permanently a hundredfold. Before he could inherit the land he and his must be trained and disciplined to enjoy it. They were called upon to forego a partial possession in order afterwards to value a complete possession, and in all this we see the wisdom of God’s love. The Divine promises were unchangeable, the Divine love to Abraham and his seed was unalterable, and yet the Divine wisdom knew how best to fulfill those promises and to manifest that love. What a call this is for unbroken and enthusiastic faith! Let us trust where we cannot trace. Let us rest our hearts upon the wisdom of God’s love. The pathway may sometimes be hard, but God still lives and loves. Experiences may often be trying and testing, but God abides faithful. Our life may be shadowed by sorrow and suffering, but the cloud will always have a silver lining, since God will never leave nor forsake His own.

One hope supports me in the storm, When flesh and spirit quail: My Father holds me with His arm, His promise cannot fail. The ocean of His grace transcends My small horizon s rim, And where my feeble vision ends My heart can rest in Him. In confidence I bide the tryst; His promise is for aye.

He guides me still, through cloud and mist, Unto the perfect day.

00A.60 The New Home Gen_46:31-34; Gen_47:1-12

The New Home Genesis 46:31-34; Genesis 47:1-12 THE arrival of Jacob and his household in Egypt meant a very great deal both to him and to Joseph, and many things had to be arranged before they could be perfectly settled in the new surroundings. There were still five years of famine, and for that time at least proper accommodation had to be found for the household of the patriarch. In all the details Jacob still appears as the head, even though most of the work had necessarily to be done by Joseph.

I. The Necessary Arrangement (Genesis 46:31-34).

It was impossible for Jacob's household to settle in Egypt, even with Joseph's approval, without the matter being referred to Pharaoh for his royal sanction. Joseph thereupon told his brethren that he would interview Pharaoh and explain the whole case to him. Joseph's words are an interesting combination of principle and prudence. On the one hand it was essential to Israel that the family should have room to grow, and, at the same time, be separated from the Egyptians; on the other hand, the feelings of the Egyptians towards shepherds necessitated the two peoples being kept apart. Joseph's frankness in telling Pharaoh how matters stood was the only way of solving the problem. It is not yet known why every shepherd was an abomination unto the Egyptians. The words are clearly those of the historian, not of Joseph, and there is independent testimony to their truth in Herodotus so far, at least, as swineherds are concerned. It is also interesting to observe proofs in history that those who kept cattle were greatly despised in Egypt, Egyptian artists showing their contempt by depicting them as either lame, or dirty, or in some other forbidding way. It is sometimes thought that the explanation of this feeling was due to the resentment against the rule of the shepherd kings, but on the whole there does not seem sufficient warrant for accepting this explanation. Probably it was due to some feeling on the part of the Egyptians that the keepers of sheep were of an impure caste. (See, more fully, Pulpit Commentary, p. 504.) II. The Complete Provision (Genesis 47:1-6).

Joseph at once carried out his project of telling Pharaoh, and took with him five of his brethren. Why five out of the eleven should have been taken is not at all clear, except that the number five seems to have had some significance among the Egyptians (Genesis 43:34; Genesis 45:22). As Joseph had anticipated, Pharaoh asked the brethren as to their occupation, and they replied, according to Joseph's directions, that they were shepherds, and requested to be allowed to dwell in the land of Goshen owing to the famine in the land of Canaan. Pharaoh at once granted their request, telling Joseph that the land of Egypt was at his disposal, and that he was to arrange for his father and brethren to dwell in the best of it. Not only so, but if there were any of his family suitable for the posts, Joseph was to make them rulers over the King's cattle. It is very interesting to observe the various occasions on which Pharaoh comes before us in this narrative; from the moment that Joseph was taken out of prison to interpret the KING'S dream. There is a real and attractive graciousness about the man, and it is hardly too much to say that some of it may have been due to the influence of Joseph. The large-heartedness, sympathy, and liberality of the King

towards Joseph and his family reveal a nobleness of nature that must have sprung from some Divine influence, however indirect and unconscious.

III. The Notable Interview (Genesis 47:7-10).

Joseph then brought in his aged father and placed him before Pharaoh, and immediately on his entrance Jacob blessed Pharaoh. As Pharaoh had asked the sons as to their occupation, so naturally he enquired of the father as to his age. “How old art thou?” Jacob’s answer was very touching. “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.” In comparison with the hundred and seventy-five years of Abraham and the hundred and eighty years of Isaac, Jacob’s days seemed few, though few and many are relative terms in more senses than one. That his days had been evil was mainly due to the fact of the almost ceaseless disquiet, sorrow, and discipline of his life. It is a striking picture that is called up before the imagination the aged and feeble patriarch standing before the mighty monarch and blessing him. Old age affords a natural opportunity for bestowing benediction, but added to this, Jacob was the representative of his God, the Covenant God of his fathers, as he stood and blessed Pharaoh.

IV. The Special Care (Genesis 47:11-12).

Joseph at once did as Pharaoh had commanded, and placed his father and his brethren in the “best of the land.” After the KING’S word no one could charge him with nepotism. From henceforth Jacob and his household were the special care and thought of Joseph, who nourished them with bread according to their families. The Hebrew of this phrase is very beautiful in its literalness, according to the little ones. In the same way Joseph promised later on to nourish his brethren and their little ones. The children were not to be forgotten. Thus everything turned out exactly as Joseph had anticipated, and Jacob and his house were ensured protection all through those five years of famine.

Suggestions for Meditation 1. The simplicity of Divine providence. As we read this story and concentrate attention first of all on the narrative as ordinary history, we see nothing whatever but the obvious, the natural, the simple and the straightforward. A famine caused a family to leave home and sojourn in a strange land. They came there under perfectly usual circumstances, and never expected to remain longer than the years of special need. Everything is quite clear and straightforward, with no circumstances left unexplained; and yet with it all we can see we review the story, that God in His providence was taking hold of these everyday events, and weaving them into His own Divine pattern for Israel. How true this is to life is at once clear to us all. The smallest experiences of our every-day life may form part of a mighty and far-reaching Providence. We pay a visit, intending to stay a week, and then we are led to take up our abode in that place, with all the course of our life entirely altered from that day forward. Or it may be that into the even tenor of our life comes a letter with a simple request which has very far-reaching effects, changing not one life, but several. It is all perfectly simple and yet perfectly Divine; and though, as we review our pathway in the retrospect, we can see nothing in detail that has been marvellous or out of the way, yet the sum-total of everything stands out as an astonishing example of the providence of God. Let us cultivate the habit of investing every detail of life with significance, and try to learn the precise lessons that God desires to teach us. Let us refuse to limit God and His providence to the great

occasions of life, and let us believe that nothing can come across our pathway unless it is in some way or other part of His loving and wise will concerning us.

2. The splendor of honest toil. The sons of Jacob were shepherds, ordinary working men, who earned their living by manual labour. There was nothing unworthy in the precise trade to which they devoted themselves, but on the contrary, there was a true honour and glory in their toil. This is one of the essential privileges and glories of life, the capacity and opportunity for work. Whether the toil is manual or mental, it is that for which we have been placed in the world, and no one whose occupation is chiefly manual should for a moment think that there is anything unworthy of the noblest nature in devoting itself to its daily calling. If only we realize that work is part of God's will for us, then whatever precise work we may be called upon to do, we shall do as under the great Taskmaster's eye, and "A servant with this clause Makes drudgery Divine. Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws, Makes that and the action fine."

3. The sacredness of family life. The relations of Joseph with his father and brethren once more bring before us the beauty and glory of family life, and we are reminded of the oft-quoted saying that "Blood is thicker than water." It is hardly too much to imagine the Egyptian courtiers as tempted to sneer at the great ruler when they found out the very ordinary circumstances of his family life, more particularly as his brethren were of a trade that was an abomination to the Egyptians. We can picture, without any great difficulty or injustice, these Egyptian magnates remarking with surprise that the one who had done so great a work for Egypt, and was occupying so exalted a position, should have had so humble an origin. We can also fully enter into Joseph's feelings, as he told Pharaoh with perfect frankness of his brethren's occupation, hateful though that was to the Egyptians. In all this, Joseph never faltered or hesitated. His love for his father and brethren was pure and strong, and nothing was allowed to affect it in the very least. So it should always be. Whatever differences of position may take place between members of the same family, the strength of family love should remain unimpaired, and every rightful opportunity taken of expressing it. God has placed the solitary in families, and in the maintenance and furtherance of family life and love will be found one of the channels of blessing to the world.

4. The significance of ordinary life.

We notice that twice over Jacob uses the word "pilgrimage" to express his idea of his own life and the life of his fathers. "The days of the years of my pilgrimage." To him life had been a journey, with a starting point and a goal, and it is this aspect of life as a pilgrimage which enabled Jacob to invest it with a sacred and special significance. The same idea of life as a pilgrimage is found all through the Bible. Holy Scripture represents life as a sojourning, a temporary residence in a land which is not one's own. Even Canaan, to the patriarchs, was regarded as the land of their pilgrimage, and in due time this idea was heightened and transformed into the thought of a heavenly Canaan (Genesis 17:18; Genesis 28:4; Leviticus 17:22; Deuteronomy 24:14; 1 Chronicles 29:15; Psalms 29:13). The same idea is taken up in the New Testament, and the patriarchs are said to have longed for a better country, confessing themselves to be "strangers and sojourners upon earth" (Hebrews 11:14, Greek). This thought of life as a sojourning away from our true home does not obtain the prominence now that it did of old. This is due in great measure to the sneer of George Eliot about other-worldliness. Nevertheless it is as true to-day as ever that this is not our rest, and that here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. This is the true

perspective for every believer. He should regard the present life as a pilgrimage, not as a place in which he is to live permanently, but one through which he is to hasten, looking off from self and circumstances to Him who has gone before us as the Captain of our Salvation to bring many sons to glory. The thought of life as a pilgrimage will inspire and cheer the heart under the storm and stress of earthly discipline, for amidst all troubles and trials, shadows and sorrows, the heart will ever be darting forward in hope and expectation of the rest that remaineth to the people of God.

“O pilgrim, as you journey, do you ever gladly say, In spite of heavy burdens and the roughness of the way, That it does not surely matter all the strange and bitter stress, Heat and cold, and toil and sorrow twill be healed with blessedness, For the road leads home?

Home! the safe and blissful shelter where is glad and full content, And companionship of kindred; and the treasures early rent From your holding shall be given back more precious than before.

Oh, you will not mind the journey with such blessedness in store, When the road leads home.

Oh, you will not mind the roughness or the steepness of the way, Nor the chill, unrested morning, nor the dreariness of the day; And you will not take a turning to the left or to the right, But go straight ahead, nor tremble at the coming of the night, For the road leads home. And often for your comfort you will read the guide and chart;

It has wisdom for the mind and sweet solace for the heart;

It will serve you as a mentor, it will guide you sure and straight All the time that you will journey, be the ending soon or late And the road leads home.”

Chapter 79

00A.61 A Wise Ruler Gen_47:13-26

A Wise Ruler Genesis 47:13-26

IT is always interesting to study great men from different points of view. Joseph lived a many-sided life, and we are enabled to see him in his personal and domestic, and also in his public and official relations. Hitherto we have observed him mainly in regard to his personal life to God and to his family. In the present section he comes before us as a statesman wielding a mighty influence by his national policy.

It is important, however, to notice why this section describing his policy during the famine appears at this place in the story. A summary of the fourteen years has already been given in Genesis 41:53-57, but the narrative at that point was interrupted in order to account for the coming of Joseph's brethren into Egypt and all that arose out of it. This occupied the long section from Genesis 41:1 - Genesis 47:12, and even now the Egyptian policy seems to be introduced almost entirely from Israel's point of view, for it is embedded between one small section (Genesis 47:11-12,) and another (Genesis 47:27) which describe Israel's position and progress in Egypt. We shall see as we proceed how definite a bearing Joseph's policy had on the life and future of his father's family. The famine is shown to account quite definitely for the need of urgency in the care of his FATHER'S household.

We will, however, take a general look at Joseph's administration during these years. Whatsoever has been written has been written for our learning, and there are very definite and valuable lessons derivable from Joseph's statesmanship.

I. The Plan. The main idea of Joseph's policy was to take necessary steps during the years of plenty in order to economize for the years of famine. Overseers were appointed over the land, and a tax of one-fifth part was made during the seven plenteous years. Then the food of those good years was stored up against the years of famine. When the famine came and there was no bread in the land, the people came to Joseph according to Pharaoh's orders and bought corn with their money. When the money was all spent and they still needed food during the famine, they bought food with their cattle. Last of all, when there were no more cattle to bring, they offered themselves and their lands for bread. Joseph thus bought up the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, with the exception of the portion that belonged to the priests, and the people entered into a sort of feudal service to the King.

II. The Wisdom of the Plan.

Joseph's policy has been questioned from time to time on several grounds. In the first place, it is charged against him that he showed undue partiality to his own kindred in providing them with bread when everybody else had to pay for their own. But it should be pointed out that the people of Israel were in Egypt as the guests of Pharaoh; they were not beggars, but on an entirely different footing. Besides, there was no possibility of their purchasing food in view of the fact that they had left all their possessions behind them. They had been told by Pharaoh not to be anxious about

what they possessed in Canaan, and he promised that all the good of Egypt should be theirs (Genesis 47:20). Joseph did nothing that was not clearly sanctioned and indeed ordered by Pharaoh, and he cannot be blamed for the kindness he showed to his father and brethren. Their temporary sojourn in Egypt as visitors placed them in an entirely different category from the inhabitants of the land. Pharaoh's care of them was a matter of philanthropy, while a free gift of corn to the people would probably have resulted in pauperization.

It is also charged against Joseph that he did the people an injustice by leading them into servitude and putting them altogether at the mercy of the Crown, but it is not correct or fair to speak of it as servitude in the strict sense of the word. They were Crown tenants rather than slaves, and the tax that he imposed was a very moderate one in view of the great productiveness of the Nile Valley. The true interpretation of Genesis 47:21 seems to be that Joseph removed them from place to place for the purpose of guaranteeing to them an efficient supply of food as needed (Genesis 41:35). Nor is it correct to speak of the money as an exaction, for 20 per cent would not have been an exorbitant tax. They were free labourers or tenants of the Crown, instead of being independent landlords. Knobel (quoted in Driver's Genesis, p. 374) says:

"In view of the fertility of Egypt the proportion does not seem excessive. In the time of the Maccabees the Jews, until Demetrius freed them, paid the Syrian Government one-third of the seed and one-half of the fruit (1Ma 10:30). Under Turkish rule the proportion is sometimes one-half of the produce, and Arab exactions from the fellahin are similar. In Syria cases occur where it is two-thirds; and about Ispahan, in Persia, the peasants, who receive land and seed from the Government, pay even three-fourths of their harvest."

It is also very probable that some such naturalization of the land was necessary. As Sayce says: "The power of the old aristocracy was broken as completely as it has been in Japan in our own day." But the main proof of the wisdom of Joseph's plan is the simple fact that those who were chiefly affected by it accepted it with readiness and thankfulness. They were only too conscious of the benefits that accrued to them in those terrible years of famine. It is surely impossible to conceive of the entire absence of complaint, opposition or rebellion on the part of such people as the Egyptians if the policy was one that did not meet with their entire acquiescence and approval. In view of all the foregoing considerations it does not seem difficult to justify Joseph's policy. At the same time we ought to bear in mind that the fact of certain actions by one of God's servants being recorded in Scripture is no necessary proof of any Divine vindication of it. We are not called upon to justify everything that Joseph did, simply because the story of his life is found in Genesis; but bearing in mind that he is described as a man in whom the Spirit of God is (Genesis 41:38), we have no hesitation in believing most thoroughly in the Divine guidance, and therefore in the perfect justification, of his actions during the years of famine.

It is impossible to pass by the recent reference to a discovery by one of the foremost of modern Egyptologists, Brugsch Bey, of a hieroglyphic record of the failure of the Nile to rise for seven consecutive years, which resulted in a terrible famine. Even as an illustration and natural explanation of the famine recorded in Genesis the discovery would be of intense interest, but according to the discoverer the date of the failure of the Nile to rise was B.C. 1700, and this corresponds exactly to that which has been recognized by students of chronology as the date of the story of this chapter. The subject will doubtless be further considered by those who are

qualified to discuss it. Meanwhile it is at least an interesting coincidence.

III. The Results of the Plan. The immediate outcome of Joseph's policy was the salvation and protection of the entire country of Egypt. The people's lives were saved, and as we have seen, they frankly and fully acknowledged what Joseph had done. Then again, the influence of Egypt was undoubtedly extended by the policy. It is not without point to read that all countries came into Egypt to Joseph to buy corn. In view of the constant action of nation against nation, and the wars that were from time to time waged against Egypt, we can easily understand the real value and importance to the country of the action of Joseph during these years. Not only so, but the protection of Israel was Israel's assured by this policy. By putting all the power into Pharaoh's hands Joseph prevented any of the aristocracy or chiefs of the people from thwarting the government. It made Joseph's action much easier in providing for his father and brethren during these years. The people of Egypt might easily have been jealous of this special attention, but inasmuch as Pharaoh became the owner of the lands and all the produce, the people of Israel were safe during their sojourn in Egypt. Israel needed safety in order to develop, and for this a stable government was required. Herein undoubtedly is the real significance of this section coming in between (Genesis 47:12-27) Genesis 47:12 and Genesis 47:27, for it shows that Joseph's policy was part of the Divine providential care of Israel. At the same time we must not forget that this policy led eventually to the affliction of Israel under a new Pharaoh. With all the power in the hands of the King it was at once easy for the Pharaoh of Joseph's time to protect Israel, and for the new Pharaoh to afflict Israel when Joseph and his work were forgotten (Exodus 1:8). Meanwhile, however, God's purposes were being accomplished in Egypt, and Israel was becoming transformed from a family into a nation.

Suggestions for Meditation As we ponder the public life of Joseph we see plainly the qualities which characterized him and enabled him to do the great work that he accomplished.

1. Three essential qualities of true life. a. His discretion. We cannot help observing the wisdom which actuated Joseph from first to last. Before the years of famine came he was enabled to look ahead, and with rare foresight take all possible precautions. This is one of the essential characteristics of true life; thought, discretion, foresight, wisdom. If a man does not exercise his reasoning faculties and think out the matters with which he is concerned, he will fail at a vital point. The absence of thought is always the presence of weakness, while the presence of thought is always one guarantee of real manhood. b. His promptitude. Joseph acted at once the moment he obtained Pharaoh's permission: and all through those years, as he journeyed from place to place, promptitude and energy characterized his actions. There was no hesitation, no vacillation, no weakness; a genuine decision of character stamped everything that he did. This again, is one of the essential features of a true life. The man who is always "letting I dare not wait upon I would" will never accomplish anything. Even the man who makes mistakes is not always and necessarily blameworthy for acting, for he shows his readiness to do something. On the other hand, the man who is cautious, slow to move and constantly fearing consequences is only too likely to end by doing nothing at all. There is no reason why mistakes should be made by a prompt, energetic, decided nature, if only with his promptitude he has the quality of discretion. The two together go far to make the real man. c. His thoroughness. He not only thought, but thought to some purpose, and took every factor into consideration. He not only acted promptly but he acted with thoroughness, doing everything that he had to do with all his heart. The policy of thoroughness, when it is based

on genuine principle, is the only policy that ministers to true life and service. Half-heartedness in any work is useless and hopeless, and can only bring trouble in its train. These three qualities should be carefully noted separately and together. They constitute three of the most important requirements for every true man; the exercise of his mind, the energy of his heart and the action of his will.

2. The source of these qualities.

We are accustomed to speak of discretion, promptitude, and thoroughness as purely natural characteristics capable qualities, of almost infinite development by use and habit. This is undoubtedly true, so far as it goes, but it leaves quite unexplained the source whence these natural characteristics come, and Joseph is a striking illustration of the fact that all these elements of true nature come from God. If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God (James 1:5). All that Joseph did in this emergency sprang from his relation to God. “A man in whom the Spirit of God is.” We must not narrow down the operations of the Spirit of God to those things which are purely spiritual and redemptive in the New Testament sense of the word. The presence and work of the Spirit of God are the source of all that is good and true in life and human nature. There is nothing outside His power. Joseph was as much influenced by the Spirit of God in selling corn as he was in bearing witness to Pharaoh and interpreting his dream. True religion touches life at every point, and nothing can be considered outside its scope. This ought to be an encouragement to us all to refer everything in our daily life to God and to seek the wisdom that cometh from above. There can be no doubt that the presence of the Holy Spirit does affect with vivifying power the faculties of mind, emotion, and will; and the Christian man, other things being equal, ought to show in his life, in all the natural events and actions of his daily career, the power and value of the possession of the Holy Spirit. A Christian It is also a point to be pressed home that a Christian can succeed in business and yet be a Christian, though we must not for an instant make worldly success the measure and proof of our Christianity. It is essential that we should keep in mind the simple fact that Christianity is no bar to success. There is no incompatibility between goodness and brains. On the contrary, we believe it to be a simple fact of Nature as well as of history that only in the sanctions and supports of true religion can our intellectual faculties find their fullest and completest exercise and justification. Joseph’s life is a testimony to the simple but significant fact that a man can serve God and be successful, that a man can occupy the highest position and glorify his Maker, that a man can be a statesman, propounding policies affecting nations, and yet all the while be a humble-minded, true-hearted child of God.

Thus we may speak of Joseph quite literally as “diligent in business,” “fervent in spirit,” “serving the Lord.” To use a colloquial but very expressive American phrase, “he was a man of grace, grit, and gumption,” the three essential features of all true life and manhood. He was not afraid of work, and he did that work to the utmost of his power and ability. That was a fine testimony to real character suggested by a notice in a shop window, “Difficult work invited.” It was the measure of the man inside the shop, and showed he did not fear to face difficult problems in his business. So it was with Joseph; he was a man of principle. His religion affected every part of his life, and the result was that he glorified God, and, we doubt not, was the means of extending the influence of true religion wherever he went. Let us therefore remember the well-known words of Archbishop Benson, To the Christian there is nothing secular but what is sinful. Religion is to be applied to every department of human life, and whatever we have to do we must do it to the fullest possible

extent of all the powers we possess. “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord” (Colossians 3:23). “Whatsoever y e do in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:17). “Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). With these three principles ever actuating us we come to learn and others come to learn through us, the real meaning of life. So he died for his faith. That is fine More than most of us do.

But, say, can you add to that line That he lived for it too? In his death he bore witness at last As a martyr to truth. Did his life do the same in the past From the days of his youth?

It is easy to die. Men have died For a wish or a whim From bravado, or passion, or pride Was it harder for him? But to live every day to live out All the truth that he dreamt, While his friends met his conduct with doubt, And the world with contempt; Was it thus that he plodded ahead, Never turning aside?

Then we ll talk of the life that he led Never mind how he died.

ERNEST ABBOTT.

Chapter 80

00A.62 A Life's Sunset Gen_47:27-31; Gen_48:1-22

A Life’s Sunset Genesis 47:27-31; Genesis 48:1-22 AS the record of Genesis approaches the death of Jacob it is noteworthy how full of detail it becomes. This clearly shows the importance of the events in the eyes of the author. Joseph recedes into the background, or at any rate takes a very secondary position. The prominent figure is the great patriarch as head of the chosen family. When the seven years of famine came to an end we wonder, from the human standpoint, why Jacob and his family did not return to Canaan. We may be perfectly sure that some indication of the will of God was given enjoining them to stay where they were. At length, twelve years afterwards, Jacob drew near to the end of his life, quite conscious that he would die in Egypt and not in Canaan. This and the succeeding section are therefore filled with the events of the last days of the patriarch, and are fraught with the deepest spiritual meaning in relation to him and to Israel.

I. The Solemn Requirement (Genesis 47:27-31).

“The time drew near that Israel must die” the inevitable event was now near at hand. Even Israel must go the way of his fathers. He therefore called his son Joseph, and begged him not to bury him in Egypt, but to take him back to the land of promise. When I sleep with my fathers thou shalt carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying-place. These words are full of the deepest meaning. The way in which sleeping with the fathers is distinguished from the act of burial clearly shows that Jacob had a very definite conception of a future life as with his fathers. But more than this, the desire to return to Canaan seems to be associated with a belief in God’s promises, which could only be realized by the resurrection from the dead. To Jacob it was perfectly certain that God would fulfill His ancient word, and give that land to him and to his seed. It was thus no mere sentiment, but a very definite religious faith that led to his making this request of Joseph. Joseph, of course, at once promised to do what his father wished, and gave a solemn oath to carry out his word. The matter thus satisfactorily settled, Israel bowed himself upon the bed’s head. If we are to read the Hebrew, it means that he turned himself over in the bed and knelt upon it in the attitude of prayer. If, however, we follow the Septuagint, which only differs from the Hebrew in the matter of vowel punctuation, we shall read that “Israel worshipped leaning upon the top of his staff.” The latter rendering, which is favored by many authorities, has the great advantage of being in close agreement with Egyptian custom at that time. In either case, worship closes the life of the patriarch, who is now indeed Israel, not Jacob. Here, as elsewhere, the usage of these two names should be carefully considered.

II. The Striking Decision (Genesis 48:1-7).

It was not long after this that Joseph heard of his father’s illness, and, knowing that the end could not be far off, went to see him, taking with him his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob roused himself to greet his son, and when they were together the old man naturally recalled the past, and told Joseph of what God had done from that day when He appeared to him in the vision at Bethel. This reminder of the Divine promise about Canaan was then followed by the surprising and even startling announcement that Joseph’s two sons were to be regarded as no longer their FATHER’S

children, but as their grandfather's, taking the place of Reuben and Simeon among the twelve sons and twelve tribes. Any other sons that Joseph might have were to remain their FATHER'S, but Ephraim and Manasseh were to be separated from Joseph and to belong in name and fact to Jacob. This adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh was a very remarkable occurrence. We naturally ask ourselves first of all how Joseph regarded it, and though the narrative is quite silent we can readily see by his perfect acquiescence that he was prepared to allow his sons to cast in their lot with the people of God rather than to continue in Egypt with all the possibilities and opportunities that might be before them. Joseph in this as in every other case never forgot that he belonged to a chosen race, to the people of God. By faith everything became possible and even easy since God was so real to him. But what are we to think of the decision in relation to Manasseh and Ephraim? They were at this time twenty years of age at the least, and their position must have been to all intents and purposes settled for them by their FATHER'S position in the land of Egypt. Their prospects were obviously bright and even glorious, and making every allowance for the authority of Joseph over them, we are surely right in assuming that the decision to separate them from Egypt and to include them in the shepherds of Israel must have meant a real test to them as well as to their father. May we not assume that they had been taught by Joseph the real meaning of the position of Jacob and his family in relation to God and His promise? And if this was so, these young men were prepared to abjure all the hopes of high estate and great power in Egypt in order to cast in their lot with the people of God. The touching reference to Rachel (Genesis 48:7) with which Jacob closed his words to Joseph is very striking. The presence of Rachel's elder son recalled the past with intensity and vividness, and the circumstances of his beloved wife's death came home to him keenly at the moment. "As for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died, to my sorrow" (R.V. margin) in the land of Canaan. The memory of that day lived with the aged patriarch. And yet we believe that there was something more than the memory of a sorrow in his reference to Rachel. He wished to honour the memory of his beloved wife by giving her three tribes among the twelve Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh.

III. The Special Blessing (Genesis 48:8-16). The dimness of Jacob's sight prevented him from recognizing those whom Joseph had brought with him, but when told who they were, he asked that they might be brought near that he might bless them. How beautiful are those words of his, "had not thought to see thy face; and lo, God hath showed me also thy seed." God is ever surprising His people with added blessing beyond our expectations, because "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Joseph thereupon placed one son at one side and the other at the other side of the patriarch, so that the elder son Manasseh might have the blessing from Israel's right hand, and the younger son Ephraim the blessing from the left hand. But this was not to be. Israel deliberately stretched forth his hands and crossed them, so that the firstborn received the blessing from the left hand. Then the, father and the two sons were blessed by the patriarch in words that live in the memory as we read them. The threefold testimony to God as the God of his fathers, the God of his own life, and the God, who had preserved him, is very striking. While we may not read into it the full New Testament doctrine of the Trinity, it is impossible to overlook the threefold ness of the reference. We may also associate with this a similar threefold ness found elsewhere in the Old Testament (Numbers 6:25-27; Isaiah 6:3). God was asked to bless the lads, and the blessing was to take two forms spiritual and temporal. They were to be incorporated into the family of Israel, and also to grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth. How truly all this was fulfilled in the subsequent history of Ephraim and Manasseh is evident from

the record of Holy Scripture.

IV. The Significant Action (Genesis 48:17-22). In accordance with the general feeling about the first-born, Joseph was displeased that his father should have laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, and he thereupon attempted to remove it, telling Jacob that Manasseh was the firstborn. The father, however, was equal to the occasion, and doubtless to the surprise of his son said, I know it, my son, I know it. It had been done wittingly and deliberately, for the younger son was to be the greater even though Manasseh himself was to be great. This passing over of the firstborn is one of the most striking features of the book of Genesis. So it was with Seth instead of Cain: Shem instead of Japheth; Abraham instead of Haran; Isaac instead of Ishmael; Jacob instead of Esau. And now it was Ephraim instead of Manasseh. Thus did God display His sovereignty and prevent anyone imagining that His blessings necessarily follow the line of natural privilege. God has again and again chosen the weak things of the earth, and even those that are despised, to set at nought those that are mighty. Grace is sovereign, and by no means follows, but rather opposes the course of nature.

Thus the patriarch had his way, and Joseph promptly and fully accepted the situation. Is it not remarkable, in spite of all Joseph had been, that his name was not to appear in the list of his father's sons, but that instead of his own his two sons were to take his place? We do not know Jacob intended the birthright to pass thereby from Judah to Joseph and to be realized in his two sons, though it is clear afterwards (1 Chronicles 5:1-2) that the birthright was regarded as belonging to Joseph. Joseph's self-abnegation and faith are once again evident. The closing word of assurance and promise was Jacob's last given to Joseph himself. Israel assured him though he himself was about to die, God would be with them and bring them again to the land of their fathers. Not only so, but Joseph was granted "one portion above his brethren," the portion which his father had taken out of the hand of the Amorite. It is sometimes thought that this reference is to Shechem, as the word f portion in the Hebrew is identical with the name Shechem, and that it is to be interpreted of the episode in Genesis 33:19. If this be the case, it must mean that, while Jacob had originally deprecated and condemned the treachery of his sons, nevertheless, the deed being done, the property belonged to him as the head of the house and of the family. He therefore bestows it, not upon those who had treacherously taken it, but on Joseph, as a special mark of privilege and as a guarantee of future inheritance. Others, however, think that the reference is prophetic, and looks forward to the time when Canaan shall be taken out of the hand of the Amorite by the seed of Jacob. It is perhaps best of all to regard it as referring altogether to an episode which is not otherwise recorded in the history of Jacob.

Suggestions for Meditation This picture of the sunset of Israel's life is one of extreme beauty and suggestiveness, and may well be taken as a type and model for old age to-day.

1. Faith, looking upward. The one thing that seems to stand out pre-eminently in this narrative is the reality to Jacob of God's presence and promise. All through the story the one theme is God (Genesis 48:3, Genesis 48:11, Genesis 48:15, Genesis 48:20, Genesis 48:21). The troubled waters of Jacob's life had now settled and cleared, and were flowing placidly in a quiet stream of fellowship with God. He rested his heart upon what God had done for him, and on what God had promised to him and to his seed. Faith is always occupied with the Word of God, and finds in that Word its nutriment, encouragement, inspiration, and power. Trust in man answers to truth in God.

The Divine faithfulness is met by human faith, for faith is the only, as it is the adequate, response to a Divine revelation. Happy are they to whom God is equally real, whose hearts rest upon His Word, and who are able to say, I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me.

2. Gratitude, looking backward.

It is very helpful to contrast the two outlooks of life associated with Jacob. When he was before Pharaoh (Genesis 47:9) he spoke of his “days as few and evil” but in his words to Joseph (Genesis 48:16) he speaks of One who had redeemed him from all evil. These two aspects of life seem to represent two moods of the ancient patriarch. In the former he himself was everything and God practically nothing, except in so far as life was thought of as a pilgrimage. In the latter God was everything and he himself nothing. It has been suggested that in taking such a gloomy view of his life when he stood before Pharaoh he missed a splendid opportunity of witnessing for God. This may be so, but there can be no doubt of the definite testimony before Joseph and his sons. God was everything to him in that threefold description, (a) The God before Whom my fathers did walk. (b) The God Who hath shepherded me all my life long unto this day. (c) The Angel which hath redeemed me from all evil. Nothing could well be finer or more appropriate than this description of God, and, whatever we may say of the former testimony, this one is full of genuine gratitude as he recalls his life from that memorable night at Bethel, when God blessed him and gave him such wonderful promises (Genesis 48:3-4). As we are passing through trials and troubles, it is not always easy though it ought to be possible for us to see the hand of God; but as we review the past and look over life’s journey we are enabled to see the way in which God has led us, and our grateful adoring testimony in the retrospect of life will undoubtedly be, He hath done all things well.

3. Love, looking outward. The aged patriarch Love, looking not only thought of God and of his own past, but outward, also of Joseph and his two sons, and with hands outstretched he called down the Divine benediction upon his grandsons, praying that God would bless the lads. His affection for Joseph and his sons prompted this outpouring of loving prayer and blessing that the same God Who had been with him would continue to be with his dear ones. Happy are those young men who can enjoy the privilege of the benediction of a father or grandfather; happy, too, are those who can give this blessing, for in it without a doubt is the assurance of Divine as well as of human love.

4. Hope, looking onward.

Israel’s faith was no t only occupied with God as a present reality, but expressed itself in hope and expectation as he looked forward to the glorious future assured by God to him and to his seed. “I die;” but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers. Hope is an integral part of the Christian life, and must never be severed from faith and love. Just as St Paul kept these three graces in close proximity (1 Thessalonians 1:3), so must it be in every true, full, and well-balanced Christian experience. Faith looks upward, Hope looks onward. Faith accepts, Hope expects. Faith is concerned with the present promising, Hope is concerned with the thing promised. Faith appropriates, Hope anticipates. Faith is always occupied with the past and present, Hope lives entirely in the future. Our life will be weakened, narrowed, and even maimed, if hope does not occupy a very definite place in our life. And thus we see what the true ending of life should be a blending of faith, gratitude, love, and hope; a consciousness of the presence and peace of God; an assurance of the mercy and blessing of God; a confidence in the promise and

assurance of God; an expectation that what God hath promised He is both able and willing to perform. When life is lived on this plane of experience it fulfils completely the Divine ideal by manifesting itself in true character, proving a blessing to those around, and bringing ever-increasing glory to God. Then indeed, God is its all in all.

00A.63 Father and Sons Gen_49:1-27

Father and Sons Genesis 49:1-27 THE dying words of Jacob to his twelve sons mark the close of the patriarchal dispensation. The family was already commencing its development into the nation, and it is in every way appropriate that the aged patriarch should foresee and foretell the general course of events which was to happen to his sons in the far-off future. The fact that he called his sons unto him in order to tell them what should befall them in the latter days shows the importance of the occasion, and its real bearing on the subsequent history of the twelve tribes in the light of God's great purpose for the patriarchs and their seed. The chapter is usually described as the Blessing of Jacob, but it is obviously quite inaccurate to describe it in this way, since the predictions about several of the sons are characterized by the very reverse of blessing. The chapter is rather to be understood as a prediction of the results of character. It consists at once of a review of the past and a foresight of the future in the light of that past.

I. The Certainty of the Fulfilment. The opening verses of the chapter clearly imply and assume the prophetic character of Jacob's words. Solemnly he called together his sons in order that they might hear Israel their father (Genesis 48:1-2). The words of the patriarch fitly come at this point, and mark a stage in the development of the Divine promise, which was first given in Eden concerning the seed of the woman, and then repeated and developed in the blessings to Abraham and Isaac. Looking back over the record in Genesis, and looking forward to the time of Moses, these words of Jacob come midway between the earlier and later stages of the development of the Divine purpose.

It is impossible to overlook the great problem raised by modern writers in regard to this chapter. Are we to understand it as a genuine prediction of Jacob? Or is it to be interpreted as the utterance of a later writer some ages after the time of Jacob, who used this form for the purpose of conveying the lessons he wished to teach Israel? On the one hand we have the very definite words of Dr. Driver, who says "that it is not to be supposed that the blessing was actually pronounced by Jacob…The present with which the blessings contained in Genesis 49 are connected is not the age of Jacob, but the age of the Judges, or a little later; and this accordingly is the period in which they must be supposed to have originated. . . From the terms in which Judah is eulogized it may be inferred with tolerable certainty that the author was a poet belonging to that tribe (Genesis, pp. 380, 381). On the other hand Dr. Green is equally definite, saying that "the structure and contents of this blessing make it impossible to explain it as a vatidnium post eventum, and after arguing the matter in detail he concludes by saying that All this points to the genuineness of this blessing as really the utterance of Jacob, which it claims to be, and is declared to be (Unity of Genesis, pp. 522-524). It certainly seems difficult to understand how a later writer, in the time of the Judges or later, could have set down calmly what is here said of Levi, whose tribe at that time had the place of honour as the priestly tribe. Nor does it seem easy to understand how anyone writing as late as the Judges could have reflected so severely on the ancestors of the tribes of Reuben and Simeon. It is to be feared that most of the objections to this chapter as a genuine utterance of Jacob arise out of a too circumscribed and almost preconceived idea of what

line prophecy should take, or else proceed on the assumption that prediction is impossible. Reviewing all the circumstances and the varieties of conclusions arrived at by critics of the passage (see Green in loc.), it does not seem too much to say, with the editor of Lange's Commentary, that "There is but one part of the Scripture to which this blessing of Jacob can be assigned without making it a sheer forgery, and that, too, a most absurd and inconsistent one. It is the very place in which it appears. Here it fits perfectly. It is in harmony with all its surroundings; while its subjective truthfulness to say nothing now of its inspiration or its -veritable prophetic character gives it the strongest claim to our credence" (Lange, Genesis, p. 651). Is there really any middle course? The chapter is "either Jacob's or it is a forgery;" and if it be the latter we naturally ask, "What is its value, whether historical or spiritual?"

II. The Variety of the Fulfilment.

Into the details of Jacob's predictions of his sons it is impossible now to enter. It would seem as though the announcements are grouped round two of the sons, Judah (Genesis 48:3-18) and Joseph (Genesis 49:19-27); six sons being associated with Judah and four with Joseph. So far as the character of each individual man is known, the patriarch s words seem based upon his knowledge of what they were, and he predicts their future history in accordance with their individualities.

It would be profitable to ponder carefully what is said of each man individually under the guidance of a commentary like Driver's or Lange's, to discover first what is the true interpretation of each word and phrase, and then to read what is said in the light of the subsequent history of the tribes so far as it is known to us.

III. The Accuracy of the Fulfilment.

There can be very little doubt of the general, and in many respects exact agreement of what is here said with what actually happened in the subsequent history of the tribes. Thus Reuben is predicted as not able to excel (as he should have done being the firstborn) by reason of his instability, and this came literally to pass. "No judge, no prophet, not one of the tribe of Reuben is mentioned" (Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, article Reuben, quoted in Dod's Genesis, p. 428). Again, Simeon and Levi are foretold as divided and scattered, which came literally true, for Simeon was absorbed in the South of Palestine, while Levi had no part in the land owing to his being appointed as the tribe from which the Jewish priesthood was taken. The fullness of reference to Judah is another case in point, for we have only to remember that David came out of this tribe, to see that during the period of the monarchy these words were abundantly fulfilled. Not least of all is the accuracy with which the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh realized the blessings here predicted for Joseph. Ephraim was the leading tribe for at least three centuries, and his land afterwards became the scene and centre of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

All this goes to prove the essential truthfulness of the chapter as a veritable utterance of the patriarch. Unless it is a true prediction, it is difficult to account for several features which are perfectly intelligible on the assumption of genuineness. Thus, if this chapter really dates from the time of the Judges, as is suggested by Dr. Driver, "it is difficult to understand why there is so much of Judah in Genesis, while he is not mentioned in Deborah's song (Judges 5:1-31)." The differences of reference to Issachar as compared with Deborah's song, and to Levi as compared

with the blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 33:1-29) should also be observed. Surely this independence implies originality, or else a very definite attempt at forgery. As Dr. Redpath truly says, “if there is any inspiration at all, insight into the future, based on a knowledge of personal characteristics, may well be included in it” (Redpath, Modern Criticism and Genesis, p. 81). Prophecy has been defined (not quite fully perhaps) as moral prescience, and it is suggested that we have in the present chapter one of its best illustrations. This is no fancy painting. It is the power of the soul in its last efforts to see what crops will come out of this seed and of that; it is a man standing upon fields charged with seed, the quality of which he well knows, forecasting the harvest. “Moral prophecy is vindicated by moral law” (People’s Bible, Genesis, p. 350). Add to this the supernatural action of the Spirit of God, and we may well rest our faith in the accuracy, and therefore in the moral value, of this chapter.

IV. The Spirituality of the Fulfilment. The references to Jacob’s sons go far beyond the merely temporal history of the Jewish nation. There are in it some of those very definite Messianic elements in which that history found its spiritual culmination. Thus, we find in the allusion to “Shiloh” a very true prediction of the Messiah as the Rest-Giver (Genesis 49:10). Notwithstanding all that has been written on this verse during recent years, there is still good reason to interpret Shiloh as a personal name, as in the R.V. The alternative to this rendering seems very trite and altogether inappropriate to the detailed description of future power and glory associated with Judah. Even those who do not interpret the word “Shiloh” as personal say that the verse is undoubtedly Messianic in the broader sense of the term by reason of its anticipation of an ideal future for Judah (Driver, Genesis, p. 414). Those who still maintain the personal interpretation have a great deal to say for themselves after everything else has been considered on the other side.

Another element of the spiritual interpretation is seen in the exclamation, “I have waited for Thy salvation, Lord” (Genesis 49:8). This puzzles many commentators, and yet perhaps the true interpretation is not far to seek. In the preceding verse a reference had been made to an adder in the path that bites the horse’s heels and causes the rider to fall backward. Is it not at least possible, not to say likely, that this allusion to a serpent recalled to the aged patriarch the primeval promise of the seed of the serpent bruising the heel of the seed of the woman? Then at once he burst out in earnest appeal to God for that salvation which had been promised as the result of the enmity between the two seeds. The blessing of Joseph can hardly be limited to Joseph. The subsequent history of Ephraim and Manasseh, but must include some of those spiritual elements which were evident and prominent throughout the subsequent history of Israel. It seems in every way best to regard the phrases in Genesis 49:24-25, as a series of descriptions of God as “The Mighty One of Jacob,” the “Shepherd,” “the Stone of Israel” “the God of thy father,” “the Almighty.” In this full revelation of God lay the secret of Israel’s uniqueness, and a guarantee of Israel’s blessing (Maclaren, Genesis, pp. 295-304).

Suggestions for Meditation The chapter is so full of material that it is quite impossible to do more than suggest in the briefest way some aspects of teaching with special reference to daily, practical life. Taking the chapter as a revelation of personal character, we may regard the sons of Jacob as among those beacons of the Bible which are set before us, written for our learning. Beacons are at once guides and warnings, and the delineation of his son’s characters by the aged patriarch affords to us inspiration for imitation, and warning for avoidance.

1. The danger of instability.

We see this in Reuben. Of him it was true, “To one thing constant never,” and what is especially sad is that the instability was due to sin. It is always so. Morality and character go together. To commit sin is to render ourselves unable to act aright because we become morally unstable.

2. The disgrace of treachery. The description of Simeon and Levi is very terrible. Their father never forgot their treachery and violence to peaceful and harmless neighbors. There is scarcely anything more awful in life than treachery, more particularly when, as in the case of Simeon and Levi, it was associated with apparently religious motives and phraseology. We dare not do evil in the name of good.

3. The blessing of sovereignty.

Judah had fully redeemed his character, and the future depicted for him is one of glory and blessing. From him was to come the Messiah, and thence would issue blessing to the world. The life of power when exercised rightly will always be fraught with blessing to others. To serve is to reign, and to reign is to bless.

4. The responsibility of opportunity.

Zebulun is described as dwelling near the sea with the opportunity of providing a haven for ships. The Jews were never particularly enamored of seafaring life, but this reference to Zebulun clearly shows the possibility of this method of living if they had been willing to seize upon it. It is worthy of notice that at the present day the only natural harbor in Palestine is that of Haifa, and the Hebrew word for “haven” (Genesis 49:13) is thought to be the original from which the modern word Haifa comes. This would be interesting if true, especially as Haifa is not otherwise mentioned in the Old Testament. Opportunity ample and free comes in one way or another to us all. It is for us to seize it, and to be the means of blessing to others, or else by missing it to lose every chance of real life.

5. The weakness of timidity.

Issachar is described as occupying a very delightful position, and succumbing to the temptation of an easy life and of yielding to the slavery of others. He was content to bear burdens rather than to exert himself courageously on behalf of his own position and rights. How easy it is to let ourselves remain content with quiet life instead of exerting ourselves strenuously on behalf of what is right and good and true!

6. The peril of subtilty.

Dan is described as a serpent, biting and causing trouble. The subtilty of the serpent has become proverbial; and whilst the Apostle advises us to be wise as serpents, the wisdom does not mean cunning, but that spiritual shrewdness which is essential to all true life. There is nothing more contemptible than cunning, and when cunning and deceit are used in connection with religion men sound almost the lowest deeps of infamy.

7. The glory of victory.

Gad is described as being overcome by a troop, but as overcoming at the last and pressing upon the heels of his enemies. Life is often associated with pressure and hardship, but victory is

promised to the faithful soldier, and “to him that overcometh there are blessings untold and everlasting.”

8. The privilege of felicity.

Asher means “Blessed,” and the promise to him is marked by fullness and real plenty. Blessedness is one of the marks of the true life. Blessed is the man (same root in Hebrew, Psalms 1:1). So long as we always remember that every aspect and element of blessedness is intended for use and service, and not for mere luxury, we may enjoy to the full all the blessedness and wealth of grace provided for us in the Gospel. The keynote of the New Testament, as of the Old, is “Blessed be the man because God is a God of blessing,” “The blessing of the Lord maketh rich.”

9. The need of activity.

It is a little difficult to understand what is meant precisely by the reference to Naphtali, but it seems to refer generally to activity, vigor, and movement. The active life is always the happy life, and the easy-going is always the dangerous life. Activity is necessitated not only by our personal safety, but by the interests of the Kingdom of God. “Zealous of good works.”

10. The joy of prosperity. The blessing of Joseph may be summed up in the one word “fruitfulness,” than which there is nothing more glorious in life. Fruit is the natural and necessary expression of the spiritual life, and the way in which our Lord emphasizes fruit (John 15:1-27) shows the importance assigned to it in the Gospel. The man who, like Joseph, is true to God will ever bring forth fruit, and his life will abound in the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

11. The value of ability.

Benjamin is compared to a wolf, and in speaking of him as ready both morning and evening to go after his prey it would seem as though the idea were that he is at all times equally ready for fighting, and equally successful in the wars which he undertakes (Driver, Genesis, p. 394). Benjamin was the smallest of the tribes, and yet was one of the most martial. From this came Ehud and Saul, and in many other ways this very insignificant tribe became prominent for its courage, fierceness, and power. We may perhaps spiritualize and say that we must ever be ready with spiritual ability and agility to attack any task that may be placed before us, and carry it forward to a successful issue.

Reviewing all these various elements of power as suggested for us by these men, we may well ask ourselves, with the Apostle, “Who is sufficient for these things?” Character undoubtedly makes the greatest demands upon us. Other elements of natural power and ability may come easy to men, but moral and spiritual character requires much care and effort for its proper and full manifestation. Like the Apostle, we may, however, answer our own question, "Our sufficiency is of God.” It is true that Character makes the Man; it is equally true that Christ makes the Character.

Chapter 82

00A.64 Light at Eventide Gen_49:28-33; Gen_50:1-14

Light at Eventide Genesis 49:28-33; Genesis 50:1-14

FEW of the deaths recorded in Scripture are more beautiful in their simplicity than that of Jacob. His departure from earth was not only the quiet, peaceful close of a chequered life; it also signalized the close of a very definite stage in the development of the Divine purpose concerning his seed.

I. The Last Words (Genesis 49:28-32). The words of Jacob concerning his twelve sons and their future came to a close with the reference to Benjamin, and as the end of the patriarch s life was at hand, he gave his sons his final Benediction: “Everyone according to his blessing he blessed them. Not one was overlooked, even though he had had to speak so faithfully about the temporal results of the sin of some of them. Each one was blessed with his own special blessing, and a legacy of benediction was left to them all. The retrospect, as he went over name after name, must have been as sad to him as it was to his sons; but at length all this was over, and only the Divine benediction was in the mind of their father. His affection for them was unshaken by anything that he had said, and he called down upon them each and all the blessing of the Lord his God. With the blessing came a solemn charge. His mind was full of the promise made to Abraham and Isaac, and what he had said to Joseph (Genesis 47:1-31) he pressed upon them all, charging them to bury him in Canaan in the field that Abraham purchased as a burying-place. Egypt was no place for him; and although the fulfilment of God’s promises was not to be realized during his life-time, he had no sort of doubt that a fulfilment would take place, and for this reason he wished to be buried in the Land of Promise. We can well believe, although it is not actually recorded, that his sons were just as ready as Joseph had shown himself to do according to their FATHER’S will.

II. The Closing Scene (Genesis 49:33). At length everything was accomplished. The last counsel had been given, the last blessing bestowed, the last charge laid upon his sons, and then the aged patriarch yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people. In these two phrases we have a simple but very significant idea of what death meant to the patriarch. To God he yielded up his spirit, and with his people he was reunited. A careful study of the various references to the close of life in Genesis reveals more about the early ideas of death than we are accustomed to credit to the patriarchs.

III. The Filial Love (Genesis 50:1-6). The loss to Joseph was necessarily great. He had lived, we may almost say, for his father, and as we review all the circumstances from the earliest days of his life we fully realize the closeness between them. Joseph fell upon his FATHER’S face, and wept upon him, and kissed him. It is, perhaps, worth while observing that during those years of stress and hardship, with cruelty, disappointment and misunderstanding as his portion, we do not read of Joseph giving way to tears. We read of his tender feelings when he met his brothers after the lapse of years; but, so far as personal sorrow is concerned, this seems to be the record of his feelings. There was nothing unmanly in these tears as he gazed upon the beloved form of the father who had been as devoted to him as he had been to his father. Henceforth life could not but

be very different for Joseph. A blank had been made which could never be filled, and we cannot wonder at his sorrow. In view of Egyptian custom, and also because of the dying charge of Jacob, the body was embalmed. Embalming was something of a testimony to a belief in the resurrection. It was believed that the soul would in time return to its body after death, and pains were therefore taken to preserve the body from dissolution in the grave (Driver, Genesis, p. 395). It is true that the idea was associated with metempsychosis, but even so it is one of those broken lights which bear their witness to the full Biblical truth of resurrection.

Seventy days altogether were devoted to mourning for Jacob; and as the usual time for mourning for a king was seventy-two days, we can readily see the respect that was shown to Joseph in this almost royal mourning for his father. When the days of mourning were over Joseph approached Pharaoh through members of the royal household, asking permission to take the body of his father up to Canaan in order to fulfill the patriarch's dying charge. It is not quite clear why he did not go direct to Pharaoh. Probably it was because he was still in the habiliments of mourning with hair and beard uncut, or it may have been that he wished to associate himself for the moment with his brethren as the head of the family, rather than approach Pharaoh in his position as Prime Minister of Egypt. Pharaoh at once gave consent, and Joseph was free to carry out his solemn promise to his father.

IV. The Complete Obedience (Genesis 50:7-14). The funeral cortege must have been a striking sight, for with Joseph went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, besides the members of Jacob's family. Pharaoh clearly desired to pay the highest possible tokens of respect to Jacob in sending such a cavalcade with Joseph and his brethren. When they arrived at the threshing-floor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan, they remained seven days, mourning according to the Hebrew time of mourning, and mourned with a great and very sore lamentation. Even the Canaanites were impressed by this great sorrow and regarded it as of special import (Genesis 50:11). Then his sons did unto him according as he commanded them. The oath of Joseph (Genesis 47:29-30) was fulfilled, and Jacob was buried in the cave of the field of Machpelah. Just as Abraham had charged his servant not to obtain a wife for Isaac in the land of Canaan (Genesis 24:2), so Jacob had charged his sons that they should not bury him out of the land of Canaan. This emphasis on Canaan shows beyond all question the deep impression made by the Divine promises, and the way in which those promises were cherished by succeeding generations.

Then came the sad return to Egypt. Joseph and his brethren and all that went up with him turned their faces from the Land of Promise to go back to the land of their adoption. We may perhaps imagine their questioning among themselves why they were not to stay in Canaan; why, after God's promise, they were not to abide in the land that had been assured to them. But the time was not yet. There was much to be accomplished before they would be ready for the land or the land ready for them. We may also think of them turning round as they finally left Canaan, to take a last look at some familiar scenes, perhaps with the thought that it was the last time they would ever have the opportunity of seeing the Land of Promise. Soon Joseph was engaged once more in his ordinary occupation in Egypt, with all its responsibilities; and though his father would never be forgotten, yet time and work would, as always, lay their healing balm upon his heart and life.

Suggestions for Meditation

Leaving for further and fuller consideration the story of Jacob's life as a whole, it may be worth while looking at this story as revealing to us some of the aspects of a believer s death. Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his. What marks the death of the righteous as suggested by the close of Jacob's life?

1. The power of faith.

We observe Jacob's mind and heart occupied with God, His promises, and His grace. The blessing that he bestowed upon his sons showed that he was concerned with very much more than temporal blessings. By faith Jacob, when he was a-dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff. Happy, thrice happy, is that deathbed where God is a reality, and where faith in God is the strength and support of the passing soul.

2. The glory of love.

Death is the great reconciler. There had been many a difficulty, many a conflict, many a sorrow in the relations of Jacob and his sons; and even on his deathbed it was essential that the patriarch, with prophetic insight and foresight, should speak quite plainly of some of the past events in their connection with the future. But even this did not affect his personal feeling for them, for he blessed them every one; and as they gathered round his deathbed the spirit of love possessed him, and as we may believe possessed them all. Happy, thrice happy, is that deathbed where all alienations are at an end, and everything is peace and love.

3. The expectation of reunion. The emphasis placed several times upon being gathered unto his people clearly shows that Jacob fully expected to be reunited with his loved ones. It is impossible to interpret a phrase like this to mean nothing more than being buried with them. It must mean that he looked forward to reunion and recognition as he and they were gathered together once again. This thought of a reunion thus hinted at, and more than hinted at, in the early pages of the Old Testament becomes fuller and clearer in the course of Divine revelation, until at length in the full revelation of the New Covenant it becomes one of the inspirations of life. Our own are our own for ever, God taketh not back His gift;

They may pass beyond our vision, but our souls shall find them out, When the waiting is all accomplished, and the deathly shadows lift, And glory is given for grieving, and the surety of God for doubt.

4. The inspiration of hope.

Jacob while on his deathbed not only looked up to a present God of g race and blessing; he looked forward also to a time when the promises of God to his forefathers would be fulfilled. The intense concern about being buried in Canaan was associated with the fulfilment of those promises. That cave in the field of Machpelah, with the precious bodies of his loved ones, was as it were an outpost, a guarantee, and a pledge of the complete fulfilment of God's promises. Like Abraham and Isaac before him, Jacob looked for a city which had foundations whose maker and builder was God. The fathers did not look only for transitory promises, for they were occupied with the thought of Resurrection. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. All this is a thousand-fold clearer and more certain to-day. The Christian is inspired with the hope of the Resurrection. It is this that fills the horizon with light and joy. The sky, not the grave, is our goal, and this hope of Resurrection

transforms and transfigures death, and enables us to realize that it is only the gateway to the fuller life which is ours in Christ. This is true dying. If God should call us through death to be with Him, happy will it be if we have the same faith, the same love, the same hope, the same expectation, for then will the words find their very literal fulfilment: Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.

How beautiful it is to be with God, When earth is fading like a dream, And from this mist-encircled shore We launch upon the unknown stream! No doubt, no fear, no anxious care, But, comforted by staff and rod, In the faith-brightened hour of death How beautiful to be with God!

How sweet to lay the burden by, The task inwrought with toil and prayer, Assured that He Who calls will send One better still the yoke to bear!

What peace, when we have done our best, To leave the pilgrim path, long trod, And in yon fields of asphodel Snow-white, be evermore with God!

Beyond the partings and the pains, Beyond the sighing and the tears, Oh, beautiful to be with God Through all the endless, blessed years; To see His Face, to hear His Voice, To know Him better day by day, And love Him as the flowers love light, And serve Him as immortals may.

Then let it fade, this dream of earth When I have done my life-work here, Or long, or short, as seemeth best What matters, so God’s will appear?

I will not fear to launch my bark Upon the darkly rolling flood;

Tis but to pierce the mist and then How beautiful to be with God!

Chapter 83

00A.65 Joseph's Later Life Gen_50:15-26

Joseph’s Later Life Genesis 50:15-26

IT is inevitable that life should take on a different aspect after the death of one s parents. Even a middle-aged man cannot help realizing that he is only a son while his father is alive, but when his father has passed away there comes the full consciousness that henceforward he must stand in the front rank and take the lead. As long as Jacob was alive he was the head of the family, and every thing connected with his household was necessarily influenced by his position, notwithstanding the fact of Joseph’s high standing in the land of Egypt. It was only after Jacob’s death that Joseph could really take the lead in matters affecting the life and welfare of his brethren. In the passage before us there are two distinct subjects connected with the people of Israel, in both of which Joseph is the central figure.

I. Fear (Genesis 50:15-18).

It is with surprise that we find the old trouble between Joseph and his brethren brought up once more. It might have been thought at an end with the full reconciliation years before. But under the new conditions consequent upon the death of their father, Joseph’s brethren conceived the idea that he would fully requite them all the evil they had done. This sense of guilt after so long a time is very striking. The men were now getting on in years, and yet remained fully conscious of those early sins and were in dread of their consequences. It may be that Joseph will hate us, and will fully requite us all the evil which we did unto him. It is a characteristic of weak, base natures to find it difficult to believe in the nobility of others. They measured Joseph by themselves, and thought that he was harboring resentment and only biding his time. What a revelation of their own nature they thus gave! In our suspicions of other people we often reveal ourselves. It is so difficult to credit others with magnanimity and the spirit of forgiveness. They thereupon sent a message to Joseph, probably (so we may imagine) by Benjamin, saying that their father commanded them before he died to ask Joseph’s forgiveness. It is thought by some that this use of their FATHER’S name was unwarranted, and was only for the purpose of gaining favour with Joseph. On the other hand, it seems quite likely that Jacob said this when he observed their fears that after his death a very great change would occur. May it not also show that some barrier was felt by them, and perhaps even by Jacob also, during those years in Egypt, in spite of all that Joseph had done for them? Their two-fold plea in sending this message is worthy of note. They based it first on this appeal to their FATHER’S memory, and then they spoke of themselves as the servants of the God of thy father. Following this message they went themselves and made full submission to their brother, saying, “Behold, we be thy servants.”

II. Forgiveness (Genesis 50:19-21). No wonder that Joseph wept when they spake unto him. It was not the first time they had misunderstood and mistrusted him, and he doubtless felt the deepest pity for them as well as sorrow that they should have thought him capable of such unworthy feelings and intentions after all the years that had elapsed since his restoration to them. There is scarcely anything more trying and searching in life than the experience of being

misunderstood, with motives misconstrued and intentions distorted. Joseph was, however, utterly unspoiled and unsoured by the various experiences of misunderstanding which fell to his lot throughout his life. He bade them not to fear, and reminded them that he was not in the place of God, that it belonged to God, not to him, to deal with their sin. At the same time he took the opportunity of speaking to them quite plainly about what they had done and what God had done in overruling their sin. As for you, ye meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. We can not fail to see the true reserve and the equally true frankness which characterize these utterances. What a comparison and contrast are here made! “Ye meant evil . . . but God meant it for good.” And then he assured them once again: “Fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.” Distrust and misunderstanding are only too apt to embitter and deaden the nature. There are few things in life more hard to bear than ungrounded suspicion, but Joseph was superior to all these feelings, and instead of altering his attitude to them, he only assured them once again of his willingness to nourish them and their families, and to do all that he could for them. This is the true attitude to take up. When our good is evil spoken of, our best intentions misinterpreted, our loving actions suspected and even reviled, then is the opportunity for showing the true spirit of Christ and proving the reality of our profession. It is easy to write this, it is easy to conceive of it being done, but it is not by any means so easy to put it into practice. Yet God’s grace is sufficient even for this, and it is in such ways that the genuineness of our religious profession is best proved.

III. Faith (Genesis 50:22-26). This last paragraph of Genesis refers to events fifty-four years after the preceding verse. Joseph’s life in Egypt was doubtless lived in the ordinary routine of daily responsibilities and duties, and although he was necessarily engrossed with the demands of his important post we can see from the sequel that his heart was still true to the faith of his fathers. That faith enabled him to do his work loyally day by day, while at the same time it prevented him from being so entirely immersed in it as to forget the calls of his father’s house.

Earthly joys were equally unable to remove him from the steadfastness of his faith. He saw the great-grandchildren of his son Ephraim and the grandchildren of his son Manasseh, and although he was surrounded with everything that was happy, bright and joyous in his home, and although every personal and family interest seemed to be inextricably bound up with Egypt, his faith enabled him to cling to God and never to forget the supremacy of the covenant with his fathers. And the faith which enabled him to do his duty and to keep true amidst all the attentions of earthly happiness did not fail him when he came to die. He summoned his brethren, and in view of his approaching death gave them a solemn charge. I die: but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which He sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. The faith of his childhood was still working powerfully in his life, and his dying words clearly show where his heart had been all through the years in Egypt. He was the simple, God-fearing Hebrew to the very end of his days, and was not affected in the least by his high position, great responsibilities, and the fascination of life in Egypt. Once again we can see how possible it is for a man to serve God humbly and faithfully in the highest walks of life. God was first, and everything else was dominated by that simple but all-embracing principle.

Like his father before him, he took an oath of the children of Israel. God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. Like Jacob, he was determined that Egypt should not be the final resting-place of his body. His heart was already in Canaan, and his body was to be there

also. So at length he died, and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. That coffin would be a constant reminder to the people of Israel of God's promise to their fathers. Joseph being dead would yet speak, and in the days that were not far ahead of them the coffin would remind them of the glorious future and inspire them with hope and courage amidst present difficulties.

"So Joseph died." Like the rest of us, even this noble man was called hence, withdrawn from the scene of his earthly labors, where his presence was so important and his life a constant benediction a reminder that not even the best man on earth is indispensable. God will take care of His own work.

Suggestions for Meditation

It is interesting and significant that the one event in Joseph's life seized upon by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was that which was associated with his closing days. "By faith Joseph, when his end was nigh, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones" (Hebrews 11:22). It was also an act of Jacob just as he was dying that is mentioned as the proof of his faith, in the same chapter (Genesis 50:21). The comparisons and contrasts between the closing days of Jacob and Joseph give much food for thought.

I. The faith of Jacob and Joseph.

Jacob as he was dying thought chiefly of the past in desiring to be buried in the cave of Machpelah. He had been in Canaan a long time, and it was only natural that he should wish to be taken back there on his death. On the other hand, Joseph's thought was concerned with the future. He made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, though that departure was not to take place for many a day. Joseph had grown up in Egypt, and to him Canaan was little more than a memory, so far as personal experience was concerned, but to him as well as to Jacob the place was the Promised Land; and thus Jacob's faith looked back as though to say, "Do not forget the Canaan from which you have come," while Joseph's faith looked forward and said, "Do not forget the Canaan to which you are going."

2. The oath of Jacob and Joseph.

It has been very helpfully suggested (Candlish, Genesis, pp. Oath - 338 ff.) that Jacob took the oath from his sons when they were in the midst of Egyptian plenty, peace, and happiness, and that Joseph took the oath from the brethren when the time of the bondage was not far distant. The one oath meant, "Rest not in Egyptian prosperity;" the other meant, "Faint not in Egyptian adversity." (See also Stock, Lesson Studies in Genesis.) The solemn promise elicited by Joseph that he should not be buried permanently in Egypt is a striking testimony to the power of his faith. It was a triumph over that sentiment which naturally thinks of resting in a hallowed burial-place. It was a triumph over the inevitable temptation to have that fine and magnificent funeral which was his due, and which would have been doubtless accorded him by the people of Egypt. Above all, it was a constant testimony to the supreme conviction which actuated him, and which he wished to perpetuate among his brethren, that God would surely visit them. While he was living his voice could speak, but afterwards that unburied body would make its silent yet all-powerful appeal. It kept before them the story of God's faithfulness, and was intended to inspire their hearts with

undying hope as they waited for the day of deliverance.

3. The first and last verses of the Book of Genesis. The contrast between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 50:26 is surely more than an ordinary coincidence. The book opens with life it ends with death a coffin in Egypt, because in between had come sin which brings forth death. And yet that coffin spoke of life as well as of death. It was a symbol of hope, a message of patience, a guarantee of life everlasting. Joseph may not have known very much of the future life, but the fact that he pledged them to carry his body is a proof that in some measure at least he believed in immortality. Genesis, with its coffin in Egypt, was followed by Exodus, which means departure, deliverance; and Joseph spake of that exodus which they were to accomplish in God's time. After nearly 200 years of watching and waiting that coffin was carried up out of Egypt: "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him:" for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you" (Exodus 13:19). Then for forty years it accompanied the people of Israel wherever they went, and at length came the fulfilment of Joseph's hopes and of the solemn promise of his brethren. In the days of Joshua the bones of Joseph which the children brought up out of Egypt buried they in Shechem (Joshua 24:32). At Shechem they now show the tomb of Joseph. Travelers are interested in a little enclosure wherein is a small mound by the side of which grows a vine. Not very far away is another spot equally associated with the story of Joseph, for it was there that the brethren cast their brother into the pit and plotted against his life. He little thought when suffering at the hands of his brethren that a larger number of mourning descendants would accompany his body 200 years afterwards to its burial at Shechem.

4. The perpetual presence and persistent purpose of God.

One lesson above all others is writ large in the story of Jacob and Joseph, as it is indeed in the entire narrative of Genesis. "I die: but God shall be with you" (Genesis 48:21). "I die: but God will surely visit you" (Genesis 50:24). One Name abides all through these centuries, the Name of the everlasting God. Adam, Noah, Abraham come and go; Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph live their lives and pass away; but God remains, the Dwelling place of His people in all generations, God from everlasting to everlasting. God buries his workmen and carries on His work. Well for us if we realize this simple but all-embracing truth. Amid all the changes and chances of this mortal life God abides, God reigns, God rules. His kingdom will be set up, His purposes shall be realized, His will must be done. Let us take heart of grace as servant after servant of God passes into the unseen. Let us take large views of the future, and not be tempted to concentrate attention solely upon our own narrow little life in the present. "I die: but God will surely visit you." It is this assurance of God's unchanging presence and undeviating purpose that alone can keep the heart peaceful, restful, trustful, and hopeful amid all the vicissitudes of life. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee." "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is an everlasting rock."

Why do we worry about the nest?

We only stay for a day, Or a month, or a year, at the Lord's behest, In this habitat of clay.

Why do we worry about the road, With its hill or deep ravine? In a dismal path or a heavy load We are helped by hands unseen.

Why do we worry about the years That our feet have not yet trod? Who labours with courage and trust, nor fears, Has fellowship with God. The best will come in the great To be, It is ours to serve and wait; And the wonderful future we soon shall see, For death is but the gate.

00A.66 Thou Worm Jacob

Thou Worm Jacob

THERE is perhaps no character recorded in Scripture about which there has been more controversy than that of Jacob. His very weaknesses seem to attract us because they make him more human, and bring him into closer contact with our own lives. There is an intense reality about the man from the first that impresses every reader, and gives rise to constant discussion as to his merits and demerits. In all ages of the Church people have been attracted and even fascinated with his history, and his individuality will doubtless continue to make him a prominent figure for ages to come.

I. Jacob's History.

We need not do more than call attention to the seven periods of his life, during each of which he was being trained and disciplined. He is first seen at home under the influence of his strong-minded and strong-willed mother Rebekah. Then comes the crisis at Bethel, when he came into personal contact with God, perhaps for the first time in his life. This notable event was followed by the years in the service of Laban, that time of intense and prolonged discipline which had so much to do with his later life. Then came Peniel, another turning point in his career, when he became conscious not only of the House of God (Beth-el), but also of the Face of God (El-beth-el), and surrendered to God the control of his life. Peniel was, however, followed by a period of backsliding at Shechem, with all that resulted of trial and sorrow to himself and his household. At length came the return to Bethel, and with it the restoration to Divine favour and fellowship, and an upward advance in the spiritual life from which he never afterward receded. Last of all came those quiet, restful fruitful years in Egypt, when, restored to his beloved son, he lived in happiness and at length died in peace. In all this history we must not fail to see the importance of the first vision at Bethel, the mysterious struggle at Peniel, and the return to Bethel once more. At this last visit things took a permanent turn for the best. We see this in the usage of the two names, Jacob and Israel. From the moment of the restoration at Bethel (Genesis 35:1-29) it is deeply interesting to study carefully and closely the occurrence of these two names. In almost every case Israel is used in connection with his spiritual life and experience as the Prince of God.

II. Jacob's Character.

What puzzles most readers is the striking contrasts in this remarkable man. Almost all through his life there was a blend of two different and in themselves divergent qualities. There are men brought before us in Scripture like Moses, David, Isaiah, St Paul and St John, who were by no means without their faults and sins, but all these are almost entirely forgotten in the glory of their character and devotion to Christ. It is somehow different with Jacob. There was on the one hand a remarkable quietness and gentleness of disposition, and on the other an intense ambition to be the head of the family and the inheritor of the promises. On the one hand there was a genuine devoutness, a clear perception and full appreciation of the Divine covenant with his fathers, while

on the other hand there was an utter self-seeking disposition which stopped at nothing to gain its ends. On the one hand there was a love which centered itself first upon his mother, then upon his wife, and then upon his two boys, while on the other hand there was a caution, a hesitation, a suspiciousness that seemed to distrust everybody but himself. On the one hand he was a man of high aims working for high ends, while on the other he stooped to the meanest methods and the most contemptible ways of accomplishing his purposes. He was indeed a mixture, a glaring contrast of opposite qualities. The slow development and progress of his character is also very noteworthy. It would have been far happier for him and for everybody connected with him if the transformation of Jacob into Israel had been made more quickly and more thoroughly, but the old nature was not only never wiped out, it seemed to be strong and vigorous almost to the last. Jacob was still there even though Israel was making his way. The ultimate victory of the Israel nature is very clearly seen. There was a gradual victory of the higher over the lower in him. We cannot help noticing his steadfastness of purpose amidst all difficulties, trials, and opposition, his prudence and forethought as he faced the problems of his life, and, above all, a genuine appreciation of Divine realities and of everything that was best and truest in human life. Whatever appears on the surface, there can be very little doubt that from his earliest days Jacob had set his heart upon the possession of all that was possible in the Covenant of God with his fathers, and as he draws near to the end of his life we can see quite clearly the results of the discipline in the strength and even glory of his character and life.

III. Jacob's Training. The one thing of importance in life is the power of making permanent our passing ideas and impressions. Character is only built up gradually as our experiences become part of ourselves. Jacob was brought back to fellowship with God, and enabled to abide in fellowship by training in three schools. The School of Personal Sorrow. Colours are painted upon earthenware, and then burnt in, in order to be made permanent. So it was with Jacob. Sorrow made and left its permanent mark upon him. The discipline in Haran, his disappointment over Rachel, Rachel's death, Reuben's sin, the hatred and loss of Joseph, the famine, the demand for Simeon and Benjamin, are some of the ways in which sorrow dealt with him and trained him for God. The School of Divine Providence. In his youth he was evidently full of indomitable hardness and self-reliance, and all through his career we find proof after proof of the native force and vigor of his character. He was ever a man of quick initiative, ready resource, and dauntless courage. Up to the end of his life he took the lead, and not even Joseph superseded him in the patriarchal position. It was therefore all the more necessary that he should be dealt with by the discipline of life. God's providence is man s inheritance, and it was the very best thing that could have happened to Jacob that the roughnesses of his nature were made smooth, and his weaknesses taken away in the hard, stern school of Providence. There is nothing like it to develop character. No chastening seems profitable at the time, but in the retrospect we see and acknowledge that it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness. The School of Divine Grace. This was the greatest and best training-ground of Jacob's life, and it enables us to understand the prolonged nature and even the severity of the discipline in the other two schools. From the vision at Bethel to the closing days in Egypt, God's presence was with Jacob whether he knew it or not. That presence was assured to him, and he never really forgot the wonderful promise, I am with thee, and I will not leave thee, which he received at Bethel. Thence forward the promises of God were his strength and stay. He pleaded them, depended on them, and believed to see their fulfilment. Meanwhile God's power was at work in his soul, dealing with him now i n severity, now in goodness, until at

length he could say, “I have waited for Thy salvation, Lord.”

IV. The God of Jacob.

There is scarcely anything more striking in the whole of the Old Testament than the frequency of the title, the God of Jacob, in the Psalms and in Isaiah. We could well understand God being the God of Israel, but to be called the God of Jacob is surely the crowning proof of Divine mercy and grace. What a remarkable point there is in the well-known words, The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge (Psalms 46:7). The Lord of Hosts is the God of Providence, protecting against foes, overcoming difficulties, and providing for all emergencies, but “the God of Jacob” is our refuge is very much more than this. It tells of His mercy and grace. The God of Jacob is a God of unwearying love, of unerring wisdom, of unfailing grace. He is our Refuge in spite of our sins, in the face of our failures, in view of our fears. And because He is all this He asks for our unreserved surrender, our unquestioning faith, our unflinching loyalty, our unfailing hope, and whispers in our hearts, “Fear not thou worm Jacob ... I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.” It is because God is the God of Jacob that we have such unbounded confidence in His mercy and grace, in His love and longsuffering. It tells us what grace can do for even the very worst of us. As a man said to a clergyman not long ago, I am cheered when I read the life of Jacob; for if the grace of Almighty God was able to straighten up that man, there must be some hope for me (see a fine Sermon on Jacob, by the late Ian Maclaren Homiletic Review, vol. liv. p. 49).

Chapter 85

00A.67 A Fruitful Bough

A Fruitful Bough THE character of Joseph is one of the choicest and most striking of all those in Holy Scripture. The fullness of detail which characterizes the record of his life from beginning to end clearly shows the importance attached to him by the writer, both personally and as an instrument for the fulfilment of the Divine purposes concerning Israel. Not only in Genesis, but in other books of the Old Testament, Joseph is brought before us as a man upon whom the Divine blessing signally rested, and in whom God's grace was very definitely manifested (Deuteronomy 33:13-16; Psalms 105:17-19; Acts 7:9-10).

I. His History. The story of his life falls quite naturally into eight periods, each of which has its special interest and its direct bearing upon his life and character. He is seen first of all at home in the days of his youth as the companion of his father, and it is evident that he was a fit and willing pupil of the aged patriarch as he was told of God's covenant with his fathers. Then the hatred and jealousy of his brethren had no effect in spoiling the beauty of that early promise. We find him next in slavery, and now the promise of the early days begins to be fulfilled. Integrity, purity, honour, and faithfulness characterize him and make him steadfast and true to his God. In prison, too, he maintains his position, and in faithful obedience to his daily round and common task, he glorifies God and is made a blessing to those around him. At Pharaoh's court he next appears revealing the secrets of the monarch s dream and declaring God's will concerning Egypt. This led at once, as we have seen, to the remarkable transformation of the prison slave to the Prime Minister. His home and work in Egypt next come before us, and in spite of the remarkable change in his circumstances he is the same simple and true-hearted man as ever. His relations with his brethren serve to reveal other aspects of his life, while the meeting with his father was the crowning point after years of trial, sorrow and discipline. The last fifty years of his life in Egypt reveal him as still the same in his nobleness of mind and heart, and in his genuine confidence in and obedience to the Lord God of his fathers. Whether then we think of him as a youth, a young man, a middle-aged man, or an old man, there is a continuity in his life, amid all circumstances, which stands out as one of the noblest and most striking features of a remarkable career.

II. His Character.

We must however go further into detail, and seek to delineate more thoroughly the various points in his character that stand out from the narrative. He seems to have belonged to God from the very first. His father doubtless gave him his first impressions and ideas of the glories of their Covenant God, and the seed fell upon good ground, and led from the very outset to true-hearted devotion. But what in particular are the points of his character that were evidently seen and written for our learning? They can only be mentioned, but it will be well worthwhile to turn to the particular parts of his life, where these features appear, and ponder them again in the light of his history. Here are some of those qualities that make up the truest, noblest, and best types of manhood: (1) Guilelessness, (2) frankness, (3) tactfulness, (4) sensitiveness to evil, (5) purity of heart and life, (6) humility of word and deed, (7) wisdom, (8) executive ability, (9) filial affection, (10) manly

energy, (11) resolute adherence to duty, (12) prudence, (13) self-control, (14) sympathy, (15) hopefulness, (16) considerateness, (17) equanimity, (18) courage, (19) patience, (20) large-hearted generosity. These are perhaps the most important features, though there are doubtless others that can be found. Joseph was good without ever being goody-goody. He was great and yet simple, true to God and yet attractive to man. He is a signal instance of the possibility of combining piety with success, manliness with true religion, intellectual force with spiritual fragrance. There are few men whose lives are more full-orbed and complete in moral beauty and glory.

III. His Secret.

What was the secret of all this power? The answer is that God was an ever-present reality. “I fear God” This was the key note of his life. The name of God was often on his lips, but still better, the presence of God and the fear of God were always in his heart. It was as natural to him to refer everything to God as it was to breathe or to speak, and whether he thought of the danger of sinning against God (Genesis 39:9), or the blessing of God upon his own life (Genesis 41:51-52), or the providence of God in allowing him to go into Egypt (Genesis 45:5-9), or the assurance that God would not leave his brethren (Genesis 50:24), God dominated Joseph’s life, and this was the secret of all that he was and did.

How did he learn this secret? We cannot but believe that it began in those early days at home with his father. His devotion to his father was, we may well believe, not merely due to the human relationship, it was based upon spiritual kinship as well. It is hard to say which is the more beautiful, Jacob’s devotion to his son or Joseph’s devotion to his father. It is a testimony to both that God was so real in their lives. It is always well if the consciousness of God can come early in life. There is no need for a period of wandering, and of sowing wild oats to be a strong, vigorous, noble, manly Christian. They are the strongest and best who find God early, who live from the very first days in His presence, surrounded by a parental life and love which breathes the atmosphere of devotion and fellowship.

How was this secret developed? By simple loyalty and obedience to every day duty. Joseph always did his best. Faithfulness characterized everything about him, and God was the source, centre, and spring of every word and action of his life. This must ever be the supreme method of deepening religious impressions, and of realizing in daily experience the lessons we have learned from our earliest days.

How was this secret proved? By its results. God justified His servant’s trust and confidence by honoring him in slavery, in prison, at court, and in his home. No life lived for God is ever without its vindication. Them that honour Me I will honour, and the man who sets out, as Joseph did, to put God first and make God real in life will always find it true that God sets His seal of favour and blessing upon him.

How was this secret continually made effectual? The answer is in the simple but significant words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, By faith, Joseph. It was simple trust in God that enabled him to be what he was and to do what he did. What is it in faith that makes it so powerful? What is there in trust which brings about such results? Faith realizes God’s presence and lives in it moment by moment. Faith relies on God’s Word and believes that what He says shall be done. Faith responds

to God’s call, and obeys with readiness and loyalty. Faith receives God’s grace, and finds it all-sufficient for daily needs. Faith rests in God’s will, and believes to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Faith rejoices in God’s protection, and knows that it shall not be put to shame. Thus faith is man s complete response to God’s revelation. It links man s life to God, and provides him with the simple yet all-powerful secret of a life of power, purity and progress. Well may the Word of God lay stress upon faith. Without faith it is impossible to please him. This is the victory that overcometh, even our faith.

00A.68 Joseph a Type of Christ

Joseph a Type of Christ IN addition to the lessons from Joseph as a historical person which are so clear that he who runs may read, there are other points of profound interest and importance in which his life has some very striking and remarkable points of comparison and contrast with that of our Lord. It is perhaps too much to say that we have in this the element of prediction, because there does not seem to be a single reference in the New Testament to the typical nature of Joseph's life, and yet it is impossible to avoid seeing the close, prolonged, and striking resemblances between Joseph and Christ. It is not mere ingenuity that endeavors to see in the story of the outstanding events in the life of the Other. While we are careful not to proceed to fanciful extremes, it is not only legitimate but in every way spiritually profitable to ponder the life of Joseph in the light of the history of our blessed Lord (see Candlish, Genesis, vol. ii. 138-146).

I. Joseph and His Father.

Joseph was the beloved son of his aged father Jacob, and those early dreams clearly indicate that he was the subject of high destinies. There was to be in some way or other a remarkable future for this beloved son. In like manner our Lord Jesus Christ was the Only Begotten of the Father. "Thou art my Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." He too was appointed heir of all things, and the destinies of the world were linked with Him.

II. Joseph and His Brethren.

We notice three points in the story in this connection. (1) He was sent to inquire after his brethren's well-being. (2) His brethren were envious of him, being altogether out of sympathy with their FATHER'S love and purposes concerning him. (3) Joseph, however, maintained his faithfulness, not abating his testimony, but speaking frankly and fully that which he believed to be right. He might have been spared the pit had he been willing to yield to his brothers wishes. In all this we cannot help seeing the Lord Jesus and His brethren. (1) Was He not sent by His Father? (2) Were not His brethren envious of Him, being altogether opposed to the Divine purpose as expressed in Jesus Christ? (3) Did He not, however, abide faithful, bearing testimony with dauntless courage, telling both high and low of their sin in the sight of God? He might have spared Himself the Cross had He been willing to abate His testimony and keep silence in the face of opposition.

III. Joseph's Rejection.

Once again we notice the story for its typical lessons. (1) His brethren conspired against him, "Come let us kill him." (2) He was betrayed by his brethren. (3) He was sold by his brethren for money. When we turn to the pages of the New Testament we are struck with the almost literal agreement with these events in the life of our Lord. When they saw him, they said, "This is the heir, let us kill him." "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." Our Lord, too, was betrayed and sold by His brethren into the hands of the Gentiles. Just as the sight of Joseph brought out all that was latent in the anger and animosity of the brethren, so Christ by His life and teaching brought out all that was evil in the human heart, so that they no longer had any cloak for

their sins (John 15:22).

IV. Joseph's Humiliation.

Once again let us trace the story of the Hebrew lad. (1) He became a servant and entered into the degradation of slavery. (2) He was sorely tempted and yet sinned not. (3) He was alone in the dungeon through no fault or sin of his own. (4) He won the respect of his jailer and was entrusted with responsible service. (5) He was the means of blessing to the butler and the messenger of judgment to the baker. Again we are impressed and even awed by the striking agreement point by point with our Lord's earthly history. He took upon Him the form of a servant. He was tempted in all points like as we are, without sin. He was alone, forsaken of God and man, and yet on the Cross He called forth the admiration of the centurion, was the means of blessing to the penitent robber, and the occasion of judgment to the impenitent one. Surely in all this we may find food for prayerful meditation and whole-hearted adoration.

V. Joseph's Exaltation. As Joseph stood before Pharaoh we notice that his exaltation accomplished three ends. (1) It revealed God's purposes for Egypt. (2) It manifested God's righteousness in bringing him out of prison. (3) It established Joseph's position as next to Pharaoh. When our Lord was raised from the dead He was exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour. God raised Him and gave Him glory. He was declared to be the Son of God with power. God set Him at His own right hand, exalted Him, and put all things under His feet until that day when the Son shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God the Father and God shall be all in all.

VI. Joseph's Marriage.

We notice that this marriage was appointed by Pharaoh, and in the New Testament we read of a certain King that made a marriage for His Son. We are also told of the Church which is at once the Body and the Bride of Christ, the figure of the Body suggesting the union of life, the figure of the Bride the union of love. In the case of Joseph the bride was a stranger to him, and the Bride of Christ consists of those who were once estranged and alienated by wicked works, and are now reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Joseph's bride shared his glory; all the nearness and intimacy of true wedded life belonged to her. His position gave her her position; she was what she was because she was his wife. So is it with the Bride of Christ. As He is so are we in this world. The Church is to share His glory. Not only are we crucified together, we are raised together, and even now seated together, and by and by shall reign together with Him in glory.

VII. Joseph's Office.

Why was Joseph exalted? What was the purpose of it? It was not for his own sake, but that he might become the channel of blessing to the whole world. So also our Lord was exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and remission of sins (Acts 4:31). The work of Joseph's life was to provide food for the people. During the famine it was to him that they turned, and from him they received all that they needed. By some authorities his Egyptian name Zaphnath-paaneah is interpreted to mean the bread of life, but whether this be the case or not he certainly was the bread of life to the people. Our Lord came as the Bread of Life. "I am come that they might have life." There is, however, one significant difference between the type and the ante-type. The people came to Joseph to buy bread, but we come to Christ without money and without price (Isaiah 65:1). The order of Joseph's work is very striking. He provided first for the Gentiles as represented

by Egypt, then he provided for his brethren, and subsequently all nations came to Egypt to buy corn. May we not see in this some slight adumbration of the order of our Lord's spiritual work in the accomplishment of God's purposes? His Church to-day is mainly composed of Gentiles, those who are willing to receive Him, but the day is coming when He will reveal Himself to His brethren the Jews, "and they will look upon Him Whom they pierced," and be reconciled to Him with tears of repentance. Then will come, and only then, the blessing to the whole world, and the reign and rule of Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

There was one sole condition of blessing during the years of famine. That was unconditional submission to Joseph. He was their saviour because he was their master. They trusted him wholly, and their trust was justified by the marvellous and perfect provision that he made for all their needs. This is the one and only requirement in things spiritual. Unconditional surrender, unquestioning submission, unwavering trust. When this attitude is taken up and maintained our spiritual needs are all provided for, our wants met, our desires satisfied, our lives protected, our hopes realized. Christ is only truly our Saviour in proportion as He is our Lord. Whenever people came to Pharaoh he had one word and one word only for them: Go unto Joseph, and what he saith to you, do. So is it to-day. In view of all our needs, sins, sorrows, weaknesses, failures, fears, one word suffices for them all: "Whatever He saith unto you, do it."

00A.69 Review

Review IN the light of all the details which have come before us in our meditations on the Book of Genesis it may be well worth while to review the entire book, and endeavour to gain an idea of its general purpose, plan, arid meaning. In our first chapter we considered several points by way of introduction, and we may now add to these some further suggestions for general study. We must never lose sight of the wood in the trees, and while giving careful attention to details we must ever strive to obtain and keep a true idea of the book as a whole. The literary structure of Genesis is, as we have seen, clear and simple. It consists of an introduction and ten sections, each with a virtually identical heading. But there is a religious unity in the book as well as a literary oneness, and for this reason it should be studied as a whole, and an impression formed of its general character. All authorities, whatever their critical views, agree in regarding the book in its present form as characterized by unity. The genealogies form a regular series, and even the apparent digressions are strictly in accordance with the fundamental principle of the book as a book of beginnings. Still more, religious aim is ever kept in view, showing how under the guidance of Divine providence the purpose of redemption was accomplished by separating a chosen man and a chosen race from all others. The early chapters (1 - 11) show the descent of Abraham from Adam, and explain why a new commencement was necessary. They also reveal God’s principle of selection in the choice of Seth, Noah, Shem and Abraham. The law of selection governs the entire narrative, and is a special sign of unity. First of all there is the selection of a special people as represented by Abraham, then the selection of a special land, then the preparation of the patriarchs by Divine discipline, and all this arising out of the prediction concerning the seed of the woman.

We see therefore in these chapters the continuous development of the Divine purpose as it adjusts itself to the circumstances brought about by the sin of man. Everything in human life and civilization, human sin, and human worship is made to subserve the Divine will and contribute to the accomplishment of the Divine purpose. Starting with the great fact and feature of the unity of all mankind as represented first by Adam, and then by Noah and his descendants, we are led on step by step until attention is concentrated on one branch of the human race as the special medium of the Divine revelation.

Then comes the great section (12-50), in which we have the record of the providential training of the patriarchs for their part in the fulfilment of the Divine will. There is no hiatus or dislocation after the early chapters (1-11), but a very distinct order and progress. After three failures in the persons of Cain and Abel, the races of the Sethites and Canaanites, and the family of Noah, a new commencement was necessary, and instead of a covenant of works with the entire human race a covenant of grace is instituted with one individual. With Abraham’s call a special series of Divine manifestations is brought before us which were evidently intended to teach him by delivering him from his own errors, revealing to him the one true God, and leading up to fellowship with God. The patriarchal narratives are the story of the way in which God trained and disciplined Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph to fulfill His purposes. The narrative is brought before us in three

different sections or cycles associated with the names of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. God's covenant with Abraham is prepared for, made, and fully realized (Genesis 11:27; Genesis 25:18); then that covenant is maintained by means of the Divine revelation to Isaac as the head of the family after Abraham's death (Genesis 25:19 - Genesis 37:1); and finally the chosen family develops into a nation by the providential preparation for its departure into Egypt, the providential removal into Egypt, and the providential protection in Egypt (Genesis 37:2; Genesis 50:26). The Divine promise was continually confirmed during the course of the history, and a gradually developing idea of God's character and relation to the people was being formed. As we read the story we are conscious of growth, progress, consolidation, and an ever-widening movement until at length both Jacob and Joseph have the future clearly and steadily in view, and look forward with certainty to deliverance from Egypt and a settlement in Canaan. God will surely visit you, is the last keynote of this memorable book as Genesis closes and leads on to the next stage of the development of the Divine purpose in Exodus. The value of this book is therefore evident. It is in some respects the foundation of the Biblical the Book, revelation of God. It is the germ and explanation of everything that follows in the history of Divine redemption through the seed of the woman. It may almost be said that there is no truth of the Bible that is not found here in germ. Thus the seven great doctrines which form the warp and woof of the Bible are all in this book. (1) The Doctrine of God as Creator, Preserver, Law-Giver, Judge, Redeemer. (2) The Doctrine of Creation as the act and process of the Divine will, wisdom, and power. (3) The Doctrine of Man in his contact both with earth and heaven, a union of flesh and spirit in a twofold nature. (4) The Doctrine of the World as the sphere of the human race in its unity, variety, and divisions. (5) The Doctrine of Human Life, first as individual, then as social and in the family, then as tribal, and at length gradually developing into national life. (6) The Doctrine of Sin as the assertion of man s independence of God, his unwillingness to remain loyal to the Divine will, with the results of evil both negative and positive in the loss of holiness and fellowship with God, and the impossibility of rendering to God the obedience and glory due to His Name. (7) The Doctrine of Redemption, with the universe as its sphere, man as its subject, Divine grace as its source, the Covenant as its method, and the people of Israel as its repository and instrument. Redemption is found in promise and in symbol, and is prepared for by the onward march of Divine providence. When Genesis is carefully studied along these lines we readily see that it contains the promise and potency of that varied, prolonged, and complete development which we find elsewhere in the Bible.

We must therefore take care to study Genesis not merely as a book of history, or even as a record of human character, human sin, human discipline. It is much more than all these, for it is a record in some of the stages in God's gracious endeavour to lead man back to Himself. It is only in the light of its specific religious purpose that we can understand both what it omits and what it contains.

It is evident; therefore, that Genesis will never yield its true meaning unless it is considered in constant view of the presence of a supernatural element in it from first to last. God and Redemption are its keynotes, and in these are found the essential features of the book and the true explanation of its difference from all others, and its infinite superiority over all other works dealing with the early days of the human race.

Above all, Genesis must ever be studied as the first book of a volume which is called the Word of God. Its presence in this volume is the simple fact that gives it whatever authority it possesses.

Unless we ever keep in mind its place as an integral part of a volume which we believe to be in some sense divinely inspired, we shall never enter into its meaning or really profit by its lessons.

If therefore the book is studied and pondered in the light of its clearly arranged contents, its varied lines of teaching, its definite religious purpose, its manifest principle of unity, and its evident marks of progress, it will be found to be one of absorbing interest, profound spiritual value, and perennial importance for mind and heart and life.

01.00. How We Got Our Bible

How We Got Our Bible And Why We Believe It Is God’s Word W.H. Griffith Thomas © 1926 The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. Copyright expired.

Published by Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois Table of Contents 1. Structure and History of the Bible 2. Canonicity of the Bible 3. Authority of the Bible 4. Authority of the Bible — Continued 5. Trustworthiness of the Old Testament 6. Trustworthiness of the New Testament 7. Unity of the Bible 8. Progressiveness of the Bible 9. Inspiration of the Bible 10. Inspiration of the Bible — Continued 11. Interpretation of the Bible 12. Purpose of the Bible

Introduction

Appearing as a posthumous work of that dean of Bible teachers, Dr. W. H. Griffith Thomas (1861-1924), this volume should have a special appeal to all who knew and loved the author, or who are familiar with his earlier works. The Rev. W. Graham Scroggie has said that "the reading of Dr. Thomas’ books creates in one a deeper love of and desire for God as revealed in his Word," and this is strikingly true of this clear and satisfying marshaling of evidence as to what the Bible is. These studies have appeared serially in the Friends’ Witness under the title, "The Book of Books."

01.01. Structure and History of the Bible

Structure and History of the Bible OUR English version, and probably most of the translations of the Bible, consists of sixty-six Books, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New, and is regarded with special consideration by all Christians because it is held to be the record of the divine religion of Redemption. The Old Testament shows how this religion was prepared through many centuries; the New tells how it was at length provided and proclaimed. The keynote of the former is, therefore, Preparation, and this is twofold: the preparation of the Redeemer for the people; and the preparation of the people for the Redeemer. The keynote of the latter is Manifestation, and this is also twofold: the manifestation of the Redeemer in Person, and the consequent manifestation of his grace in the redeemed, both individually in believers and corporately in the community of Christians, which we call the church. Thus both Testaments together form a complete record of human sin and divine salvation, the former making the latter necessary. Sin is seen in its nature and consequences, and salvation in its character and effects. The Books of the Old Testament are the product of at least thirty authors and cover a period of at least a thousand years. They are made up of history, legislation, poetry, philosophy and prophecy. The Jewish Old Testament, following the classification of the Hebrew text, is in three parts; the law, the prophets, and the psalms. The law consists of the first five books of the Bible and on this account is called the Pentateuch (five rolls). It may be said in passing that there is no trace in the historical tradition of the Jews of a Hexateuch (six rolls, including Joshua). The second division of the Hebrew Bible, called the prophets, includes the historical books of Judges, Samuel and Kings, and the prophetic books proper with the exception of Daniel, which because it is apocalyptic rather than, as the other prophetic books, strictly predictive, is in the third section. The historical books are called "the former prophets" because they are written from a religious standpoint and are not mere historical annals. They were pretty certainly the work of prophets or prophetic men. The third part of the Hebrew is so called from the first book in it, and the rest of it consists of those Books which are not found in the other two parts. Our English Old Testament has a different order and comes from the Greek Version of the Old Testament. It consists of four parts: Pentateuch, History, Poetry, and Prophecy. The New Testament numbers twenty-seven Books, and is the work of eight authors, covering only about fifty years. Of the eight authors, five were apostles of Christ and three were associates of the apostles. The New Testament has three main parts: History, contained in the Gospels and Acts; Doctrine, in the Epistles; and Prophecy, in the Revelation. These three provide respectively the commencement, the course, and the culmination of the Christian religion.

There is a striking connection between the Old Testament and the New beyond the general unity mentioned above. The Old Testament emphasizes the three aspects of the divine Saviour: the prophet, the priest, and the king. These answer to the three deepest necessities of man. He requires a prophet to reveal God; a priest to redeem from sin; and a king to rule his life for God. Each of these is emphasized in the Old Testament, and in general can be associated with sections of its Books. The New Testament fitly shows how this threefold need is met in Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King; revealing, redeeming, and ruling. The full title "Jesus Christ our Lord" suggests

this: Jesus the Prophet, Christ the Priest, and the Lord the King.

Such is the Bible as we have it today. But how did it come to be what it now is? There has been a gradual growth, and the steps of this we must note. At first and for a long time the revelation of God was oral. "The word of the Lord came to Abram" (Genesis 15:1). This was sufficient for ages. But the time came when it was necessary to put the divine revelation in a written form. It would seem as though a book were essential for the maintenance and continuance of religion, and it is at least interesting and perhaps also significant that all the great religious systems of the world have their sacred books. Literature is the nearest possible approach to reliability. This is a point which will need fuller consideration at a later stage.

There are traces in the Old Testament of a gradual growth by accretion. The Jewish tradition associates Moses with the commencement of the Scripture, and there is no doubt of the essential truth of this position. Certainly there is no other tradition attaching to the books; and in view of the tenacity with which the Jews kept their national traditions, this belief about Moses calls for adequate explanation. A careful study of passages found throughout the Old Testament shows this development, indications being found at almost every period, of growth and additions to the existing writings. Among others the following passages should be noted: Exodus 17:14; Numbers 33:2; Deuteronomy 17:18; Joshua 1:8; Joshua 24:26; 1 Samuel 10:25; Isaiah 8:16, Isaiah 8:20; Jeremiah 36:2; Daniel 9:2; Nehemiah 8:1. These references, taken from each period of the history, indicate a gradual growth of the Jewish Scriptures. The complete volume is associated by tradition with Ezra, and there are no valid reasons for doubting this, especially as it harmonizes with the testimony of the well-informed and representative Jew, Josephus, who, writing in the first century of the Christian Era, said that no book was added to the Jewish Scripture after the time of Malachi. As to the preservation of the gradually growing volume through the ages from Moses to Ezra, it has been pointed out by that eminent Egyptologist, Professor Naville, that it was the custom among Eastern nations to deposit their books in their sanctuaries, and there is every likelihood that the Jews did the same. The copy found by Hilkiah was probably this temple copy (2 Kings 22:8). The New Testament was also marked by a gradual growth. At first came the oral accounts of the life of Christ and the presentation of the Christian message. Then followed the apostolic letters, confirming and elaborating their oral teaching. These letters were read in the assemblies of the Christians (1 Thessalonians 5:27; 2 Thessalonians 3:14). The next stage was the interchange of these letters among the churches (Colossians 4:16). Not long after the need of a record of the life of the founder was felt, and as a result came our Gospels (Luke 1:1-4; John 20:31). The story of the early church naturally followed (Acts), and the Apocalypse fitly crowned the whole with its outlook on the future. As the primitive churches had the Old Testament volume in their hands, it was a constant reminder of the need of an analogous volume of the New Testament, though everything was so very gradual and natural that it is only when the process is complete that it is realized to have been also manifestly supernatural. At this point the important question arises how we can be sure that our Bible today really represents the books which have been thus naturally and simply collected into a volume. The answer is that it is quite easy to prove that our Bible is the same as the church has had through the centuries. We start with the printed Bibles of today and it is obviously easy to show that they correspond with the printed Bibles of the sixteenth century, or the time when printing was invented. From these we can go back through the English and Latin versions until we reach to the great manuscripts of the fourth century as represented by the three

outstanding codices known as the Codex Sinaiticus (in Petrograd), the Codex Vaticannus (in Rome) and the Codex Alexandrinus (in the British Museum). Then we can go back still farther and compare the use of Scripture in the writings of the Fathers of the third century, and from these work back to the second century when versions in several languages are found. From this it is but a short step to the time of the apostles and the actual composition of the New Testament writings. There is no reasonable doubt that we possess today what has always been regarded as the Scriptures of the Christian Church. The proof as to the Old Testament can be shown along similar lines. Our Old Testament is identical with the Bible of the Jews at the present time. This is the translation of Hebrew manuscripts dating from several centuries past, and the fact of the Jews always having used the same Bible as they do today is a proof that all through the ages the Christian Church has not been mistaken in its inclusion of the Old Testament in its Bible. An additional evidence of great value is the fact that the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek about two centuries before Christ, and this translation is essentially the same as the Hebrew text from which we get our Old Testament. The additional books which are found in the Greek Old Testament, called the Apocrypha, were never part of the Jewish Scriptures, and were never regarded as Scripture by those who knew the Hebrew language. These books were not written in Hebrew, and were not included in Scripture by any body of Christians until the Church of Rome arbitrarily decided to include them at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. In addition to other points which could be mentioned, these books contain inaccuracies in history and doctrine, which make it impossible for them to be regarded as part of the Word of God for man.

These are some of the facts which are connected with our Bible as we now have it, and from them we can proceed to consider the various points which are involved in our belief that the Bible is for us the Word of God, and as such, the rule of our faith and practice.

01.02. Canonicity of the Bible

Canonicity of the Bible THE attitude of the Christian Church toward the entire volume of the Scriptures is one of reverence. The thirty-nine Books of the Old Testament comprise the Bible of the Jews, setting forth the Jewish religion in its historical development and different aspects, covering centuries of time. The Church, therefore, inherited her belief in the sacredness and authority of the Old Testament, from our Lord and his apostles, since the basis of their teaching was the Old Testament Scriptures. Since the New Testament sets forth the Christian religion in various aspects, covering some sixty years, or two generations, and is thus a complete declaration of those facts on which the Church grounds her life and belief, her reverence for it is readily understood. None of the Books of the New Testament was written by the Founder of the Christian religion, in marked contrast with the Koran, which is alleged to have been written by Mohammed. From the beginning of her life the Church had the Old Testament, but not until years had passed were the Books constituting the New Testament written and added to it. The recognition of these New Testament writings as possessed of divine authority, marked them as canonical, and the method by which they were so recognized has been called canonization. The word "Canon" comes from the Greek word, Kanon, and is akin to the Hebrew word for reed. The words "cane" and "canon" are cognate terms. The word had active and passive senses. A thing which is employed as a measure is first measured, and only then used to measure other things. The passive meaning, anything measured, e.g., a measured racecourse at Olympia in turn becomes a measure, and the word means a straight rod or rule used for measurement (2 Corinthians 10:13-16, passive; Galatians 6:16; active). Then the word came to mean any list of things for reference, e.g., at Alexandria a list of classical writers was called a "Canon," and Eusebius calls chronological tables, "Canons of times." This is the meaning of the technical word "Canon" in relation to Scripture. The Canon of Scripture is used first of all in a passive sense, meaning that which being measured becomes the means which measures or tests others. Thus Scripture is (1) that which is measured or defined by the rule of the Christian Church, and (2) that which, being measured, becomes thereby the rule of the Church for other cases. The Bible contains the recognized list of Books which have been measured by a certain rule or standard of measurement and have thereby become measures of other books. The word was first used in the Christian Church by a poet, Amphilochius, 380, "The Canon of the God-breathed writings." But Origen had spoken of "canonized books" or books put on the list. Afterward Jerome and Augustine, A.D. 400, handled the word technically.

What, then, is the rule of the Christian Church by which a book is "measured," or defined as "canonical"? The Sixth Article of the Church of England describes a Canonical Book as one "of whose authority [there] was never any doubt in the Church." We must observe that the reference is to authority, not to authorship. The statement is usually regarded as a great difficulty, since it cannot apply to all the books and all the churches, for the Reformers knew well the early doubts about some of the books. It is probable that as the doubts were dead by the sixteenth century the reference is to the Church as a whole as distinct from individual churches. The matter was

originally settled mainly by public reading and general usage in Christian communities. The first three centuries never pronounced on the subject except by the testimony of individual and representative writers. No corporate evidence was possible. But when that was available and necessary it was soon seen that there was no real doubt as to our books. The first corporate witness dates from the Council of Laodicea, A.D. 364, where the testimony is clear, and when once the whole Church was able to bear its witness the words of the Article are seen to be justified. The grounds of Canonicity need consideration. Why were certain books received and certain rejected? In conversation with a friend I asked him this question: "What is the ultimate reason why you accept the New Testament? Deep down below everything else, what is it that causes you to accept it, and reject other books?" My friend said he did not know that he had ever really faced it in that way. So I went on: "Do you accept it because it is old? There are older books. Do you accept it because it contains truth? Well, there are other books that contain truth. No: beneath its age, beneath its helpfulness, beneath its truthfulness is the bedrock — this book came from men who were uniquely qualified to convey God's will to men; and the basis of our acceptance of the New Testament is what is called in technical language 'Apostolicity'; because the books came either from Apostolic authors, or through Apostolic sanction." Our view of the Old Testament corresponds to this. The fundamental reason is the conviction that certain books came from men who were divinely inspired to reveal and convey God's will; prophets in the Old Testament and apostles in the New. Prophets were recognized expounders of God's will, and their writings were regarded as immediately authoritative. The best illustration is found in Jeremiah 36:1-32, where the prophet's words were recognized as possessing authority by reason of its prophetic source, and then gradually came the collection into one volume, so that the Old Testament represents those books which Israel accepted on proper evidence as the divine standard of faith and practice, because they were either written or put forth by prophetic men. It was not the decision of the people that caused the Canonicity, but the Canonicity was the cause of their acceptance by the people. The authority came from God through the prophets, and the recognition by the people was the effect of the Canonicity. The action of the people was the weighing of evidence, and the outcome was testimony rather than judgment. In the same way the books of the New Testament were regarded as marked by Apostolic origin. This may have been authorship or sanction, but there is no doubt that the primary standard of verification and acceptance was the belief that these books came from Apostolic men, either apostles themselves or their associates. So that the ground of Canonicity was not merely the age, or the truth, or the helpfulness of the books, but, beneath and before these characteristics, because they came from uniquely-qualified instruments of God's will. All other tests were subsidiary and confirmatory. It is, therefore, important and essential to distinguish between the ground of Canonicity and the ground of the conviction of Canonicity. The latter is quite separate from the former and is subjective, while the latter is rational, objective, and leaves man no excuse.

It is particularly important at this point, to notice what Canonicity really implies and involves. It created a book, not a revelation. Canonicity is analogous to codification, and implies the existence of separate books. The authority of each book of the Bible would have been the same even if there had been no collection and codification. So that the authority is not that of a volume, but of a revelation; the revelation did not come to exist because of the Canonicity but the Canonicity because of the revelation; and the Bible, as we have seen, is regarded as a revelation, because it is held to be the embodiment of the historical manifestation of the Redeemer and his truth. It has

been well said that the Bible is not an authorized collection of books, but a collection of authorized books. This distinction is vital. It is essential to remember that the quality which determines acceptance of a book is its possession of a divine revelation. So that Canonicity did not raise a book to the position of Scripture, but recognized that it was already Scripture. Canonization was a decision based on testimony, and the canonizing process was the recognition of an existing fact. It is, of course, true that the process of canonization by the whole Church implies a cumulative authority, and adds immensely to the strength of the position as representing the witness of the entire Christian body, but it must never be forgotten that the authority of each separate book was in it from the first.

01.03. Authority of the Bible

Authority of the Bible THE acceptance of the Bible is due to the belief that it embodies a divine Revelation. Religion involves a Revelation, but it is necessary to inquire as to the grounds on which the Bible is regarded as containing and expressing that Revelation. No one can read the Old or the New Testament without seeing indications that the writers believed that they could and did receive communications from God (Genesis 15:1; Ezekiel 6:1; Luke 3:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:15). At this point some fundamental presuppositions must be considered. First, Revelation is possible. If we believe that God exists and is almighty, then of course he can communicate himself to us. Second, Revelation is probable, inasmuch as self-revelation is natural to us. We cannot help communicating ourselves to others, because of interest and love, and, as God is love, this fact implies that he will communicate himself, because it is the essence of love to reveal itself. Third, Revelation is necessary. There are two things essential for life — Knowledge and Power; what Matthew Arnold once called "light and leading." And these are all the more needed because of sin. Sin has brought uncertainty, and this demands knowledge. Sin has brought weakness, and this necessitates power.

These considerations lead to the thought that Revelation is available in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2). A person communicates himself by acts or by words, or by both. For the first disciples, for the earliest Christian Church before our Lord’s resurrection — that is to say, for the community of his immediate followers — his Presence was a revelation, his Person was sufficient; but we today have his words, since we have not his outward Presence as they had (John 20:30-31; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Our position therefore is this — God has revealed himself in nature, in providence and in history; but preeminently he has revealed himself in Christ for spiritual realities. Natural religion has not been found sufficient for human life, because of sin. Man’s nature has never been an adequate mirror of divine revelation.

Now of this revelation in Christ, we believe that the New Testament is the purest, fullest, and clearest expression and embodiment. We are not concerned for the moment whether the revelation came in this way or in that way. All that is essential is that we have — whatever it is and however it has come — a revelation of God in Christ. It is at least significant to note that all the great religions have their sacred books. It would seem as though the litera scripta (the written word) were a foundation, a necessary condition of all divine revelation.

We proceed to state that Revelation is assured. This is the heart of our present subject: Why do we believe the Bible to be a divine revelation? I do not now refer to the Old Testament in detail, because if we can prove the New Testament to be divine this carries the Old Testament with it. We are on the most convenient ground if we concentrate on the New Testament, and look upon that as the embodiment of a divine revelation. There are just three steps in this argument.

First, the New Testament is genuine; that is, it is the work of those for whom it is claimed — the early believers in Jesus Christ. This genuineness of the New Testament may be proved in a variety of ways. (a) There is the testimony of the Church through the centuries. (b) There is the

direct testimony of the Books themselves. If we examine them we see clear evidence that they came from the apostle's time. It is easy to see the New Testament possesses evidences of genuineness. Its allusions to Jewish, Roman, and Greek history and customs prove its early date. Such allusions would have been impossible later. (c) There is the testimony of adversaries. Every opposition to Christianity from the second century onward has been directed toward the New Testament. Why did men like Celsus, Porphryry, Julian, and Rousseau oppose it? If they did not think anything of this book, why did they trouble about it?

Secondly, the New Testament is credible; that is, it is worthy to be believed. There are many books genuine, but not credible. The New Testament is not only genuine, but is worthy of our belief. Why? For several reasons. Because of the unblemished character of the witnesses. Because of the agreement of the facts of the New Testament with the acts of Christianity in the world. Because the contents of the New Testament do nothing but good. Because the explorations of Palestine, Egypt, and Babylon go to confirm the truth of the Bible, Old and New Testament. There have been many archeological researches, and not one has gone against the Bible, or proved it untrue.

Now, if we have followed the argument so far, we shall be prepared to take the third step. The New Testament is divine. What are the reasons for this? There are many ways of proving it, some of which will come before us later. But now attention is concentrated on three points, which will be sufficient for the purpose.

First, there is that in the Old Testament which is always pointing forward to the future, especially to the coming of the Messiah. In Liddon's Bampton Lectures it is shown that there are 333 references to the Messiah in the Old Testament, and Dr. Pierson argued that, based upon mathematical grounds, the concentration of all these 333 references on an individual, in face of all probabilities against it, is nothing short of marvelous. Each time we add a reference, we reduce the probability of the allusions centering on one person; and when we get to 333, and all these concentrate on one Man, we see at once the force of this extraordinary expectation. And what does the power of prediction mean but the Supernatural?

Then, we turn to the New Testament and consider the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. We notice the portrait of Christ, and note the combination and balance of qualities in him, and the perfection of his character. The third of these proofs or attestations concerns the results of Christianity. Let us observe the effects of Christianity on life. Life is the problem, and Christ is the solution; life is the question, and Christ is the answer. If we want to see the results of Christianity, we should test it by other religions. If we would know what Confucianism has done, let us look at China; if we would know what Buddhism has done, let us look at India; if we would know what Islam has done, let us look at Turkey and Persia. We do not despise any of these religions. Everything that is good in them comes from God. They are what Tennyson calls "broken lights." But while they are "lights," they are"broken." There is one great difference between them and Christianity; in each of these, man is seeking God; in Christianity, God is seeking man. These religions are human aspirations; Christianity is a divine revelation. And so, we conclude that God has spoken; and this message is in the Bible or nowhere else. It calls for a personal test from every one of us. In the present day a great deal is rightly said about the argument from experience. There is no other book in the world that will so verify itself to human experience, and this is because it contains and embodies a divine

revelation. Whatever may be said about history and philosophy and morality, the crowning point is: What is the Bible to us? And when the Bible is really a force in our own heart and life, we cannot possibly doubt that it comes from God.

Chapter 92

01.04. Authority of the Bible, Continued

Authority of the Bible — (Continued)

IF GOD has spoken, then obviously his word must be authoritative. This question of authority is vital, and touches us at every point. A fundamental question is: What is the ultimate and final authority in religion? What and where is the last and supreme word concerning God, life, and eternity?

1. The Need of Authority — Authority is needed in every walk of life, and it is also essential in connection with religion. Man, even as man, needs a guide. But still more, man as a sinner needs an authority.

2. The Source of Authority — Where is this need to be satisfied? The answer, of course, is that God is the Source of all authority, and authority is expressed by revelation. For the present purpose it will suffice to say that Christ, as representing and revealing God, is our ultimate authority. So far, there will be no real difficulty. But at once the question arises: God is invisible. Christ is no longer visibly here. Where, then, can this divine authority be found? Where is it embodied? And so we come to consider

3. The Seat of Authority — There are three usual, perhaps only three possible answers. There are those who say that the seat of authority is in human reason. The word "reason" represents what is sometimes spoken of as human experience, including reason and conscience.

Some say that the consent of the mind is the condition and foundation of all certitude. Let us be clear on this point. Reason is valuable and necessary. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind." The mind is essential as part of human nature, and is required to test the claims of any professed revelation, and then to receive the revelation thus tested. There can be no authority that destroys human reason; no authority that stultifies the mind that God has given us. The right of every man to verify is inalienable. "Prove all things," said the apostle, as well as "hold fast that which is good." But this is very different from claiming that reason is the seat of authority. Man’s faculties have been affected by sin. Besides, there is such a thing as reality, independent of reason. What is truth? Truth is not what I suppose it to be (what I think or believe); truth is fact, and is not dependent upon the changing opinions of men. Truth is true whether we accept it or not. A thing must be true before we can accept it as truth. Truth is first objective — something presented — and only then is it subjective — something accepted. So that reason is not originative, not creative, it is only a channel. It is not a source, but a medium. It creates nothing; it only weighs data, and settles things as the result of weighing them.

Others say the Church is the seat of authority. On this, we ask: What Church? Where is that Church to be found? The Church in the fullest sense of the word is best described as "the blessed company of all faithful people"; and as such it is the product of divine revelation. The Church came into existence on the day of Pentecost by accepting divine revelation. As, therefore, the Church began through accepting divine revelation, it is difficult to see how it can be the seat of authority.

So we come to this, that the seat of authority is the Bible, and we believe this because the Bible preserves the revelation of Christ in its purest and clearest form. Christianity is a historic religion, and what we need today is the very best form of that historic religion which we can find. It does not matter where it is, or how it has come, so long as we can be sure that we possess the best available form of God's revelation in Christ.

Now Christianity is at once life and literature, and the life requires the literature for its nourishment. It is at least significant that all the great religions of the world have their books. It seems as though a book were really necessary for the maintenance and continuation of all religion. Literature is the nearest possible approach to reliability. Truth in literary form has four qualities which are preeminently necessary for a world-wide religion: (1) Durability. There is a character about a written form of communication which stands the test of time. (2) Catholicity. A universal element in a written form appeals and applies to the whole world. (3) Fixity. A permanence about the written Word makes it valuable and important for human life. (4) Purity. Purity is possible in connection with writing in a way that is impossible by any other method.

We cannot be sure of these four qualities in reason, because that is unsafe and variable. Nor can we be sure of them in any institution, for it is always uncertain. The written form of revelation is therefore the best available form.

If some one should say that this is what is called "Bibliolatry," the reply is that it is not. We do not interpose the Bible between ourselves and Christ. We use it as a medium by which we come to Christ. If I desire to see the stars with the telescope, will that be an interposition? It will be a medium. It will not be a hindrance, but a help. And so Scripture brings us face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. The Nature of this Authority — It is a spiritual authority. It is a Book of salvation, it is a guide to spiritual safety. It reveals the Lord Jesus Christ as our Teacher, our Redeemer, and our Master; our Prophet, Priest, and King.

Then this authority is supreme. The Bible is supreme over reason. It is the light of reason and of human thought. Revelation, because it comes from God, cannot possibly dishonor reason, which also is from God. Reason is the judge of our need of revelation. It examines the claims of revelation; but once those claims are accepted, reason takes a subordinate place, and revelation is supreme. Reason examines, tests, sifts, inquires, but the moment it has become convinced that this or that comes from God, then, like Joshua of old, it says: "What saith my Lord unto his servant?" So, though revelation is supreme over reason, reason examines the credentials of revelation and then submits to them. Since Christ is our Authority, what we need is the rational conviction that the Bible is the best form in which his Word reaches us, and then we submit to it, and it becomes supreme over our reason and life.

Again, the Bible is supreme over the Church. But some one says: "How can this be? Surely it is impossible; the Church was in existence at least twenty years before a line of the New Testament was written." The Church was certainly before the New Testament, but does it follow that the Church is above it? That is where a fallacy may creep in.

It is perfectly true that the Church had no part of the New Testament for more than twenty years, and there was no complete New Testament for a very long time after that. But while they did not

possess the written Word they had the spoken Word from the day of Pentecost onward. The Church came into existence by believing the spoken Word; and as long as the apostles were at hand, the spoken Word was sufficient. But when they went from place to place, and afterward died, it was essential to embody the spoken revelation; and thus came the written form. It does not really matter whether it is spoken or written, so long as we can be sure it is a revelation from God. If the apostle Paul were present at our meetings we should listen to him just as carefully as we should read one of his writings. The precise way in which the revelation comes does not matter so long as we can be certain that it comes from God. So that it is perfectly true that the written Word of the New Testament came after the Church, but the spoken Word came before the Church. Did the Church at Rome write the Epistle to the Romans? Was the Church at Rome the maker of that Epistle? No; it was the apostle who wrote that Epistle to the Church of Rome, and it was Scripture to that Church from the moment they accepted it from his hand. It was not the Church, but the apostles representing Christ, who gave first the spoken and then the written Word of God. The Church is "a witness and a keeper" of Scripture, but it is not its author or maker, and the reasoning employed in support of the latter contention is fallacious. The fallacy, of course, lies in attributing to the body in its collective capacity certain acts of individual members of the body. The Church is not, and never was, the author of Scripture. The Scriptures are the law of God for the Church, delivered to it by the apostles and prophets. So we say again that the Lord Jesus Christ is our supreme Authority, and we accept the Bible because it enshrines and embodies that authority. Take away Christ from the Bible, and there is no Bible left worth having. We do not bow down to the Book because it is a book; we do not repudiate reason because it is reason; we do not set aside the Church because it is the Church. We say that what we want is the best available form of Christ’s revelation, and we believe we get this in the Bible and not in any other way. The witness of the whole Church is very important, but still, when we have said everything for it, it is the work of a witness, not of a creator. As Bishop Gore has said: "The Word of God in the Bible is the final testing-ground of doctrine."

Church belief — what we call Church tradition — tends to deteriorate in the course of time. It never abides fixed. Tradition is so variable that we cannot depend upon it. There is modification and subtraction. We find this in Jewish history: "making the word of God of none effect through your tradition" (Mark 7:13). Bishop Gore wrote some years ago concerning the Jewish Church, and the Medieval Church, that they had "merged Scripture in a miscellaneous mass of authorities." We must not do this, but keep it separate and supreme. The Bible is our final authority. The Old Testament could not claim finality for itself, because it was a gradual growth; and for the same reason the New Testament could not claim finality for itself; but the whole tone of the Bible involves and implies finality. The attitude of Scripture shows that it is final (Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 24:25; 2 Corinthians 4:2; Ephesians 6:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 1:23). Our Lord Jesus Christ himself in his life on earth bore testimony again and again to his own submission to that authority: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (See Matthew 5:18; and John 10:35) So we believe that the substance of Scripture bears testimony to its finality; and the general tenor of the early Church is in the same direction. If we read the Fathers of the first three centuries, we shall find witness after witness to the supremacy and finality of the Word of God, and at the Council of Chalcedon the Gospels were placed in the center, as the final court of appeal. Then, too, every heresy opposed to orthodoxy was alleged to be based on Scripture; ancient liturgies are simply saturated with the Scriptures, and the most severe attacks of opponents have always been

on Scripture.

Experience tells the same story. It is clear from Church history that the Lord Jesus Christ has never fully revealed himself apart from the Bible. Where the Bible has been neglected, Christ has been neglected, and the light of Christianity has burned low. The oldest and truest view we have in ecclesiastical history is the supremacy of the Bible, and its finality in relation to the revelation of God in Christ.

There is a special reason today for asserting the authority of the Bible. In many quarters the emphasis is placed on experience and this is said to be the test of truth. Everything else is said to be objective and external, and if different from or opposed to experience, it is to be rejected. But experience is variable and uncertain, and cannot possibly be the criterion of truth. This modern tendency to fix the seat of authority within is liable to the fatal error of pure subjectivity, unless it is constantly safeguarded by the consciousness of a true objective element in knowledge. The idea of the terms "objective" and "external" being identical is wholly incorrect, for since the ultimate authority is Christ himself, we can see at once that though Christ is dwelling in us, he is not thereby identical with us. He is the divine revelation mediated through Scripture and applied by the Holy Spirit, and as such he is at once objective and subjective, external and internal. Years ago, Sabatier wrote a book entitled, "Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit," a title which expresses an utterly false antithesis, because it is at least conceivable that a religion of the Spirit, in the sense of the Holy Spirit, can and will be a religion of "authority." Such a position is involved in a serious fallacy, because our supreme authority is the Lord Jesus Christ, and while he is not "external" he is certainly our final authority. It would be well if we could at once and forever get rid of the antithesis so often stated between objective and internal, because Christ as our authority is at once our indwelling Master and our absolutely objective authority.

Even the Christian consciousness is inadequate and often defective, because for a safe, reliable, and constant standard we need to look away from Christian experience, however true it may be. The truth underlying this emphasis on Christian experience can be stated without any disregard of Scripture as our standard. God’s revelation in Christ is our supreme authority. Of this revelation the Bible is the divine authenticated record, and the Holy Spirit is the divinely authoritative interpreter, working on and in reason, conscience, and emotion, and producing an experience. It is thus that the truth without becomes the truth within and the subjective necessarily follows the objective. This makes our authority both external and internal and each fits the other. The Bible as an external authority alone would be without power in life. Our experience alone would be unsafe, unreliable, and independent of safeguards. But the two together are all we need. The Scripture tests experience and guards against the extremes of pure individualism, and the Spirit in our experience makes the truth of Scripture vital for life. Thus, the Scripture as interpreted by the Spirit protects us against the sole external authority of the Church and also against the sole internal authority of reason. The light of truth in the Bible blends with and guards the light of the Spirit within, and therein we have our ample, infallible and satisfying authority.

01.05. Trustwothiness of the Old Testament

Trustworthiness of the Old Testament

IT IS apt to be overlooked that the fundamental question about the Bible is not its inspiration but its trustworthiness. It is possible to be without any theory of inspiration, if we are assured of its trustworthiness. This is our present question: Can we trust the Old Testament? A later chapter will similarly discuss the New Testament.

It is sometimes thought that a question of this kind is so technical as to be suitable only for scholars, and not for ordinary Christians. This, however, is not the view of many leading scholars themselves. Thus, Professor W. Robertson Smith, in his preface to a work by Wellhausen, says, "The present volume gives the English reader an opportunity to form his own judgment on questions which are within the scope of anyone who reads the English Bible carefully, and is able to think clearly and without prejudice about its contents." There are other criteria besides those of the expert. It is exactly the same with the Bible as it is with most other departments of life; scholarship is not everything, technicalities of learning cannot solve all problems. "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of" in human philosophy, and it is at once possible and a duty for the ordinary Christian to test the question of trustworthiness for himself. There are at least five ways of doing this. Each of them alone is important, but when they are taken together they are seen to provide the ordinary Christian with opportunities and methods of coming to a definite decision which is perfectly satisfying to the believing soul. The Bible is so vital and so important to the ordinary Christian man that unless he can be assured of its substantial trustworthiness as a record of divine revelation, his life and testimony must inevitably suffer. It is with the object of enabling him to arrive at this assurance for himself that these methods are indicated, and certain fundamental principles are enunciated.

1. The Historical Fact of the Jewish Nation — The Jewish nation is a fact in history, and its record is given to us in the Old Testament. There is no contemporary literature to check the account there given, and archeology only affords us assistance on points of detail, not for any long or continuous period. This record of Jewish history can be proved to have remained the same for many centuries, and what we find in the Old Testament agrees with all that is known from other sources.

Here before us we see the great outstanding objective fact of a Jewish nation. The Old Testament, as we have it, is at once the means and the record of their national life. It rose with them, grew with them, formed them, and at the same time witnessed against them, and it is to the Jews alone we look for the earliest testimony to the Old Testament canon. In the face of these historic facts, it is not too much to say that the trustworthiness of the Old Testament is wholly in accord with the historic growth and position of the Jewish people. And so we can test the Old Testament by the history of the Jews and find it in entire agreement with all that we know of Hebrew national life.

2. The Evidence of Archeology — During the last eighty years a vast number of discoveries have been made in Egypt, Palestine, Assyria, and Babylonia, many of which have been valuable for

their illustration of the Bible. The special advantage of these archeological results is that they are, as it were, tangible and intelligible by ordinary men and do not require expert scholarship to appreciate their meaning. The bearing of this on the Old Testament is obvious. It is impossible to adduce these discoveries in detail. And it is most striking and significant that not a single discovery has been made which goes to set aside or even weaken the trustworthiness of the Old Testament, while discovery after discovery has supported its statements.

3. The Witness of our Lord and His Apostles — For many reasons I should prefer to leave the authority of our Lord out of this discussion, because I am convinced that scholarship is amply sufficient to settle the question. But while this is impossible, it is important to have a clear understanding of what it means to call attention to the evidence of the New Testament embodying the attitude of our Lord and his followers. We do not invoke the authority of Christ to close questions summarily, but we adduce the witness of the New Testament in support of the contentions of conservative historical scholarship. If we see that the witness of Christ and his apostles corresponds with the Church's view of the Bible, the testimony is assuredly weighty, and this is all that we claim.

What, then, was our Lord's general view of the Old Testament? That his Old Testament was practically, if not literally, the same as ours, and that he had a thorough knowledge of its contents, are admitted by all. Nor does any one seriously deny that Jesus Christ accepted the Old Testament as authoritative, inspired, and the final court of appeal for all questions connected with it. No one can go through the Gospels without being impressed with the profound reverence of our Lord for the Old Testament and with his constant use of it in all religious matters. Whether he referred to Bible names, or incidents, or to its deep teaching about God, it was always with the utmost reverence and with the evident conviction that it embodied a divine revelation. This general view is confirmed by his detailed references. His various testimonies to Old Testament persons imply their historical character. His references to the facts of the Old Covenant equally assume historicity. His whole earthly career was very largely a fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures.

4. The Necessity of Spiritual Work — The use of the Bible in connection with Christian service is universally recognized, and the Old Testament part of it cannot be overlooked in work for God. Now no one doubts that the blessing of the Spirit of Truth rests upon those who are serving God while holding and teaching its trustworthiness. There are men today of outstanding influence doing evangelistic and pastoral work who cling tenaciously to the "old paths." Their belief has been no bar to the grace of God. Blessing has manifestly come through use of the books of the Old Testament as they now exist. Divine lessons have been brought home to us by means of the present form of the older part of Scripture. While we welcome all that scholarship can do in making the past clearer, and in enabling us to enter more fully into the divine methods of work, yet the Bible is the revelation of God for spiritual life, and not merely for historical literature, however valuable. Whenever scholarship tends to forget this, the question of the spiritual value of the Bible becomes imperative. For this reason we hold that any doctrine of the Bible for spiritual men must bear the seal of the Holy Spirit. The view of its trustworthiness has the mark of this seal, and has been, and is being, abundantly blessed.

5. The Testimony of Spiritual Experience — There is one special way of testing this matter, for truth requires verification by the spiritual man. When the divine Word is brought to bear upon the

human mind, conscience, heart and will, it carries its own conviction and elicits its own verification. The experience of the soul soon bears witness in the words of the Psalmist, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalms 119:105). "Thy Word is very pure: therefore Thy servant loveth it" (Psalms 119:140).

We ask for an earnest and thorough consideration of these five tests. It would have been possible to add others more technical and more directly applicable to questions of scholarship, but these will suffice to show how the ordinary Christian man can test the trustworthiness of the Old Testament Scriptures. When these tests are applied separately they will be seen to carry real weight, but when they are taken together they constitute a cumulative effect and demand attention from all who seek to know the truth.

01.06. Trustwothiness of the New Testament

Trustworthiness of the New Testament THE primary question concerning the New Testament, the one on which all else rests, must never be forgotten. It is the same one that has already been faced in relation to the Old Testament; viz., its historical trustworthiness. Is it an accurate presentation? This must and can be tested at every point, and the following constitute the main avenues of approach.

1. The Gospels — The record is specially noteworthy on account of something that is apt to be overlooked. It is well known that in the entire realm of literature there is no trace of the picture of a perfect character. Poets, novelists, dramatists, philosophers, essayists, have given the world wonderful creations and yet no writer has ever attempted to portray a perfect man or woman. Professor Mackintosh has said that Tennyson's King Arthur is one of the most recent failures in this respect. And yet in the Gospels, written by ordinary men, not literary geniuses, we have a perfect character depicted. How did the Evangelists accomplish what no writer has ever attempted with success? As Fairbairn asked, did the record invent the Person or did the Person create the record? It has often been pointed out that if the four Evangelists invented the character of Jesus Christ we are faced with a literary miracle of the first magnitude. There is only one explanation of the literary features of the Gospels; their presentation of Christ is true. The same result is seen by a consideration of his character in detail. What are we to say of the unique feature of Christ's sinlessness? How is it that only one man has been found out of all the millions of the world's history in whom the entail of sin has been broken? Then, too, what is to be said about the marvelous combination and equally wonderful balance of qualities found in Jesus which are seldom found in their blend and never found in their balance in any one else? No wonder that Bushness should say that "the character of Jesus Christ forbids his possible classification with men." The claim of Christ as recorded in the Gospels is another point of great importance. He claimed to be perfect (John 8:46); to be the Jewish Messiah (Matthew 26:64); to be the Master of mankind (Matthew 4:19); to be the Judge of the world (Matthew 25:32); to exercise the prerogatives of God (Matthew 28:20; Mark 2:10; John 9:38). How are these claims to be explained? Rabbi Duncan said the last word when he put it thus: "Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud; or was Himself deluded and self-deceived, or He was Divine."

Taking the record of the life of Jesus in the Gospels, no one can seriously doubt that consistency of the picture and the persistence of it in spite of all the acute criticisms of the last eighty years.

2. The Book of Acts — This record of the first thirty years of the history of the Christian community has been the subject of much and thorough examination of late years, and as is well known, the great scholarship of Sir William Ramsey has endorsed its accuracy in the light of archeological research in Asia Minor and elsewhere. In addition to its representations of the primitive Christian society, the book comes into contact at several points with the secular history of Palestine, Greece and Rome, and the result of testing it confirms our conviction that Luke was a first-rate historian and can be relied on for accuracy.

3. The Christian Church — The New Testament gives the record of the commencement of the society which we call the Church. A few people believed that their Master was alive, and formed themselves in a society based on this conviction. Then they set out to proclaim this as a message; and wherever they went the same result followed, societies sprang up believing Jesus Christ was alive. But this often meant opposition, stern and persistent; it almost always involved persecution, cruel and relentless; it frequently led to death. But, in spite of all, the Church continued, increased, and extended far and wide. No temporal advantage led men to join it; no human force compelled them to become associated with it. The Church everywhere consisted of free, loyal, devoted adherents whose relation to Christ impelled them to continue their testimony of word and deed to the Master whom they trusted and loved. This is the society of which the start and early years found their record in the New Testament. And is it not instinct with reality?

4. The Apostle Paul — The character and career of Paul afford a special opportunity of testing the trustworthiness of the New Testament. As a man he was of outstanding force, a man of great intellectual ability, of intense feeling, of keen conscientiousness, and of strong, determined will. When mind, emotion, conscience and will combine, as they did in Saul of Tarsus, we have a real man, one in the very front rank. Now it was this able man that became a persecutor of Christians and, using his own language, was "exceedingly mad against them." He went into houses, dragged out men and women, put them into prison, simply because they were Christians. Then, when he went to Damascus, a hundred and fifty miles away, to continue the work, something happened, and the persecutor became a preacher of the very faith he had formerly attempted to destroy. Not only so, but he continued in the same course for thirty years amid opposition, persecutions, perils, and disappointments. How are we to account for Saul’s conversion and Paul’s apostleship? Baur examined this problem sixty years ago, and confessed it was insoluble. So with every theory since then; they have been shattered on the simple rock of Paul’s historical testimony, "It pleased God to reveal his Son in me." And what is this but a striking proof of the trustworthiness of the New Testament?

5. The Agreement with the Old Testament — We hardly realize that the New Testament is not a book, but twenty-seven books, and the remarkable feature is these twenty-seven books proceeding from eight authors are in absolute unity with the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. That book is one of (1) Prophecies largely unfulfilled; (2) Ceremonies mainly unexplained; (3) Aspirations mostly unsatisfied. But the New Testament meets these three features of incompleteness with its three lines of teaching. (1) The Prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus the Prophet. (2) The Ceremonies are explained in Jesus Christ the Sacrifice and Priest. (3) The Aspirations are satisfied in Jesus Christ the Lord — "Jesus my Prophet, Priest, and King." Could the agreement have been due to the collusion of all the eight writers of the New Testament? Impossible. As the great Methodist theologian, Dr. W. B Pope, well said: "That the New Testament as fulfillment should so perfectly correspond with the Old Testament as prophecy is in itself the most wonderful phenomenon in literature: it is evidence as near demonstration as needs be of the intervention of a divine Hand. The Redeemer made manifest in the later Scripture answers face to face, and feature for feature, to the Form predicted in the older Scripture. One idea runs through the whole: the kingdom of God set up or restored in His Incarnate Son."

6. The Unique Claim — For the first two or three hundred years Christianity suffered persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire. This was because it claimed to dispossess every other religious

system and to be the only religion in the world. If the Christian people had gone to the Emperor and others in authority and said, "This is a new religion; we want you to allow it to come with the others and be put in your Pantheon," they would have been ready to allow Christianity to appear as one of the number. But that was not the way of the Gospel. It said, in effect, "No, this is the only religion. The others are not religions." Persecution then came upon Christianity, because it was intolerant — in the right sense of the word, the only way in which any one has a right to be intolerant, with the intolerance of truth.

Another point of great importance is included in this claim. The Bible has now been before the world for nearly two thousand years in its complete form, and yet it has said the last word on the greatest things in life. We find in it the last word about God, the last word about salvation from sin, the last word about holiness, the last word about the future life. And as has often been pointed out, while we outgrow the teaching of other men, we never outgrow the teaching of Jesus Christ and his apostles. Not only so, we have had great systems of philosophy and morality during the last thousand or fifteen hundred years, great theories, great books, and great ideas: but there is not a single new moral fact, not a single new ethical truth, in any one of these great systems that we cannot find in this Book. How is it that with all the great teachers of these centuries nothing new and true has been propounded beyond what is found in this Book?

Surely the claim of Christ and his apostles to finality is true. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). "In none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved." And these claims, if true, support the historical trustworthiness of the New Testament.

7. The Spiritual Power — For most Christian people the simplest and most conclusive proof of the Bible will be that which is derived from their own use of Holy Scripture in daily life and work. First and foremost, Scripture is a spiritual book, brought home to the heart by the Holy Spirit, and it is just here that criticism fails us. A learned writer justly says:

"I am struck with the absence of any sign of an experience distinctively Christian in many of those who discuss the sanctuaries of the Christian faith . . . Some of these scholars, to judge from their writings alone, do not seem even so much as to have heard of the Holy Spirit. And they have a fatal dread of pietism, and methodism, and most forms of intensely personal evangelical faith. They are, like Haeckel, in their own way the victims of an intellectualism which means spiritual atrophy to Christianity at last.

"In matters of the soul it is better to have the dogma of the telescope than that of the microscope. It is better to have the dogma of Melancthon, or even Calvin, than of Wellhausen or Schmiedel (whom I name with due respect for the great work they represent). The one has the positivity of infinite revelation, the other the positivism of the present age."

Taking these seven considerations together, can there be any real doubt or serious question about the historical accuracy and therefore trustworthiness of the New Testament? And if we proceed to enquire as to the cause of this reliability, there is only one explanation: the New Testament is a supernatural book.

01.07. Unity of the Bible

Unity of the Bible

VERY often we fail to realize that the Bible is not a book, but a library. The word "Bible" really suggests that, if we happen to know that while it is now applied to one book it comes from a Greek term meaning "the books" — ta biblia. An edition of the Bible in various volumes, with one allotted to Genesis, another to Exodus, and on through the Bible, helps us to realize that it is a library, not merely a volume. Yet notwithstanding all these sixty-six books, there is a real unity running through it from Genesis to Revelation, constituting one of teh most impressive features connected with our belief in the Bible as the Word of God.

1. The Fact of Unity — This unity can be realized all the more clearly if we first think of the variety of the Bible. There is variety of contents — history, theology, philosophy, poetry, counsel aspiration, prediction. There is variety of authorship — prophet, priest, king, annalist, apostle, evangelist. There is variety of circumstances — differences of time, place, country, purpose, destination. The sixty-six books are the work of at least thirty-six to forty authors, and cover certainly sixteen centuries. And yet the Bible, though so varied, is essentially one, and possesses one predominant idea. The Old Testament is the product of one country, though stretching over a long period of time. The New Testament is the product of several countries, but extending over a short time. The Old is to the New as the foundation is to the structure, and the New to the Old as the building is to the base. The God of Genesis and the God of Matthew are the same, only with the two complementary aspects of transcendence and immanence. In the Old Testament we have God in Himself as supreme, while in the New we have God in Christ as our Saviour. In the Old Testament man is seen in himself as a sinner. In the New he is seen in Christ as saved. To quote some familiar words, "In the Old the New is concealed (latent), and in the New the Old is revealed (patent)."

2. The Unity of Purpose — The one purpose of the Bible from beginning to end is to record God’s religion of redemption. Dr. M.G. Kyle once helpfully stated this by pointing out that in the Patriarchs we have the promise of redemption; in the time of the Judges, the Providence which was leading to redemption; in the period of the monarchy, the prophecies of redemption; in Christ the Person who wrought redemption; in the Acts and Epistles the preaching of redemption; and in Revelation the prediction which was the outcome of redemption. In view of this great purpose it may be said that the Old Testament is a revelation of outward forms developing inward principles, while the New is a revelation of inward principles developing outward forms. The former is suited to moral and spiritual childhood, and the latter to moral and spiritual adulthood. The Old Testament is thus a preparation of Christ for teh Church and of the Church for Christ. The New is a revelation of Christ to the Church, and through the Church to the world.

3. The Unity of Subject — It is a familiar story, but is worth repeating, that the late Dr. A.J. Gordon, of Boston, on one occasion was in his study with some of his children, and gave them a puzzle, one of those made of different sized pieces of wood, which have to be properly fitted together. He

went out and came back unexpectedly soon afterward, when to his surprise, he found the puzzle already completed. He asked his children how they had managed to do it so soon, and one of them replied: "We saw a picture of a man on the back and this helped us to know where the pieces were to go." And so, as it has often been pointed out, there is a picture of a man, the man Christ Jesus, anticipated in the Old Testament, and realized in the New, and this gives unity to the Book.

Christ is thus the key to the whole Bible, and gives it its historical and spiritual unity. The following unity which covers the whole Bible has been suggested and is well worth consideration:

1. Genesis to Deuteronomy — Revelation.

2. Joshua to Esther — Preparation.

3. Job to Song of Solomon — Aspiration.

4. Isaiah to Malachi — Expectation.

5. Matthew to John — Manifestation.

6. Acts to Epistles — Realization.

7. Revelation — Culmination. Of course these are only to be understood quite generally, but they are sufficiently accurate to reveal the essential unity.

4. The Unity of Theme — It is said on good authority that every piece of rope in the British Navy has a red thread running through it, so that it may be safeguarded against theft. Wherever that rope is cut the red thread can be seen. In the same way there is a "red thread" running through the Bible, and wherever we examine it, we see indications of that "thread" in the unity of theme running from Genesis to Revelation. The "red thread" is only another expression for the Cross of Christ. In the Old Testament that Cross is promised in prophecy and pictured in sacrifice and personal types (Acts 8:34-35). In the Gospels it appeared gradually in the teaching of Christ, and was at length provided in the event on Calvary (John 1:29). In the Acts the Cross is proclaimed in sermons and explanations (Acts 2:23; Acts 3:15; Acts 4:10; Acts 5:30; Acts 7:52; Acts 10:39-40; Acts 23:29-30). In the Epistles it is proved in various ways, and shown in its theological and practical bearings (Ephesians 1:7). Then in Revelation it is praised as theme of the glorified saints whose song is "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain" (Revelation 5:6; Revelation 13:8).

5. The Unity as seen in the Symmetry — This symmetry is characteristic both of the literary structure and also of the spiritual teaching of the Bible. The shortest expression of it is that in the Old Testament we have Moses and the prophets,m and in the New, Christ and his apostles.

Extending this somewhat further, we may notice that the Pentateuch is to the Old Testament what the Gospels are the New, the foundation on which all else rests, so that it may be regarded as generally correct to say that the Pentateuch and Gospels are books of the revelation of God to man, and the rest of the Old and New Testaments are books of realization of that revelation in man. This can be made clearer if put in tabular form.

1. Revelation (Pentateuch). God to his people.

2. Realization (Rest of the Old Testament). God in his people.

(1) In outward expression. Historical books.

(2) In inward experience. Poetical books.

(3) In onward expectation. Prophetical books.

Taking the New Testament in the same way we have:

1. Revelation (Gospels). Christ to his Church.

2. Realization (Rest of the New Testament). Christ in his Church.

(1) In outward expression (History). Acts.

(2) In inward experience (Doctrine). Epistles.

(3) In onward expectation (Prophecy). Revelation.

There are other and fuller ways of seeing the wonderful symmetry of the Word of God, but these will suffice to show something of its wonderful unitary structure. This unity is one of the unique features of the Bible that nothing in scholarship or anything else can destroy. Some words on this point were quoted in Chapter VI from the a great Methodist theologian, Dr. W. B. Pope.

Here is another statement from him:

"The unity of Scripture is a very strong credential in its favor as professing to be from God. It is one great vision, and its interpretation one: beginning and ending with the same paradise, with thousands of years of redeeming history between . . . One idea runs through the whole: the kingdom of God set up or restored in his Incarnate Son. To this idea authors of various ages and of various races contribute in harmony which never could be the result of accident or mere coincidence. Only the divine Power could have made so many men of different lands concert, yet without concerting, such a scheme of literature. If they had not asserted their inspiration of God, that hypothesis would have had to be invented to account for the facts and phenomena of their writings. But they have asserted it: the claim is bound up with every page of the Word they have left behind them."

All this inevitably compels the question as to how a unity of this kind is possible, and there is only one answer. Some years ago while a tunnel was being constructed in London, five shafts were sunk, and ten sets of men worked toward each other from opposite directions. Ultimately the sets met in the middle of the tunnel at a depth of one hundred feet. They were working practically in the dark, but they fitted so well together when the tunnels met each other that every one could see there was a master-mind who had planned the whole thing. And so the various writers of the Old and New Testaments were working separately, as it were, in a tunnel in the dark, and the apostle Peter tells us they did not know exactly the meaning of their own words (1 Peter 1:11). But by and by they met, and now that we have the Bible complete, the writers are seen to have worked together and to have dovetailed into one another, thus showing the presence and power of a master-mind, which is none other than that of the Holy Spirit of God.

01.08. Progressiveness of the Bible

Progressiveness of the Bible

IT IS often thought that belief in the unity of Scripture carries with it the inevitable conclusion that everything in it is on the same level of spiritual value, that the teaching and authority (say) of Ecclesiastes are not essentially lower than those of (say) Ephesians. But this idea of uniform spiritual value is assuredly not a logical consequence of a belief in the unity of the Bible. On the contrary, just as in the human body, some members are more important than others, and yet each is necessary in its place and for its purpose, so in the Bible, some parts are of less, and others are of greater spiritual importance and value. The two truths of the Unity and Progressiveness of Scripture must, therefore, be held together, and the latter must be allowed to explain and vindicate the former.

1. The Principle — The Bible consists of two parts, Old Testament and New Testament, and in these it is possible to see the general progress of truth. The former indicates Law, and the latter Grace. The one deals for the most part with rules suited to moral childhood, the other, with principles applicable to moral maturity. But within these two main divisions there are still further and fuller instances of progress. God has revealed his will to man in many parts and in many ways (Hebrews 1:1), and it is usual to speak of these as dispensations, meaning particular methods of the divine attitude and action. While in general we speak of the Jewish and Christian dispensations, we can and must go into further detail, and notice both in the Old Testament and in the New, the different yet connected stages of God’s revelation to man. Some students suggest seven of these dispensations: the Edenic; the Antediluvian; the Patriarchal; the Mosaic; the Christian; the Millennial and the Eternal. Even these are capable of fuller division, for the Mosaic dispensation can be distinguished as the Theocracy (the time from Egypt to Samuel); the Monarchy (from Saul to the Captivity); and the Return (from the restoration to Malachi). The Christian dispensation can be similarly divided into the times before and after Pentecost.

Now in these various divisions it is often possible to distinguish God’s manifestation of himself and of his truth at different stages. There was a gradually increasing expression of the divine character and will at successive periods, just as the people were considered ready to receive it. This means that while the revelation at every stage of dispensation was perfect for its own time, it was not necessarily suited for a following stage.

Now, however we may divide the periods, it is clear that a distinction of this kind has to be drawn. Thus, when Christ said, "I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12). He was indicating, what I am now emphasizing, that truth was progressive and not all delivered at once. For, as the Lord went on to say, "howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth."

Other proofs of the same gradual unfolding of the complete revelation of God for man, can be seen in these two instances. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ first declared the Old Testament

truth, and then supplemented and deepened it by adding, "but I say unto you" (Matthew 5:17-48). And it is clear from Mark 16:17-20, when five miraculous signs are said to "follow them that believe," that the reference cannot be to the present period of the Church (for these signs do not "follow them that believe"), but to that transitional period comprised in the thirty years of the Book of the Acts, during which time the Gospel was being offered to the Jews, and when we have the record of four of the five "signs" plainly stated as having "followed them that believe." But in all this progressiveness of revelation, it is necessary and important to remember that it did not involved any repudiation of what had gone before. Like the repealing of a law which is in force up to the time of the repeal, the teaching for each stage was valid and obligatory until supplemented and thereby supplanted by fresh and fuller instruction. But repeal of a law never means repudiation, only a "disannulling" because of a completer provision (Hebrews 7:18). A striking proof of this has been shown in the fact that there are traces of Scripture of later portions carrying an endorsement of previous stages. Joshua confirms the law of Moses (Joshua 1:8). The first Psalm emphasizes the value of the law (Psalms 1:2). Acts refers back to the third Gospel. The Old Testament is frequently endorsed in the New. Throughout the Old Testament there are, as we have already seen, traces of the gradual growth by accretion of the various books, until the Canon was complete. All this attestation of one part of Scripture by another is a proof at once of its unity and its progressiveness. Then, at length we have the meridian of truth in the New Testament revelation.

2. The Principle Illustrated — Out of many examples of this progressiveness of revelation, two will be adduced. The first is the doctrine of God. In the Old Testament emphasis is rightly placed on the unity of the Godhead as against the "gods many" of heathenism. But in the New Testament there is the additional revelation of the Trinity, which is not only not contradictory of the Unity, but is based on it and developed out of it. Every one knows that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity never had the slightest connection with polytheism, but grew out of Jewish monotheism. It is significant that with all the Jewish objections to Christianity in Paul’s time, no trace can be found of any opposition to his doctrine of a distinction between the Deity of the Father and the Deity of the Son, which was the germ of the fully-developed doctrine of the Trinity. The explanation of this was that the Jewish believers, having been led by experience into an acceptance of Christ as a divine Redeemer (and thereby to a distinction in the Deity) found in their Old Testament anticipatory hints of the Trinity. They realized that the unity of the Godhead was compound not simple, as the Hebrew words for "one" clearly indicate (Deuteronomy 6:4; Exodus 26:6-11; Ezekiel 37:16-19).

Another illustration of the progressiveness of revelation is seen in the difference between the morality of the Old and New Testaments. This doctrine of the progress of revelation helps us to distinguish between God’s temporary and permissive will and his absolute and inflexible standard. The former is seen in the Old Testament and the latter in the New Testament, and as we study the first-named we can see in it clear indications of its temporary character. Thus, while permitting slavery, restrictions were imposed, and cruelty was prohibited (Exodus 21:16-27). Many of the Old Testament difficulties can be solved, or at least relieved by the consideration of this purely temporary and merely permissive character of the morality. Christ referred to this when he distinguished between the primal divine command about marriage, and the Mosaic toleration of divorce (Matthew 19:8). This principle of progress in God’s revelation is of great practical service in meeting certain current objections to the Old Testament. There are those who reject it because of

its alleged cruelties, such as the slaughter of the Canaanites, or because of certain manifestations in individual life and practice not consonant with the New Testament principles. Now, while we are not to be guided today by many of the examples of the Old Testament, it is equally true that in so far as what they said and did was due to a revelation of God, that revelation was perfect for that time, whatever additional truth came afterward for newer needs. We say in so far as what they said and did was of God, because not even in the Old Testament are we to understand that God necessarily approved of all that his servants said and did, even when they thought they were doing him service. But if there were the place to do it, the instance of the Canaanites, already referred to, could be justified without much difficulty, in the light of the divine judgment on the awful depths of sin to which they had descended (Genesis 15:16).

There is another point that is too apt to be overlooked, namely that side by side with the gradual development of God’s revelation there was an equally gradual deterioration of Israel, so that they in their degeneration failed to realize and respond to the ever-enlarging disclosure of God. And so it has been well pointed out that "there are no set-backs in the revelation made to Israel, but there are many set-backs in the religious history of Israel." It is the failure to recognize this distinction between the divine and the human that has caused people to regard Old Testament morality as low and unworthy of God, when all the time the explanation has been in the failure of the people to accept the growing truth of God. This is how the distinction has been put:

"In regard to the Old Testament I suggest two words of guiding principle: ’The Law of the Lord is perfect’ (that is, its quality). ’The Law made nothing perfect’ (that is, its achievement — in its office as a preparatory discipline to ’school’ souls for Christ). These two statements can be written across the sacred Record. A perfect revelation — imperfect faith. Perfect ethical requirement — imperfect obedience." And so, God revealed himself, not only at "sundry times" but also in "divers manners," to the fathers. He taught men as they were able to bear it. He led them step by step from the dawn of revelation up to the fulness and splendor of his manifestation "in these last days in his Son" (Hebrews 1:2). A knowledge of this principle of progress in God’s revelation of himself will enable us to avoid a twofold error: it will prevent us, on the one hand, from undervaluing the Old Testament by reason of our fuller light from the New Testament; on the other hand, it will prevent us from using the Old Testament in any of its stages without guidance from the complete revelation in Christ. We shall thereby be enabled to obtain the correct spiritual perspective from which to study the Old Testament, and to derive from it the wealth of spiritual instruction it was intended to convey to all ages (Romans 15:4).

We have thus to distinguish carefully between what may be called temporary teaching and permanent truth in the Old Testament — that is, between those elements of God’s revelation intended solely for the immediate need, and those which are of eternal validity. To put it in yet another way, we have to remember the difference between what is written to us and for us. All Scripture was written for our learning, but not all was written to us directly. Much of it was not addressed to Christians but to Jews, and was primarily and often exclusive for them, and is only for us today by way of application. This distinction will solve many a difficulty and the progress of doctrine is one of the master-keys of the Bible.

01.09. Inspiration of the Bible

Inspiration of the Bible THE basis of our acceptance of the Bible is the belief that it embodies a divine revelation. But at once the question arises as to how the authority of this revelation is expressed. This brings us to the problem of Inspiration. At the outset two things should be said: (1) If we accept the Authority of Scripture we really need not trouble about any particular theory of Inspiration, but (2) if we seek to know as fully as we can what Inspiration means we should confine ourselves strictly to facts, since Inspiration when properly understood is not a theory, but a fact. It is something we accept, whether we can explain it or not.

1. The Source of the Bible — We believe that the Bible comes from a divine Source. The Old Testament prophets claimed to be the recipients of divine revelation. "The word of the Lord came"; "the Lord spake"; "the word of God"; "God said"; "the Lord commanded." Phrases like these are found nearly seven hundred times in the Pentateuch alone, and they are scattered throughout the Scriptures no less than three thousand times altogether. There is one verse, which, whatever else it means, certainly makes this plain: 2 Samuel 23:2, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was on my tongue." In harmony with this, we have a claim in the New Testament, of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. In some passages there is no reference to the human writer of the Scripture, but only to the divine Author. In Hebrews 3:7; we read, "The Holy Spirit saith..." This refers to Psalms 95:1-11, which was, of course, written by a man, David or some one else, and yet there is no reference at all to a human author. This use shows that the writer is concerned, not with what the Psalmist said, but with the Holy Spirit’s utterances, and this means that the Holy Spirit is the Author of Scripture. The attitude of the New Testament to the Old Testament shows the same truth. Over fifty times in the New Testament, is the Old Testament spoken of as of divine origin and authority, and always with the deference due to this fact (Romans 3:2; Matthew 22:29; Mark 14:49; Luke 24:25-27, Luke 24:44-46).

2. The Instruments of the Bible — The Holy Spirit used men as the instruments of divine revelation. There are a number of passages where the divine and the human are mentioned; where the distinction is drawn very clearly between the divine Author and the human instrument. Thus in Matthew 1:22; we have "Spoken of the Lord by the prophet;" in Acts 1:16, "The Holy Spirit spake by the mouth of David," and in 2 Peter 1:21, "Holy men of old spake as they were moved [carried along] by the Holy Spirit." So that as the instruments of the Spirit’s work, the men were first the speakers, and then the writers of divine revelation. And yet "instrument" does not mean passivity, as "pens," but rather, the thought is expressed by the word in the case of penmen. Inspiration is a concursus of the divine and human.

3. The Media of the Bible — I do not know any other term than this that will better express my idea. I mean the words of the men (2 Peter 1:21). The men themselves are not alive now, and if we are to be in touch with their revelation, it must be though their words; and if we are to be sure of the revelation from God, then for us today we must be sure of what the men wrote, as they are not here to speak for themselves.

Let us notice 2 Timothy 3:16. Whether we follow the Authorized Version or the Revised Version, the thought is: "Every writing is God-breathed." God, somehow or other, breathed into these writings, and therefore we are concerned with words.

Now look at 1 Corinthians 2:13. Dr. Forsyth says the chapter is classic for the apostolic view of inspiration. Mark this: "Words which the Holy Spirit teacheth." Could anything be more definite and clear than this? Not the words with man's wisdom teacheth, but the words which "the Holy Spirit teachest." And so there is an intimate, a necessary connection, between thoughts and words. Whether it be for our own thinking, or for intercourse between man and man, thoughts must be expressed in words. And this is exactly what Bishop Westcott says in his Essay on Inspiration! "Thoughts are wedded to words as necessarily as soul is to body." So when we speak of the media of the Bible, we are concerned with words. But some one says: Does not this mean "verbal inspiration"? Well, we can call it verbal inspiration if we like, or we can call it plenary inspiration, if we prefer, so long as we do not call it dictation. When a man dictates a letter to his secretary, he does not inspire her. It is mechanical dictation, and he expects her to reproduce exactly what he tells her. But in Scripture we do not have mechanical dictation, but inspiration; and whether we call it verbal or plenary, the phrase is not intended to say how God does it, but how far it had gone. It means that inspiration extends to the form as well as to the substance, that it reaches to the words as well as to the thoughts, in order that we may be sure of the thoughts; for how are we to know God's thoughts if we do not know his words? God used the natural characteristics of the writers, and through them conveyed his truth. But does it not say" "The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life"? It does; but in that phrase Paul is not concerned with the letter of inspiration as opposed to the spirit. That is an entirely false idea of the passage. Again some one says: "We want the inspiration of the thoughts, not of the words: Now what do we really mean by inspiration or authority in the thoughts? Surely this must be expressed in the words, and the objections raised to the inspiration of words are just as valid against the inspiration of thoughts.

Surely inspiration cannot mean an uninspired account of inspired thoughts. How did Moses remember God's revelation found in Exodus 25:1-40, Exodus 26:1-37, Exodus 27:1-21, Exodus 28:1-43, Exodus 29:1-46, Exodus 30:1-38, or Isaiah remember that which is found in Isaiah 8:1-22, Isaiah 9:1-21, Isaiah 10:1-34, Isaiah 11:1-16, Isaiah 12:1-6, or Hosea remember the contents of Hosea 4:1-19, Hosea 5:1-15, Hosea 6:1-11, Hosea 7:1-16, Hosea 8:1-14, Hosea 9:1-17, Hosea 10:1-15, Hosea 11:1-12? As these are evidently continuous revelations, are we to rely on the writers' memory only, and on no other faculty? As Dr. Kuyper has truly said: "You can as easily have music without notes or mathematics without figures as thoughts without words."

Let us notice 1 Corinthians 14:37, "If any man think himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write are the commandments of the Lord." Here we see both the human instrument and the divine authority. This is how Dr. A.T. Pierson has put the matter.

"There are, with regard to this question of verbal inspiration, or the oversight of the very words of Scripture, five important significant passages in the Word of God: Hebrews 12:27; Galatians 4:9; John 8:58; John 10:34-36; Galatians 3:16. If these passages are examined it will be seen that in the first instance the argument turns on one phrase, 'yet once more.' In the second, on the passive voice rather than the active voice of the verb. In the third, on the present rather than on the past tense. In the fourth, on the inviolability of a single word; and in the fifth, on the retention of the

singular number of a noun, rather than the plural. Taking the five passages together, they teach us that, to alter or omit a phrase, change the voice or mood or tense of a verb, change a single word or even the number of a noun, is to break the Scriptures; and if this does not come close to verbal inspiration, then I am no judge." The use of the Bible today is a wonderful confirmation of this view. We regard it as our authoritative court of appeal, and we rest upon its words as our warrant, and the fact that we employ a concordance, be it Greek, or Hebrew, or English, is another testimony to this belief. It points to the value, the meaning, the force, and the extent of words. This was the view of the Apostolic Church.

Bishop Westcott, in the Essay to which I have already referred, says that the doctrine of inspiration as held in the Apostolic churches was that it was supernatural in source, unerring in truthfulness, and that it comprised words as well as subject-matter. This, according to the Bishop, is the view of the earliest churches, and certainly it has also been that of a great many churches since the Apostolic days.

We notice, too, the precise form of the appeal of the New Testament to the Old: "It is written." It is not "it is thought," or "it is suggested," but, "it is written." And the Lord Himself said, in John 10:35, "The Scripture cannot be broken." So we are on perfectly safe ground when we ask attention to the words of Scripture as the media of the men who spake by the Holy Spirit. As Dr. J.H. Brookes used to say, about Exodus 4:10-12, it is not "I will be with thy mind and teach thee what thou shalt think," but "I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say," because while it does not so much matter what Moses thought, it does matter what he actually said.

4. The Substance of the Bible — What is the outcome of this Source, these instruments and media? Truth. This is the substance of the Bible. First of all, truth in its reality. The greatest authority we have, the Lord Jesus, once said, "Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). Truth in its reality is found in this book. As Dr. Denney remarks, "When a man submits his mind to the Spirit which is in the Bible, it never misleads him about the way of salvation, it brings him invariably to that knowledge of God which is eternal life. The most vital truth about it is covered by the terms inspiration and infallibility, and in virtue of this truth it is indispensable and authoritative to the mind of every age."

Secondly, Truth in its uniqueness. We can test the work of the Holy Spirit in regard to the Bible very simply. Take the writings of A.D. 50 to 100. Then take the writings from A.D. 100 to 150. Compare them, and, as it has been well said, between the New Testament writings of A.D. 50 to 100, and the most post-apostolic writings of A.D. 100 to 150, there is a chasm, "sheer, deep, and abysmal." The finest writings of the second century cannot compare with the writings of the first century. When the Christian faith was settling itself in the world, the Holy Spirit was working in a unique manner. He was at work as the Spirit of inspiration. But from A.D. 100 to 150 we do not have inspiration; but illumination. From that time forward and ever since, there has been constant illumination, but no new revelation. John Robinson, of Leyden, said: "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to bread forth from His Word." True, but it is from His Word. We have not reached the end of it yet, but there it is, ready for the Holy Spirit to illuminate its pages. What does all this involve but the fact of a divine, unique inspiration?

Chapter 98

01.10. Inspiration of the Bible, Continued

Inspiration of the Bible — (Continued)

FORMER considerations have shown that the Bible as a revelation of divine truth occupies a unique position, and that this uniqueness is due to some action of God whereby we are assured of the reality of the divine communication. This action is called Inspiration and in further study of it some important principles emerge.

1. Varieties of Inspiration — It is of supreme importance to realize that Inspiration does not always mean the same thing, and for this reason it is essential to use the term with the greatest care and the strictest possible accuracy. Several vital and important distinctions must be made and kept in view.

(1) Sometimes Inspiration means a direct communication from God. When Paul said, "I have received from the Lord," he evidently claimed to have had a communication of truth direct from above. This corresponds exactly with the frequent claims made, as already seen, by prophets and others, when they said, "The Lord spake to me," etc. And such a direct revelation is obviously necessary, because many truths of the Bible are above and beyond human ken and must be revealed because they could not be discovered by man.

(2) Sometimes Inspiration means "the inspiration of selection." It is clear that the historical books of the Old Testament give mere fragments of the events out of the complete annals of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and in view of the emphasis indicated by the substance and arrangement of these books, a selection must have been made. In like manner, John selected materials out of our Lord’s life to form the Fourth Gospel (John 20:31), and Luke’s preface points in the same direction. Inspiration here is associated with the selection of materials.

(3) Sometimes Inspiration means only the guarantee of an accurate record. In the Bible we find the words of the Devil. They are not true, although they are found in the Bible. We find the words of Job’s friends. They are not true, but they they are in the Bible. We find the words of God’s enemies in the Bible. They are not true. The sentiment is wrong, but the record of them is true. The sentiment may be full of imperfection, but the record is always perfect. This is the meaning of the inspiration of accurate record. We have to be very careful, therefore, that if a man preaches from a particular text, he first inquires who said it. An old Welsh preacher once gave out his text this way: "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life"; and then said, "That is a lie!" Of course it was. It is the word of Satan. Although it is in God’s Book, it is not true of itself, but the record of it is true. There may be, there often is, imperfection in the sentiment, but there is no imperfection in the account of it. This aspect of the subject calls attention to the distinction between Revelation and Inspiration. Revelation is the substance of God’s truth, the what; Inspiration is the expression of that truth, the how. We can see this in 1 Corinthians 2:10-13, where we have revelation in 1 Corinthians 2:10, and inspiration in 1 Corinthians 2:13. And so, not all the Bible is revealed, because much of it is history and refers to all sorts of men. But all in the Bible is

inspired, because the record is given at every point in words that are trustworthy. This distinction helps us to understand how it is that the Bible, while fully inspired, is not of the same spiritual value at every point. The revelation of truth is, as we have seen, progressive, but the record is accurate throughout.

2. Inspiration and Difficulties — How is Inspiration to be regarded in the face of Bible difficulties? People often say the Bible is so difficult. It is. But when once we have decided, on the grounds of proper evidence, that the Bible is the Word of God, then every difficulty must be judged in the light of that antecedent fact. In the words of Tregelles, the great textual critic: "No difficulty in connection with a proved fact can invalidate the fact itself."

Some difficulties are inherent in a revelation, otherwise it would not be a revelation. We cannot expect that which comes from the infinite God to finite man to be without difficulty. Revelation means to "draw back the veil," and if there were no veil to draw back, we should not have any revelation. Therefore, we are not surprised if, as Butler taught us nearly two hundred years ago, there are difficulties in revelation, for there are difficulties in nature also, and yet nature is from the same God.

Difficulties are either scientific, historical, or ethical. Scientific difficulties for the most part turn upon differences of interpretation between man’s views of the Bible and man’s views of science. Difficulties of history have to be tested one by one; and we have yet to find any real statement in the Bible in terms of history that has been found to be unhistorical. And with regard to ethical difficulties, what has been said about progressive revelation may be applied at this point. God has revealed more and more of his will as man could bear it. There is, therefore, such a thing as progress in the ethics of the Bible, but there is no progress beyond the ethics of Christ and his apostles. Not a single new ethic has been given to the world since Jesus Christ and his apostles lived on this earth.

Then let us remember that none of these difficulties affect any fundamental Christian doctrine. Dean Farrar, who was no slave of conservatism, once said that no demonstrable error has ever been discovered in the Bible.

We are not called upon to answer every objection. It is quite sufficient for us to prove the truth of Christianity. Why should a man take leave of his common sense when he reads the Bible? There are scores of things in life that we cannot understand. A man says, "I will not believe what I do not see." Then what about his brains? So in regard to life. No one can tell us what life is. We cannot define life, and since we cannot, we ought not to be surprised if we find difficulties in the Bible that we cannot solve.

Let us make use of the Bible as fully as we can, and see how far that will take us. A man once went to Dwight Moody and said: "Mr. Moody, I cannot accept your Bible, because there are so many difficulties in it." Moody said to him: "Do you like fish?" "Yes." "Do you find any bones in it?" "Yes." "Do you eat the bones?" "No, I put them on the side of my plate." "That is what I do with the difficulties of the Bible, and I find quite enough fish without bones." That is a good, working, practical rule, though obviously it cannot settle everything. It is called the verifying faculty, and it is worth applying. It will do much to prove the uniqueness of the Bible.

3. Inspiration and Criticism — There are three kinds of criticism, and these should be carefully kept together. The first is what is called Lower Criticism. This is the technical word descriptive of the criticism which provides a text and a translation. We depend upon scholarship for these. Since very few know Greek and Hebrew, we take our text from scholars, and also their translation. This is the lower or the lowest criticism, and is legitimate, important, and, of course, absolutely essential. And for all practical purposes either the Authorized or Revised Version does give us a substantial idea of the original text.

Then, secondly, there is what is called the Higher Criticism. This has to do with the authorship, date, and character of the books; and again it is legitimate, vital, and essential, only it requires to be tested. Let us not call any man master, whether ancient or modern, English or German. Let us simply hold ourselves free to look at these things for ourselves. What is meant is, that we must not merely follow a fashion of scholarship, but test things for ourselves, and get the theory that best fits all the facts. But there is a third aspect, the "Highest" Criticism. It is sometimes overlooked. Here it is: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:2). This is the criticism of the humble soul. To the same effect is another text: "The Word of God is a 'critic' of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12; Greek). If the soul of man will allow God's Word to criticize it, and if we do a little more "trembling" at God's Word, this will be the highest criticism, and will provide a criterion that would settle almost everything for us. The trouble is that people take the lower and the higher criticism, but forget the third, the highest. Yet, on the other hand, there are numbers of humble souls who know far more of the truth of Scripture than the greatest scholars. As James Hamilton once said: "A Christian on his knees sees farther than a philosopher on his tiptoes." When these three are held together there need be no fear about criticism. To appreciate the pictures on stained-glass windows we must go inside a church; and to know the Bible we must go inside, and not judge from the outside. Nor with reason only, but with conscience, and heart, and soul, and will; and when the whole nature responds to the highest criticism, rationalizing critical theories will not be able to do us any serious harm.

4. Inspiration and Spiritual Work — Our view of Inspiration will depend very largely on the use we make of the Bible. If it is employed as a mere reference book our conception of it may be low, but if it is regarded as our daily food and the instrument of our Christian service, our view of it will be correspondingly high.

What does the Bible do for spiritual life and work? The Bible is spoken of as God's seed (Luke 8:11; James 1:21). We are born of the Word (1 Peter 1:23); we grow by the Word (1 Peter 2:2); we are cleansed by the Word (John 15:3); we are sanctified by the Word (John 17:17); we are edified by the Word (Acts 20:32); we are illuminated by the Word (Psalms 119:105); we are converted by the Word (Psalms 19:11); and we are satisfied with the Word (Psalms 119:103). Surely a Word that can do all this must have divine power in it. There is a Latin phrase, solvitur ambulando, which is equivalent to our proverbial expression, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." The Word of God in experience is the greatest proof we can have, and if we allow the things now mentioned to become part and parcel of our life, we shall know what the power of God's Word means.

Then from the work of the Bible in our own souls will come this verification of the Bible in our efforts on behalf of others. If we wish to verify the Bible, let us go out and win souls for Christ — do

personal work. A great number of our problems are theoretical. They come from places where people spin theories absolutely remote from human life. But if we go out into the world and tell a man of the Lord Jesus Christ, and get that man to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" we shall very soon get verification of the Word of God; and when we have that, we shall not need much, if any, further testimony to its inspiration.

01.11. Interpretation of the Bible

Interpretation of the Bible

IT IS frequently remarked that most of our difficulties with the Bible are connected with its interpretation. For example, instead of saying, as is so often done, that Science and the Bible disagree, it would be more correct to say that interpretations of Science and interpretations of the Bible disagree, since Science and the Bible, coming from the same divine source, cannot possibly be discordant. It is, therefore, of the first importance to give the most thorough consideration to certain principles which should guide us in our interpretation of Scripture.

1. In general the supreme need of the Holy Spirit must be emphasized. As the Bible is a divine revelation it is essential that the readers should be in spiritual sympathy with its standpoint, accepting its authority and desiring to learn its meaning. An irreligious man cannot possibly obtain the true idea of Scripture or appreciate the standpoint of the writers. It is recorded of a well-known American Christian lady, Mrs. Margaret Bottome, that one Sunday afternoon she had been attending a Bible class in New York, and as she returned to her home she found a gentleman waiting for her, a professor in one of the colleges. When she expressed her regret at not having been at home on his arrival and explained that she had been attending the Bible class, a thinly veiled sneer came to her caller's face as he said: "Oh, you believe in the Bible, do you?" Her sensitive spirit at once felt the sneer and the plain inference from the words, and instantly she replied with a beautiful light on her face: "Oh, you know, I have the pleasure of a personal, intimate acquaintance with the Author of the Book!" It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this spiritual standpoint in our approach to the Bible.

2. Then follows the necessity of studying the Book like other books, because the divine revelation has been given to us in book form. This will mean that we should give careful attention to matters of grammar, of history, and of words, both in regard to their etymology and to their usage. In all this the obvious and natural meaning of the words and phrases should come first.

3. Yet, as we give attention to the Bible from beginning to end, we must always bear in mind its relation to Christ, for both Old and New Testaments are so closely associated with Him that he constitutes the key to the interpretation of many of its vital passages. In the Old Testament Christ is prepared for and anticipated in various ways, while in the New Testament he is seen to be manifested in Person, and the results of that manifestation are evident in the life and service of the Christian Church. It will be of real and constant value to keep in mind as we endeavor to interpret the Bible that its dominant note is "Christ in all the Scriptures."

4. And yet it is important to keep clear, what has already been emphasized in a former chapter, the progressiveness of the revelation of the Bible. This principle is the key which unlocks many of the difficulties, especially of the Old Testament.

5. In this connection it is also necessary to emphasize another point, which has already been considered, the differences of the dispensations which can be traced throughout Scripture. When

we follow Augustine’s advice to "distinguish the dispensations," many of our Bible problems find their solution.

6. Then, it is essential for us to distinguish rigidly between interpretation and application, between the primary and the secondary meanings of Scripture. It will probably be found necessary to apply this principle almost everywhere. To take one instance, perhaps the most familiar: In the Authorized Version the headings of the chapters from Isaiah 40:1-31 to 66 frequently refer to "the Church" as though the various messages found in that magnificent section had reference to the present dispensation, and to the body of Christ. But when the chapters are considered, it will be found that they have no reference to the Church at all, but to Israel, and this shows the vital necessity of the primary interpretation to Israel being distinguished from the secondary and spiritual application to the Church. The same principle obtains in the study of such passages as Isa. 2:2 to 4 and Ezekiel 37:1-28. Whatever spiritual teaching we may derive from these passages for our life today, it is essential to keep in mind that the primary reference cannot possibly be to anything in the Gospel dispensation, but to something that is still future. As before stated — while all Scripture is written for us, it is not all written to us. The New Testament affords almost constant illustration of the same distinction. Thus, when we read Matthew 10:5-10 we see at once that the primary reference was purely local to the Jews, especially when we compare Luke 22:36. So also with Matthew 16:28. Further, the reference to Joel, Joel 2:1-32, by the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47) is a striking illustration of this principle, for it is obvious that the prophecy of Joel was not by any means completely fulfilled in what happened then. See also the reference to John the Baptist in Malachi 4:5. While it is, of course, true as our Lord said, that the Baptist in relation to Christ was "Elijah the prophet" (Matthew 11:14), yet the text speaks of "a great and terrible day of the Lord," which shows that there is a further and fuller realization to come. Another illustration out of many is afforded by the familiar words of the Lord’s Prayer. When Christ taught his disciples to pray to their Father in heaven, "Thy Kingdom come," it seems clear that he was referring to a time beyond the mediatorial Kingdom of the Son, even to the end of all things, when the Son shall have delivered up the Kingdom to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).

7. Another vital principle of interpretation is the need of distinguishing rigidly between the literal and symbolical views of passages. The Bible is an Eastern Book and as such it is full of pictures and metaphors. We must take the literal meaning whenever it is possible. One instance of this is in Luke 1:31-33, where eight statements are made concerning our Lord. As the first five of these are literally fulfilled in the first coming of Christ, it seems impossible to doubt that the other three are to be literally fulfilled when he comes again, for it is not natural to take the former literally and then to spiritualize the latter. On the other hand, there are many obvious instances of the purely symbolical meaning, so illustrative of Eastern life. Thus, in Psalms 68:16; the mountains are said to leap. In the book of Revelation we have an almost constant use of metaphor and symbol, like the "sea of glass" and many other instances. The use of allegory is found in Scripture, as in Galatians 4:22-31, though, as we know, this was based on the historical circumstances of Hagar and Ishmael. It will, no doubt, be difficult from time to time to express the distinction between what is literal and what is symbolical, and yet it is essential that the attempt be made.

8. Closely associated with the foregoing is the frequent use of figurative language in Scripture, and it is important to remember that this form of speech intensifies a fact and does not destroy it. It means, as we know, that one thing is put for another. Among the very many illustrations of this,

which is peculiarly characteristic of Eastern life, may be adduced the following: "My cup runneth over" (Psalms 23:5); "My grey hairs with sorrow" (Genesis 42:38). There is also the particular form of figurative language known as personification, as "The blood that speaketh" (Hebrews 12:24); "Let not thy left hand know — " (Matthew 6:3). The use of exaggeration is found in the well-known phrase, "hateth not . . . he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Then, there are metaphors and parables in almost every part of the Scripture. But the most important feature of the figurative language found in Scripture is known as type, which has long been described as "an illustration in a lower sphere of a truth belonging to a higher." A type is a pictorial or personal representation of something that is to come, and the following distinctions have been drawn. A parable is an illustration in word, while a type is an illustration in deed. A prophecy is a prediction, while a type is an anticipation. An allegory is an illustration in the form of fancy, while a type is one in the form of fact. A symbol is an illustration which gives a hint, merely suggesting a truth, while a type is an illustration which is fuller and provides a more complete view. It is also said that a parable illustrates a truth that concerns the present, while a type deals with that which is still future. The object of the type being to prepare the mind for the true idea of the coming redemption. The following principles have been set forth for the proper interpretation of the types. (1) Each type suggests some great truth, though the resemblance is internal rather than external. (2) Each type is necessarily imperfect in the conveyance of the truth. (3) The New Testament is our best guide to the meaning of types. Beyond this it is essential to take great care, lest we regard as typical what was not intended by God so to be.

9. Not least of all in importance is the absolute necessity of studying the context when we are concerned with any particular passage. It is well known that theological students are often advised when they take a text to "study the context, lest the text become a pretext." Out of the many illustrations which show the necessity of this principle, the chapter divisions of the Authorized Version may be adduced. Thus, if we read John 3:1; only, it is probably difficult, if not impossible, to see precisely what sort of a man Nicodemus was; but if that verse is considered strictly in connection with the three preceding verses, and the particle in the Greek, which has been curiously omitted from the Authorized Version, be borne in mind, it is not difficult to understand the man’s true character at that time. So, when the little word "also" in Luke 16:1 is carefully noted, it will be seen that the parable of the unjust steward is an application to the disciples of what our Lord had said to the Pharisees. He had been blamed for making friends of the poor and outcast (Luke 15:1-2), but he vindicated himself, in the three parables of the lost sheep, the lost silver, and the lost son, and then applied the lesson to his own disciples and urged them to make to themselves friends of these poor people. Other illustrations of this vital principle can be found almost everywhere, but perhaps the most familiar, as it is in some respects the most important for many, is the statement of our Lord at the institution of the Last Supper. The words, "This is my body," are often quoted in certain quarters, and yet Christ said more than this, for He did not speak of the bread but of his sacrifice on the Cross: "This is my body which is being given for you" (1 Corinthians 11:24).

These are not the only points to be remembered in connection with the interpretation of Scripture, but they will suffice to show how important it is to give careful attention to the circumstances of the Book, its Eastern origin, its spiritual meaning, and its practical message for daily life.

01.12. Purpose of the Bible

Purpose of the Bible OUR consideration of the various aspects of Scripture naturally leads to the inquiry as to the aim and object of our use of the Bible, because everything else necessarily culminates in the definite relation of the Word of God to our own life. Since God has spoken, it is for us to hear and heed, and this will mean a proper use of Scripture.

1. Its Stages — The first stage of all study in relation to the Bible is that known as Textual Criticism — the discovery of the true text, the assurance that we have as nearly as is possible for us to obtain them the words of the sacred writers. But this stage of study is obviously only introductory. It is essential as the foundation, but is only the foundation. The next stage is that which is known as Literary Criticism — the study of the Bible as literature, the consideration of its composition, authorship, date, style, and contents. This also is important and essential, for without it we should lose much of the beauty and glory of the Bible. Yet there is something more and better to which we must proceed. The Bible is literature, but it is more, and if we rest content at this stage we shall fail at a vital point. The third stage of Bible study is concerned with Biblical Exegesis — that is, the true interpretation of the contents of the Bible, the exact meaning of passages, sections, and verses. This involves a knowledge of language and grammar, of manners and customs, of literary and rhetorical forms of expression. This is obviously of the greatest moment and imperative for all true study. Still, it is not everything, and it is only too possible to become occupied with details of interpretation, and all the while to be missing the essential spiritual power. The fourth stage of our work with the Bible is occupied with Biblical Theology — the consideration of the religion revealed in the Scriptures, its doctrines, morals and duties. This is the highest point of Christian scholarship, and it is of the utmost value to be able to see what is the theological teaching of each stage of God’s revelation of Himself, from the first days until the time of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet even here we do not get finality; for it is only too possible to be occupied with the intellectual contents of the Bible, to have it all arranged and grasped in our minds, and still to be devoid of the substance and power of the Word of God.

Through and above all stages we must press until we arrive at the summit, which is the use of the Bible as God’s personal Word to our own souls, "What saith my Lord unto his servant?" "What wilt Thou have me to do?" The Scriptures are intended to lead the soul direct to God, to introduce us to his presence, and to convey His revelation of truth and grace. If we do not realize this, we shall fail at the critical point, and all our other knowledge, great and valuable though it be, will count for little or nothing. Bible study above all else is intended to bring and keep the soul in direct contact with God. The highest privilege and holiest possibility of the Christian religion is fellowship with God in Christ, and this is absolutely impracticable apart from constant devotional dealings with the Word of God.

2. Its Requirements — Any one with intellect can become an expert in the first four stages of the Bible study referred to above. The fifth stage needs qualities and conditions far beyond intellectual capacity and attainment. The soul must be accepted with God in Christ. Fellowship with God is

only possible to a saved soul, to one pardoned and accepted in Christ. Sin must be dealt with before communion is realized, and consequently there can be no genuine devotional study of Scripture apart from the position of a believer in Christ and the assurance of personal salvation. The "natural" man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, or, to take Paul's word literally, "does not welcome" them. But, more than this, as the apostle goes on to say, "neither is he able to experience them" (1 Corinthians 2:14; Greek); he has not the faculty which will enable him to do so. He must be changed into a "spiritual" man, for these things are "spiritually discerned." It is for lack of realization of this patent and potent fact that so much error is abroad today. Men study the Bible without being at all conscious that it demands spiritual as well as intellectual qualifications.

Further, the soul thus accepted in Christ must be kept right with God, if Bible study is to be of the highest and best. The life of the believer must be true to God. The conscience must be kept pure and sensitive; the mind must be kept teachable, self-distrustful, and ever wishful to learn more; the will must be kept submissive and obedient, and ready to do what God appoints. The secrets of the Lord are only revealed to "them that fear Him"' for "to this man will I look, even to him that . . . trembleth at my Word." Many a believer finds the Word of God dark to him because he is out of spiritual condition. There is no "open vision" because his soul is not right with God. The devotional study of the Bible is at once a cause and an effect in relation to the spiritual life. It is a cause of increased spiritual vitality, power, insight and blessing, while in turn this spiritual reality of life leads to yet more spiritual revelation of God in His Word. Prayer and Obedience are organs of knowledge, and the more of these the more knowledge. For spiritual power in life we must use the spiritual food of the Word of God.

3. Its Methods — For the devotional and spiritual use of the Word of God there are three rules, but these three, though simple, are all-inclusive.

We must search (John 5:39). God's thoughts are never revealed to listless readers, only to eager searchers. The glories of the Scriptures are not to be discovered without diligent search. The Bible is like a mine, and its jewels are not to be picked up on the roadside. It affords opportunity for thought, and requires its exercise. Its words, phrases and sentences are full of meaning and power. Like our Lord's parables, the Bible at once conceals and reveals its message. Strenuous thought is imperative if we would obtain from the Word the blessing it contains. We must ponder its statements, dwell on its meaning, grasp its message, and dwell lovingly and earnestly on its revelation of God in Christ. Nothing in it is without some purpose, and what this is, the Lord will reveal in response to His servants' faithful search.

We must meditate (Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1:2). "Meditation" comes from a Greek word meaning "to attend," and this is essentially the idea of the Bible meditation. It is reading with attention. More than this, it is reading with intention. It is concerned at each point with personal application. And it must be our own thought, our own musing, our own application. The great, the primary, the essential point is first-hand meditation on God's Word as the secret of Christian living.

Dr. Andrew Murray has reminded us in one of his books that milk represents food which has already passed through digestive processes before it is taken by us. So we may say that all the little books of devotion, the helps to holiness, the series of manuals of thought and teaching, however valuable, represent food which has passed through the spiritual digestion of others before it comes to us. And it should be used as such. If these helps are put first, to the exclusion of

the Bible alone, and the Bible day by day, they will become dangerous and disastrous, crutches that prevent vigorous exercise, and lead to spiritual senility. If they are put second, they become delightful and valuable, inspirations to further thought and pathways to deeper blessings. When we have had our own meditation of the Word, we are the better able to enjoy what God teaches us through others of his children, and especially those whom God honors with special gifts of teaching.

Meditation must be real. It must be "the meditation of my heart" (Psalms 49:3), and "the heart" in Scripture means the center of the moral being, which includes the intellect, emotions, and the will. It implies that we come to the Word to be searched thoroughly, guided definitely, and strengthened effectually. The hour of meditation is not a time for dreamy, vague imaginings, but for living, actual blessing, whether in the form of guidance, warning, comfort, or counsel.

Meditation will also be practical. What are its stages or elements? First, the careful reading of the particular passage or subject, thinking over its real and original meaning. Next, a resolute application of it to my own life's needs, conscience, heart, mind, imagination, will; finding out what it has to say to me. Next, a hearty turning of it into prayer for mercy and grace, that its teaching may become part of my life. Next, a sincere transfusion of it into resolution that my life shall reproduce it. Lastly, a whole-hearted surrender to, and trust in, God for power to practice it forthwith, and constantly throughout the day.

We must compare (1 Corinthians 2:13). God's Word is like a kaleidoscope with many combinations. In addition to our search and meditation of one particular passage, we must compare passages together, in order to arrive at the full meaning of the Word which has been given to us in "many parts and many manners" (Hebrews 1:1). The various aspects of truth are thus seen in their entirety and proportion, and our spiritual life becomes fully informed and completely equipped. There are so many topics or subjects scattered throughout God's Word, that only as we collect and compare them can we appreciate the fulness and glory of God's revelation.

All that has been said may be summed up in the words of Job: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food"; and of Jeremiah: "Thy words were found and I did eat them"' and of the Psalmist: "How sweet are thy words to my taste!" The Bible must be our daily food if we are to be strong and vigorous. Not quantity, but quality, determines the nutritive value of food. What we must emphasize is capacity to receive, power to assimilate, and readiness to reproduce. As some one has well put it, the process is threefold — infusion, suffusion, transfusion. The Word thus becomes all-sufficient and all-powerful in our life — the mirror to reveal (James 1:1-27); the water to cleanse (Ephesians 5:1-33); the milk to nourish (1 Peter 2:1-25); the strong meat to invigorate (Hebrews 5:1-14); the honey to delight (Psalms 119:1-176); the fire to warm (Jeremiah 23:1-40); the hammer to break and fasten (Jeremiah 23:1-40); the sword to fight (Ephesians 6:1-24); the seed to grow (Matthew 13:1-58); the lamp to guide (Psalms 119:1-176); the statute-book to legislate (Psalms 119:1-176); and the gold to treasure in time and for eternity (Psalms 19:1-14).

Chapter 101

02.00. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ Article by W. H. Griffith Thomas*

Contents:

1. First Proof: The Life of Jesus:

2. Second Proof: The Empty Grave:

3. Third Proof: Transformation of the Disciples:

4. Fourth Proof: Existence of the Primitive Church:

5. Fifth Proof: The Witness of Paul:

6. Sixth Proof: The Gospel Record:

7. Summary and Conclusion:

8. Theology of the Resurrection: The Resurrection has always been felt to be vital in connection with Christianity. As a consequence, opponents have almost always concentrated their attacks, and Christians have centered their defense, upon it. It is therefore of the utmost importance to give attention to the subject, as it appears in the New Testament. There are several converging lines of evidence, and none can be overlooked. Each must have its place and weight. The issues at stake are so serious that nothing must be omitted.

W. H. Griffith Thomas (1861-1924) was born and raised in England. He received his B.A. from King’s College, London and his D.D. from Oxford (in England Doctor of Divinity is an earned, not an honorary degree). He numbered T. E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia") and his brothers among his Greek students at Oxford, where he taught till coming to the New World. In Canada he taught at Wycliffe Hall, Toronto. Moving to Philadelphia as his headquarters, he maintained a wide writing and preaching ministry in North America, Britain, and elsewhere. He was a prime mover in the founding of Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924, the year he died.

02.01. First Proof: The Life of Jesus:

1. First Proof: The Life of Jesus: The first proof is the life of Jesus Christ Himself. It is always a disappointment when a life which commenced well finishes badly. We have this feeling even in fiction; instinct demands that a story should end well. Much more is this true of Jesus Christ. A perfect life characterized by divine claims ends in its prime in a cruel and shameful death. Is that a fitting close? Surely death could not end everything after such a noble career. The Gospels give the resurrection as the completion of the picture of Jesus Christ. There is no real doubt that Christ anticipated His own resurrection. At first He used only vague terms, such as, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." But later on He spoke plainly, and whenever He mentioned His death, He added, "The Son of man .... must be raised the third day." These references are too numerous to be overlooked, and, in spite of difficulties of detail, they are, in any proper treatment of the Gospels, an integral part of the claim made for Himself by Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:38-40; Matthew 16:21; Matthew 17:9, Matthew 17:23; Matthew 20:19; Matthew 27:63; Mark 8:31; Mark 9:9, Mark 9:31; Mark 10:34; Mark 14:58; Luke 9:22; Luke 18:33; John 2:19-21). His veracity is at stake if He did not rise. Surely the word of such a One must be given due credence. We are therefore compelled to face the fact that the resurrection of which the Gospels speak is the resurrection of no ordinary man, but of Jesus--that is of One whose life and character had been unique, and for whose shameful death no proper explanation was conceivable (Denhey, Jesus and the Gospel 122 f). Is it possible that, in view of His perfect truthfulness of word and deed, there should be such an anti-climax as is involved in a denial of His assurance that He would rise again (C. H. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection 30)? Consider, too, the death of Christ in the light of His perfect life. If that death was the close of a life so beautiful, so remarkable, so Godlike, we are faced with an insoluble mystery--the permanent triumph of wrong over right, and the impossibility of believing in truth or justice in the world (C. H. Robinson, op. cit., 36). So the resurrection is not to be regarded as an isolated event, a fact in the history of Christ separated from all else. It must be taken in close connection with what precedes. The true solution of the problem is to be found in that estimate of Christ which "most entirely fits in with the totality of the facts" (Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus 14).

02.02. Second Proof: The Empty Grave:

2. Second Proof: The Empty Grave:

Another line of proof is the fact of the empty grave and the disappearance of the body. That Jesus died and was buried, and that on the third morning the tomb was empty, is not now seriously challenged. The theory of a swoon and a recovery in the tomb is impossible, and to it Strauss "practically gives its deathblow" (Orr, op. cit., 43). At Christ's burial a stone was rolled before the tomb, the tomb was sealed, and a guard was placed before it. Yet on the third morning the body had disappeared, and the tomb was empty. There are only two alternatives. His body must have been taken out of the grave by human hands or else by superhuman power. If the hands were human, they must have been those of His friends or of His foes. If His friends had wished to take out His body, the question at once arises whether they could have done so in the face of the stone, the seal and the guard. If His foes had contemplated this action, the question arises whether they would seriously have considered it. It is extremely improbable that any effort should have been made to remove the body out of the reach of the disciples. Why should His enemies do the very thing that would be most likely to spread the report of His resurrection? As Chrysostom said, "If the body had been stolen, they could not have stolen it naked, because of the delay in stripping it of the burial clothes and the trouble caused by the drugs adhering to it" (quoted in Day, Evidence for the Resurrection 35). Besides, the position of the grave-clothes proves the impossibility of the theft of the body (see Greek of John 20:6-7; John 11:44; Grimley, Temple of Humanity 69, 70; Latham, The Risen Master; The Expository Times, XIII 293 f; XIV 510). How, too, is it possible to account for the failure of the Jews to disprove the resurrection? Not more than seven weeks afterward Peter preached in that city the fact that Jesus had been raised. What would have been easier or more conclusive than for the Jews to have produced the dead body and silenced Peter forever? "The silence of the Jews is as significant as the speech of the Christians" (Fairbairn, Studies in the Life of Christ 357). The fact of the empty tomb with the disappearance of the body remains a problem to be faced. It is now admitted that the evidence for the empty tomb is adequate, and that it was part of the primitive belief (Foundations 134, 154). It is important to realize the force of this admission, because it is a testimony to Paul's use of the term "third day" (see below) and to the Christian observance of the first day of the week. And yet in spite of this we are told that a belief in the empty tomb is impossible. By some writers the idea of resurrection is interpreted to mean the revival of Christ's spiritual influence on the disciples, which had been brought to a close by His death. It is thought that the essential idea and value of Christ's resurrection can be conserved, even while the belief in His bodily rising from the grave is surrendered (Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus 23). But how can we believe in the resurrection while we regard the basis of the primitive belief in it as a mistake, not to say a fraud? The disciples found the tomb empty, and on the strength of this they believed He had risen. How can the belief be true if the foundation be false? Besides, the various forms of the vision-theory are now gradually but surely being regarded as inadequate and impossible. They involve the change of almost every fact in the Gospel history, and the invention of new scenes and conditions of which the Gospels know nothing (Orr, op. cit.,

222). It has never been satisfactorily shown why the disciples should have had this abundant experience of visions; nor why they should have had it so soon after the death of Christ and within a strictly limited period; nor why it suddenly ceased. The disciples were familiar with the apparition of a spirit, like Samuel's, and with the resuscitation of a body, like Lazarus', but what they had not experienced or imagined was the fact of a spiritual body, the combination of body and spirit in an entirely novel way. So the old theory of a vision is now virtually set aside, and for it is substituted theory of a real spiritual manifestation of the risen Christ. The question at once arises whether this is not prompted by an unconscious but real desire to get rid of anything like a physical resurrection. Whatever may be true of unbelievers, this is an impossible position for those who believe Christ is alive.

Even though we may be ready to admit the reality of telepathic communication, it is impossible to argue that this is equivalent to the idea of resurrection. Psychical research has not proceeded far enough as yet to warrant arguments being built on it, though in any case it is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain material from this quarter which will answer to the conditions of the physical resurrection recorded in the New Testament. "The survival of the soul is not resurrection." "Whoever heard of a spirit being buried?" (Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus 229). In view of the records of the Gospels and the general testimony of the New Testament, it is impossible to be "agnostic" as to what happened at the grave of Jesus, even though we are quite sure that He who died now lives and reigns. It is sometimes said that faith is not bound up with, holding a particular view of the relations of Christ's present glory with the body that was once in Joseph's tomb, that faithis to be exercised in the exalted Lord, and that belief in a resuscitation of the human body is no vital part of it. It is no doubt true that faith today is to be exercised solely in the exalted and glorified Lord, but faith must ultimately rest on fact, and it is difficult to understand how Christian faith can really be "agnostic" with regard to the facts about the empty tomb and the risen body, which are so prominent in the New Testament, and which form an essential part of the apostolic witness. The attempt to set faith and historical evidence in opposition to each other, which is so marked a characteristic of much modern thought will never satisfy general Christian intelligence, and if there is to be any real belief in the historical character of the New Testament, it is impossible to be "agnostic" about facts that are writ so large on the face of the records. When once the evidence for the empty tomb is allowed to be adequate, the impossibility of any other explanation than that indicated in the New Testament is at once seen. The evidence must be accounted for and adequately explained. And so we come again to the insuperable barrier of the empty tomb, which, together with the apostolic witness, stands impregnable against all the attacks of visional and apparitional theories. It is becoming more evident that these theories are entirely inadequate to account for the records in the Gospels, as well as for the place and power of those Gospels in the early church and in all subsequent ages. The force of the evidence for the empty grave and the disappearance of the body is clearly seen by the explanations suggested by various modern writers (those of Oscar Holtzmann, K. Lake, and A. Meyer can be seen in Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus, chapter viii, and that of Reville in C. H. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection of Christ 69; see also the article by Streeter in Foundations). Not one of them is tenable without doing violence to the Gospel story, and also without putting forth new theories which are not only improbable in themselves, but are without a shred of real historical or literary evidence. The one outstanding fact which baffles all these writers is the empty grave.

Others suggest that resurrection means a real objective appearance of the risen Christ without implying any physical reanimation, that the "resurrection of Christ was an objective reality, but was not a physical resuscitation" (C. H. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection of Christ 12). But the difficulty here is as to the meaning of the term "resurrection." If it means a return from the dead, a rising again (re-), must there not have been some identity between that which was put in the tomb and the "objective reality" which appeared to the disciples? Wherein lies the essential difference between an objective vision and an objective appearance? If we believe the apostolic testimony to the empty tomb, why may we not accept their evidence to the actual resurrection? They evidently recognized their Master, and this recognition must have been due to some familiarity with His bodily appearance. No difficulty of conceiving of the resurrection of mankind hereafter must be allowed to set aside the plain facts of the record about Christ. It is, of course, quite clear that the resurrection body of Jesus was not exactly the same as when it was put in the tomb, but it is equally clear that there was definite identity as well as definite dissimilarity, and both elements must be faced and accounted for. There need be no insuperable difficulty if we believe that in the very nature of things Christ’s resurrection must be unique, and, since the life and work of Jesus Christ transcend our experience (as they certainly should do), we must not expect to bring them within the limitations of natural law and human history. How the resurrection body was sustained is a problem quite outside our ken, though the reference to "flesh and bones," compared with Paul’s words about "flesh and blood" not being able to enter the kingdom of God, may suggest that while the resurrection body was not constituted upon a natural basis through blood, yet that it possessed "all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature" (Church of England Article IV). We may not be able to solve the problem, but we must hold fast to all the facts, and these may be summed up by saying that the body was the same though different, different though the same. The true description of the resurrection seems to be that "it was an objective reality, but, that it was not merely a physical resuscitation." We are therefore brought back to a consideration of the facts recorded in the Gospels as to the empty tomb and the disappearance of the body, and we only ask for an explanation which will take into consideration all the facts recorded, and will do no violence to any part of the evidence. To predicate a new resurrection body in which Christ appeared to His disciples does not explain how in three days’ time the body which had been placed in the tomb was disposed of. Does not this theory demand a new miracle of its own (Kennett, Interpreter, V 271)?

02.03. Third Proof: Transformation of the Disciples:

3. Third Proof: Transformation of the Disciples: The next line of proof to be considered is the transformation of the disciples caused by the resurrection. They had seen their Master die, and through that death they lost all hope. Yet hope returned three days after. On the day of the crucifixion they were filled with sadness; on the first day of the week with gladness. At the crucifixion they were hopeless; on the first day of the week their hearts glowed with certainty. When the message of the resurrection first came they were incredulous and hard to be convinced, but when once they became assured they never doubted again. What could account for the astonishing change in these men in so short a time? The mere removal of the body from the grave could never have transformed their spirits and characters. Three days are not enough for a legend to spring up which should so affect them. Time is needed for a process of legendary growth. There is nothing more striking in the history of primitive Christianity than this marvelous change wrought in the disciples by a belief in the resurrection of their Master. It is a psychological fact that demands a full explanation. The disciples were prepared to believe in the appearance of a spirit, but they never contemplated the possibility of a resurrection (see Mark 16:11). Men do not imagine what they do not believe, and the women’s intention to embalm a corpse shows they did not expect His resurrection. Besides, a hallucination involving five hundred people at once, and repeated several times during forty days, is unthinkable.

02.04. Fourth Proof: Existence of the Primitive Church:

4. Fourth Proof: Existence of the Primitive Church: From this fact of the transformation of personal life in so incredibly short a space of time, we proceed to the next line of proof, the existence of the primitive church. "There is no doubt that the church of the apostles believed in the resurrection of their Lord" (Burkitt, The Gospel History and Its Transmission 74).

It is now admitted on all hands that the church of Christ came into existence as the result of a belief in the resurrection of Christ. When we consider its commencement, as recorded in the Book of the Ac of the Apostles, we see two simple and incontrovertible facts:

(1) the Christian society was gathered together by preaching;

(2) the substance of the preaching was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was put to death on a cross, and would therefore be rejected by Jews as accursed of God (Deuteronomy 21:23).

Yet multitudes of Jews were led to worship Him (Acts 2:41), and a great company of priests to obey Him (Acts 6:7). The only explanation of these facts is God’s act of resurrection (Acts 2:36), for nothing short of it could have led to the Jewish acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Messiah. The apostolic church is thus a result of a belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The early chapters of Ac bear the marks of primitive documents, and their evidence is unmistakable. It is impossible to allege that the early church did not know its own history, that myths and legends quickly grew up and were eagerly received, and that the writers of the Gospels had no conscience for principle, but manipulated their material at will, for any modern church could easily give an account of its history for the past fifty years or more (Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus 144). And it is simply absurd to think that the earliest church had no such capability. In reality there was nothing vague or intangible about the testimony borne by the apostles and other members of the church. "As the church is too holy for a foundation of rottenness, so she is too real for a foundation of mist" (Archbishop Alexander, The Great Question 10).

02.05. Fifth Proof: The Witness of Paul:

5. Fifth Proof: The Witness of Paul:

One man in the apostolic church must, however, be singled out as a special witness to the resurrection. The conversion and work of Saul of Tarsus is our next line of proof. Attention is first called to the evidence of his life and writings to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some years ago an article appeared (E. Medley, The Expositor, V, iv 359). inquiring as to the conception of Christ which would be suggested to a heathen inquirer by a perusal of Paul's earliest extant writing 1 Thessalonians. One point at least would stand out clearly--that Jesus Christ was killed (1 Thessalonians 2:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:14) and was raised from the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:14). As this Epistle is usually dated about 51 AD--that is, only about 22 years after the resurrection--and as the same Epistle plainly attributes to Jesus Christ the functions of God in relation to men (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 1 Thessalonians 3:11), we can readily see the force of this testimony to the resurrection. Then a few years later, in an epistle which is universally accepted as one of Paul's, we have a much fuller reference to the event. In the well-known chapter (1 Corinthians 15:1-58) where he is concerned to prove (not Christ's resurrection, but) the resurrection of Christians, he naturally adduces Christ's resurrection as his greatest evidence, and so gives a list of the various appearances of Christ, ending with one to himself, which he puts on an exact level with the others: "Last of all he was seen of me also." Now it is essential to give special attention to the nature and particularity of this testimony. "I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3 f). This, as it has often been pointed out, is our earliest authority for the appearances of Christ after the resurrection, and dates from within 30 years of the event itself. But there is much more than this: "He affirms that within 5 years of the crucifixion of Jesus he was taught that â€˜Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures' "(Kennett, Interpreter, V 267). And if we seek to appreciate the full bearing of this act and testimony we have a right to draw the same conclusion: "That within a very few years of the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus was, in the mind of at least one man of education, absolutely irrefutable" (Kennett, op. cit., V 267).

Besides, we find this narrative includes one small but significant statement which at once recalls a very definite feature of the Gospel tradition--the mention of "the third day." A reference to the passage in the Gospels where Jesus Christ spoke of His resurrection will show how prominent and persistent was this note of time. Why, then, should Paul have introduced it in his statement? Was it part of the teaching which he had "received"? What is the significance of this plain emphasis on the date of the resurrection? Is it not that it bears absolute testimony to the empty tomb? From all this it may be argued that Paul believed the story of the empty tomb at a date when the recollection was fresh, when he could examine it for himself, when he could make the fullest possible inquiry of others, and when the fears and opposition of enemies would have made it

impossible for the adherents of Jesus Christ to make any statement that was not absolutely true. "Surely common sense requires us to believe that that for which he so suffered was in his eyes established beyond the possibility of doubt" (Kennett, op. cit., V 271). In view, therefore, of Paul's personal testimony to his own conversion, his interviews with those who had seen Jesus Christ on earth before and after His resurrection, and the prominence given to the resurrection in the apostle's own teaching, we may challenge attention afresh to this evidence for the resurrection. It is well known that Lord Lyttelton and his friend Gilbert West left Oxford University at the close of one academic year, each determining to give attention respectively during the long vacation to the conversion of Paul and the resurrection of Christ, in order to prove the baselessness of both. They met again in the autumn and compared experiences. Lord Lyttelton had become convinced of the truth of Paul's conversion, and Gilbert West was convinced of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If, therefore, Paul's 25 years of suffering and service for Christ were a reality, his conversion was true, for everything he did began with that sudden change. And if his conversion was true, Jesus Christ rose from the dead, for everything Paul was and did he attributed to the sight of the risen Christ.

02.06. Sixth Proof: The Gospel Record:

6. Sixth Proof: The Gospel Record: The next line of proof of the resurrection is the record in the Gospels of the appearances of the risen Christ, and it is the last in order to be considered. By some writers it is put first, but this is in forgetfulness of the dates when the Gospels were written. The resurrection was believed in by the Christian church for a number of years before our Gospels were written, and it is therefore impossible for these records to be our primary and most important evidence. We must get behind them if we are to appreciate fully the force and variety of the evidence. It is for this reason that, following the proper logical order, we have reserved to the last our consideration of the appearances of the risen Christ as given in the Gospels. The point is one of great importance (Denney, Jesus and the Gospel 111).

Now, with this made clear, we proceed to consider the evidence afforded by the records of the post-resurrection appearances of Christ. Modern criticism of the Gospels during recent years has tended to adopt the view that Mark is the earliest, and that Matthew and Luke are dependent on it. This is said to be "the one solid result" (W. C. Allen, "St. Matthew," International Critical Commentary, Preface, vii; Burkitt, The Gospel History 37) of the literary criticism of the Gospels. If this is so, the question of the records of the resurrection becomes involved in the difficult problem about the supposed lost ending of Mark, which, according to modern criticism, would thus close without any record of an appearance of the risen Christ. On this point, however, two things may be said at the present juncture: (1) There are some indications that the entire question of the criticism of the Gospels is to be reopened (Ramsay, Luke the Physician, chapter ii; see also Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus 63 ff). (2) Even if the current theory be accepted, it would not seriously weaken the intrinsic force of the evidence for the resurrection, because, after all, Mark does not invent or "doctor" his material, but embodies the common apostolic tradition of his time (Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus 62).

We may, therefore, meanwhile examine the record of the appearances without finding them essentially affected by any particular theory of the origin and relations of the Gospels. There are two sets of appearances, one in Jerusalem and the other in Galilee, and their number, and the amplitude and weight of their testimony should be carefully estimated. While we are precluded by our space from examining each appearance minutely, and indeed it is unnecessary for our purpose to do so, it is impossible to avoid calling attention to two of them. No one can read the story of the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:1-53), or of the visit of Peter and John to the tomb (John 20:1-31), without observing the striking marks of reality and personal testimony in the accounts. As to the former incident: "It carries with it, as great literary critics have pointed out, the deepest inward evidences of its own literal truthfulness. For it so narrates the intercourse of â€˜a risen God' with commonplace men as to set natural and supernatural side by side in perfect harmony. And to do this has always been the difficulty, the despair of imagination. The alternative has been put reasonably thus: Luke was either a greater poet, a more creative genius, than Shakespeare, or--he did not create the record. He had an advantage over Shakespeare. The ghost in Hamlet was an effort of laborious imagination. The risen Christ on the road was a fact supreme, and the

Evangelist did but tell it as it was" (Bishop Moule, Meditations for the Church's Year 108). Other writers whose attitude to the Gospel records is very different bear the same testimony to the impression of truth and reality made upon them by the Emmaus narrative (A. Meyer and K. Lake, quoted in Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus 176 f).

It is well known that there are difficulties connected with the number and order of these appearances, but they are probably due largely to the summary character of the story, and certainly are not sufficient to invalidate the uniform testimony to the two facts: (1) the empty grave, (2) the appearances of Christ on the third day. These are the main facts of the combined witness (Orr, op. cit., 212). The very difficulties which have been observed in the Gospels for nearly nineteen centuries are a testimony to a conviction of the truth of the narratives on the part of the whole Christian church. The church has not been afraid to leave these records as they are because of the facts that they embody and express. If there had been no difficulties men might have said that everything had been artificially arranged, whereas the differences bear testimony to the reality of the event recorded. The fact that we possess these two sets of appearances--one in Jerusalem and one in Galilee--is really an argument in favor of their credibility, for if it had been recorded that Christ appeared in Galilee only, or Jerusalem only, it is not unlikely that the account might have been rejected for lack of support. It is well known that records of eyewitnesses often vary in details, while there is no question as to the events themselves. The various books recording the story of the Indian mutiny, or the surrender of Napoleon III at Sedan are cases in point, and Sir William Ramsay has shown the entire compatibility of certainty as to the main fact with great uncertainty as to precise details (Ramsay, Paul the Traveler 29). We believe, therefore, that a careful examination of these appearances will afford evidence of a chain of circumstances extending from the empty grave to the day of the ascension.

02.07. Summary and Conclusion:

7. Summary and Conclusion: When we examine carefully all these converging lines of evidence and endeavor to give weight to all the facts of the case, it seems impossible to escape from the problem of a physical miracle. That the prima facie view of the evidence afforded by the New Testament suggests a miracle and that the apostles really believed in a true physical resurrection are surely beyond all question. And yet very much of present-day thought refuses to accept the miraculous. The scientific doctrine of the uniformity and continuity of Nature bars the way, so that from the outset it is concluded that miracles are impossible. We are either not allowed to believe (see Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus 44), or else we are told that we are not required to believe (C. H. Robinson, Studies in the Resurrection of Christ, chapter ii), margin, the reanimation of a dead body. If we take this view, "there is no need, really, for investigation of evidence: the question is decided before the evidence is looked at" (Orr, op. cit., 46).

We challenge the tenableness of this position. It proves too much. We are not at all concerned by the charge of believing in the abnormal or unusual. New things have happened from the beginning of the present natural order, and the Christian faith teaches that Christ Himself was a "new thing," and that His coming as "God manifest in the flesh" was something absolutely unique. If we are not allowed to believe in any divine intervention which we may call supernatural or miraculous, it is impossible to account for the Person of Christ at all. "A Sinless Personality would be a miracle in time." Arising out of this, Christianity itself was unique, inaugurating a new era in human affairs. No Christian, therefore, can have any difficulty in accepting the abnormal, the unusual, the miraculous. If it be said that no amount of evidence can establish a fact which is miraculous, we have still to account for the moral miracles which are really involved and associated with the resurrection, especially the deception of the disciples, who could have found out the truth of the case; a deception, too, that has proved so great a blessing to the world. Surely to those who hold a true theistic view of the world this a priori view is impossible. Are we to refuse to allow to God at least as much liberty as we possess ourselves? Is it really thinkable that God has less spontaneity of action than we have? We may like or dislike, give or withhold, will or not will, but the course of Nature must flow on unbrokenly. Surely God cannot be conceived of as having given such a constitution to the universe as limits His power to intervene if necessary and for sufficient purpose with the work of His own hands. Not only are all things of Him, but all things are through Him, and to Him. The resurrection means the presence of miracle, and "there is no evading the issue with which this confronts us" (Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus 53). Unless, therefore, we are prepared to accept the possibility of the miraculous, all explanation of the New Testament evidence is a pure waste of time. Of recent years attempts have been made to account for the resurrection by means of ideas derived from Babylonian and other Eastern sources. It is argued that mythology provides the key to the problem, that not only analogy but derivation is to be found. But apart from the remarkable variety of conclusions of Babylonian archaeologists there is nothing in the way of historical proof worthy of the name. The whole idea is arbitrary and baseless, and prejudiced by the attitude to the supernatural. There is literally no link of connection between these oriental cults

and the Jewish and Christian beliefs in the resurrection. And so we return to a consideration of the various lines of proof. Taking them singly, they must be admitted to be strong, but taking them altogether, the argument is cumulative and sufficient. Every effect must have its adequate cause, and the only proper explanation of Christianity today is the resurrection of Christ. Thomas Arnold of Rugby, no ordinary judge of historical evidence, said that the resurrection was the "best-attested fact in human history." Christianity welcomes all possible sifting, testing, and use by those who honestly desire to arrive at the truth, and if they will give proper attention to all the facts and factors involved, we believe they will come to the conclusion expressed years ago by the Archbishop of Armagh, that the resurrection is the rock from which all the hammers of criticism have never chipped a single fragment (The Great Question 24).

02.08. Theology of the Resurrection:

8. Theology of the Resurrection: The theology of the resurrection is very important and calls for special attention. Indeed, the prominence given to it in the New Testament affords a strong confirmation of the fact itself, for it seems incredible that such varied and important truths should not rest on historic fact. The doctrine may briefly be summarized:

(1) evidential: the resurrection is the proof of the atoning character of the death of Christ, and of His Deity and divine exaltation (Romans 1:4)

2) evangelistic: the primitive gospel included testimony to the resurrection as one of its characteristic features, thereby proving to the hearers the assurance of the divine redemption (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 4:25);

(3) spiritual: the resurrection is regarded as the source and standard of the holiness of the believer. Every aspect of the Christian life from the beginning to the end is somehow associated therewith (Romans 6:1-23); (4) eschatological: the resurrection is the guaranty and model of the believer’s resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-58). As the bodies of the saints arose (Matthew 27:52), so ours are to be quickened (Romans 8:11), and made like Christ’s glorified body (Php 3:21), thereby becoming spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15:44), that is, bodies ruled by their spirits and yet bodies.

These points offer only the barest outline of the fullness of New Testament teaching concerning the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ.

LITERATURE.

James Orr, The Resurrection of Jesus 1908;

W. J. Sparrow Simpson, The Resurrection and Modern Thought;

Westcott, The Historic Faith and The Gospel of the Resurrection.

Very full literary references in Bowen, The Resurrection in the New Testament 1911, which, although negative in its own conclusions, contains a valuable refutation of many negative arguments.

* W. H. Griffith Thomas, "Resurrection of Jesus Christ", International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia. Edited by James Orr (1913).

Chapter 110

03.0.1 The Prayers of St. Paul

THE PRAYERS OF ST. PAUL BY THE REV. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

PROFESSOR OF OLD TESTAMENT LITERATURE AND EXEGESIS WYCLIFFE COLLEGE, TORONTO NEW YORK CHARLES SCRIBNER’S SONS 1914

03.00.3 CURRENT COPYRIGHT STATUS

CURRENT COPYRIGHT STATUS

Reviews of both the Stanford University and Rutgers University copyright renewal databases on March 25, 2010 found no copyrights for this work.

Chapter 112

03.00.4 ABOUT THE SHORT COURSE SERIES

ABOUT THE SHORT COURSE SERIES THE PRAYERS OF ST. PAUL

GENERAL PREFACE The title of the present series is a sufficient indication of its purpose. Few preachers, or congregations, will face the long courses of expository lectures which characterised the preaching of the past, but there is a growing conviction on the part of some that an occasional short course, of six or eight connected studies on one definite theme, is a necessity of their mental and ministerial life. It is at this point the projected series would strike in. It would suggest to those who are mapping out a scheme of work for the future a variety of subjects which might possibly be utilised in this way. The appeal, however, will not be restricted to ministers or preachers. The various volumes will meet the needs of laymen and Sabbath-school teachers who are interested in a scholarly but also practical exposition of Bible history and doctrine. In the hands of office-bearers and mission-workers the "Short Course Series" may easily become one of the most convenient and valuable of Bible helps.

It need scarcely be added that while an effort has been made to secure, as far as possible, a general uniformity in the scope and character of the series, the final responsibility for the special interpretations and opinions introduced into the separate volumes, rests entirely with the individual contributors. A detailed list of the authors and their subjects will be found at the close of each volume.

Volumes Already Published

A Cry for Justice: A Study in Amos. By Prof. JOHN E. MCFADYEN, D.D.

The Beatitudes. By Rev. ROBERT H. FISHER, D.D.

The Lenten Psalms. By the EDITOR.

The Psalm of Psalms. By Prof. JAMES STALKER, D.D.

The Song and the Soil. By Prof. W. G. JORDAN, D.D.

The Higher Powers of the Soul. By Rev. GEORGE M’HARDY, D.D.

Jehovah-Jesus. By Rev. THOMAS WHITELAW, D.D.

The Sevenfold I Am By Rev. THOMAS MARJORIBANKS, B.D.

The Man Among the Myrtles. By the EDITOR.

The Story of Joseph. By Rev. ADAM C. WELCH, B.D., Th.D.

The Divine Drama of Job. By Rev. CHARLES F. AKED, D.D.

A Mirror of the Soul: Studies in the Psalter. By Rev. CANON VAUGHAN, M.A.

In the Upper Room. By Rev. D. J. BURRILL, D.D., LL.D.

The Son of Man. By ANDREW C. ZENOS, D.D., LL.D.

The Joy of Finding. By Rev. ALFRED E. GARVIE.

The Prayers of St. Paul. By Rev. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

The Short Course Series EDITED BY REV. JOHN ADAMS, B.D.

03.00.5 TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS I. GRACE AND HOLINESS 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 II. CONSECRATION AND PRESERVATION 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 III. APPROBATION AND BLESSING 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 IV. LOVE AND PEACE 2 Thessalonians 3:5, R.V.; 2 Thessalonians 3:16 V. KNOWLEDGE AND OBEDIENCE Colossians 1:9-12 VI. CONFLICT AND COMFORT Colossians 2:1-2 VII. WISDOM AND REVELATION Ephesians 1:15-19 VIII. STRENGTH AND INDWELLING Ephesians 3:14-19 IX. LOVE AND DISCERNMENT Php 1:9-11

APPENDIX

03.00.6 INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

One of the most valuable elements in the Epistles of St. Paul is their revelation of the writer's spiritual life. While they are necessarily doctrinal and theological, dealing with the fundamental realities of the Christian religion, they are also intensely personal, and express very much of the Apostle's own experience. They depict in a marked degree the sources and characteristics of the spiritual life. This is especially seen when the various prayers, thanksgivings, doxologies, and personal testimonies are considered.

03.01-I. GRACE AND HOLINESS.

I. GRACE AND HOLINESS.

"Now God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."-- 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13.

There are few more precious subjects for meditation and imitation than the prayers and intercessions of the great Apostle. He was a man of action because he was first and foremost a man of prayer. To him both aspects of the well-known motto were true: "To pray is to labour," and "To labour is to pray."

There is no argument for or justification of prayer; nor even an explanation. It is assumed to be the natural and inevitable expression of spiritual life. Most of the Apostle’s prayers of which we have a record are concerned with other people rather than with himself, and they thus reveal to us indirectly but very really what St. Paul felt to be the predominant needs of the spiritual life. In this series of studies we propose to look at some of these prayers, and to consider their direct bearing upon our own lives. Taking the Epistles in what is generally regarded to be their chronological order, we naturally commence with the prayer found in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13. In this passage we have what is not often found, a prayer for himself associated with prayer for others.

1. HIS PRAYER FOR HIMSELF (1 Thessalonians 3:11).

Let us notice Who it is to Whom he prays--"God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ." The association of Christ with God as One to Whom prayer is addressed is of course very familiar to us, but it ought never to be forgotten that when the Apostle penned these words the association was both striking and significant. For consider: these words were written within twenty-five years of our Lord’s earthly life and ascension, and yet here is this quiet but clear association of Him with the Father, thus testifying in a very remarkable and convincing way to His Godhead as the Hearer of prayer. And this fact is still more noticeable in the original, for St. Paul in this verse breaks one of the familiar rules of grammar, whether of Greek or English. It is well known that whenever there are two nouns to a verb the verb must be in the plural; and yet here the Greek word "direct" is in the singular, notwithstanding the fact that there are two subjects, the Father and Christ. The same feature is to be found in 2 Thessalonians 2:17. It is evident from this what St. Paul thought of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is in such simple, indirect testimonies that we find the strongest and most convincing proofs that the early Church believed in the Deity of our Lord.

Let us consider what it is for which he prays--"Direct our way." He asks for guidance. There had been certain difficulties in the way of his return to Thessalonica. He had been hindered, and now asks that God would open the way for him to go back to his beloved friends. Nothing was outside

the Apostle’s relationship to God, and nothing was too small about which to pray to God. As it has been well said: "Nothing is so small that we do not honour God by asking His guidance of it, or insult Him by taking it out of His hands." The need of guidance is a very real one in every Christian life, and the certainty of guidance is just as real. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" (Psalms 37:23); and this is as true now as ever. "I will guide thee with Mine eye" (Psalms 32:8) is a promise for all time, and we may confidently seek guidance in prayer whenever it is needed. The answer to our prayer will come in a threefold way. God guides us by His Spirit, reigning supreme within our hearts. He also guides us by the counsels and principles of His Word. These two agree in one, for the Holy Spirit never guides contrary to the Word. And then, in the third place, He guides us by His Providence, so that when the Word, the Spirit, and Providence in daily circumstances agree we may be sure that the guidance has been given.

2. HIS PRAYER FOR OTHERS (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13).

Consider the immediate request he makes--"The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men." He asks for love on their behalf, that God would grant them this greatest of all gifts--"the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before Him." Love in the New Testament is no mere sentiment, for it involves self-sacrifice. It is not limited to emotion; it expresses itself in energy. It does not evaporate in feeling; it expresses itself in fact. "Love is of God," for "God is love"; and the Apostle in praying this prayer asks for the supreme gift of their lives. The measure of the gift is noticeable--"Increase and abound in love." The "increase" has to do with their inner life, their hearts being more and more enlarged in capacity to possess this love; the "abounding" has to do with their outward life, and points to the overflow of that love towards others.

Consider, too, the objects of this love--"Toward one another, and toward all men." There was, first of all, the special love to be shown toward Christians, according to the "new commandment" (John 13:34). In the New Testament the emphasis is laid again and again upon brother-love, or love of the brethren, and the brotherhood. This was something entirely new in the world’s history--a new tie or bond, the union of hearts in Christ Jesus. To see how these Christians loved one another was a proof of this new affection based upon the new commandment. But, further, their love was to extend beyond their fellow-Christians--even to "all men," just as we have in St. Peter’s Epistle, in that long chain of graces, first, love of the brethren, and then, love towards all (2 Peter 1:7). And yet it may perhaps be asked, How is it possible for us to love everybody? What about those who are not lovely and lovable--how can we love these? It may help us to remember that there is a clear distinction between loving and liking. While it is impossible to like everybody, it is assuredly possible to love everybody. A mother loves her wayward son, but she cannot like him, for there is practically nothing "alike" between them. In the same way we may love with the love of compassion if we cannot love with the love of complacency, and thus fulfil our Lord’s command and realise the answer to the Apostle’s prayers. This, we may be perfectly certain, is the supreme thing, and our Christianity will count for nothing in the eyes of men if it is not permeated and energised through and through with active, whole-hearted, Christ-like love.

Consider the ultimate purpose he expresses--"To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness." The love for which he prays is to be expressed in holiness. The meaning of holiness throughout the Old and New Testaments is "separateness." The idea is that

of a life separated unto God, dedicated, consecrated to His service. Wherever the words "holiness," "sanctification," and their associated and cognate expressions are found, the root idea is always that of separation rather than of purification. It involves the whole-hearted and entire dedication of the life to God. The cognate word "saint" does not strictly mean "one who is pure," but "one who belongs to God." The sphere of this holiness is to be in "your hearts." It is always to be noticed that in Scripture the "heart" includes the intellect, the emotions, and the will. In a word, it is the centre of our moral and spiritual being; and when this is understood we can see at once the point and importance of the heart being holy, for it is only another way of saying that our entire being is to be separated from all else in order to be possessed by, and consecrated to, God. The standard of holiness is also brought before us in this prayer--"Stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness." The Apostle prays that they may be steadfast, not weak and vacillating. The great need was for solidity and steadfastness, as it is in the present day, for it is only when the heart is established by grace and in holiness that it can in any true sense serve God. This emphasis on a fixed or stablished heart is brought before us several times in Holy Scripture (cf. Psalms 57:7; Psalms 108:1; Psalms 112:7; Hebrews 13:9). And steadfast hearts will be "unblameable" hearts, hearts that are not blameworthy. A clear distinction is to be drawn between unblameable hearts and unblemished hearts. A little child may perform a task which in the result is full of blemishes, though the child, having done his best, is entirely without blame. In like manner, though the believer is not free from blemish, it is nevertheless possible for him to live free from blame. This is the meaning of the Apostle, and the reason of his prayer. In all this we can see the close connection between love and holiness. When our hearts are filled to overflowing with the love of God to us, and of our love to Him, the inevitable result is holiness, a heart separated unto God, "strengthened with all might," and "ready unto every good work."

Consider the great incentive he urges--"Before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." The Apostle puts before his readers the great future to which they were to look, and he urges upon them this love and this holiness in the light of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and all that it will mean to the people of God. St. Paul draws a wonderful picture of that day in a very few words. He speaks first of all of God’s presence there: "Before God, even our Father." Then he reminds us of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And last of all he tells us that "the saints" will be there also. Thus, surrounded by our fellow-Christians, and in the presence of our God and Saviour, we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known, with hearts "unblameable in holiness."

This, then, is what the Apostle prays for his beloved friends in Thessalonica--abounding love and perfect holiness. This is Christianity and the normal Christian life. How simple it all is, summed up in the words Love and Holiness. And yet how searching it is! The simplest things are often the most difficult, and while it is possible for the believer to do great things and to shine in great crises, it is not always so easy to go on loving day by day, and to continue growing in grace and holiness, until the heart becomes so stablished in grace that our Christianity becomes the permanent character of our life. Yet this is God’s purpose for each one of us. And the fact that the Apostle prayed for this is a clear proof that an answer was expected, and that the purpose can be realised.

03.02-II. CONSECRATION AND PRESERVATION.

II. CONSECRATION AND PRESERVATION.

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, Who also will do it."-- 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. As we consider these prayers of the Apostle, we become increasingly aware of what he felt to be the most important elements in the Christian life. The prayers all have reference to Christian living, and whether we think of the character of the life portrayed, or the standard held up in them, we can readily see their intense practical value for daily living. We may be pretty sure that those things for which he prayed on behalf of his converts were the things he regarded as most essential in Christian character and conduct. The prayer that now calls for consideration is that found in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.

1. THE PETITION.

He prays for their sanctification--"Sanctify you wholly." As already noted, the root idea of sanctification, and of its cognate expressions, "holiness," "holy," and the like, is separation. We see this very clearly in connection with buildings or things which are said to be "holy" or "sanctified." It is obvious that no thought of purification is applicable to buildings and inanimate objects. We must, therefore, understand sanctification in this case as equivalent to consecration. This is also the root-meaning of the word "sanctify" in relation to persons, and it may be questioned whether the word, as used in the original, ever really includes in it the idea of purification; the latter thought has another set of words altogether. The Apostle therefore prays that they may be consecrated, set apart from all else, for the possession and service of God. This meaning may be aptly illustrated from our Lord’s words about Himself: "For their sakes I consecrate Myself, that they also may be consecrated through the truth" (John 17:19). The extent of this consecration is very noteworthy--"Sanctify you wholly." The word rendered "wholly" is used in connection with the Old Testament sacrifices in the Septuagint, and implies the entire and complete separation of the offering for the purpose intended. The Christian life must be wholly, entirely, and unreservedly consecrated to God, no part being reserved or held back, but everything handed over and regarded as permanently and completely belonging to Him.

He prays for their preservation--"Preserved blameless." The consecration is to be maintained in continual preservation, in and for God. The consecration as an act is to be deepened into an attitude, so that, day by day, and hour by hour, the separated life may be maintained, and preserved in readiness for every call that God may make. The extent of this preservation is also observable--"Your whole spirit and soul and body." The spirit is that inmost part of our life which is related to God. The soul is the inner life regarded in itself, as the seat and sphere of intellect, heart, and will. The body is the outward vehicle and expression of the soul and spirit through which we are enabled to serve God. The order of these three should be observed. It is not, as we often say, and sing in certain hymns, "body, soul, and spirit," but the very reverse--"spirit, soul, and body." The Apostle starts from within and works outward, thereby reminding us that if the spirit or

deepest part of our nature is wholly surrendered to God, this fact will express itself in every part of our nature, and we shall be consecrated wholly. What a searching requirement this is, and what a solemnity and responsibility it gives to life! Whether in relation to God, or in relation to man, whether for worship or work, character or conduct, prayer or practice, we are to be wholly consecrated, and continually kept for the Master's use-- "That all my powers with all their might, In Thy sole glory may unite."

2. THE PRE-REQUISITE.

"The God of Peace Himself." The Divine title associated with this prayer as its definite presupposition and pre-requisite is very significant, as, indeed, is every title of God. There is always some special point of direct connection between the way in which God is addressed and the prayer that follows. In the present instance the prayer for consecration and preservation is addressed to "The God of Peace Himself." The Apostle lays special stress upon the fact that it is God "Himself" Who consecrates and keeps us. As with salvation, so with consecration--it is and must be Divine. The work is entirely beyond any mere human power, and while there is a truth in our frequent reference to consecration as something that we ourselves have to effect, it is far more scriptural, and, therefore, much more helpful, to endeavour to limit the idea of consecration to the Divine side, and to think of it as an act of God, to which the corresponding human act and attitude is that of dedication. It is God Himself Who separates us, marks us off as His own, and designates us for His use and service. It is God Himself, and no one else, for we are here brought into personal and blessed association with the Divine power and grace.

Further, God is described as "The God of Peace," and we naturally ask what it means, and why peace is thus associated with consecration and preservation. This title, "The God of Peace," is found very frequently in the writings of St. Paul, and it deserves careful consideration in each passage. There is a twofold peace in Scripture, sometimes described as "peace with God" (Romans 5:1), at others as "the peace of God" (Php 4:7); and they both have their source in the "God of Peace" (Php 4:9). Peace is the result of reconciliation with God. Our Lord made peace by the Blood of His Cross (Colossians 1:20), and the acceptance of His atoning sacrifice through faith brings peace to the soul. This consciousness of reconciliation in turn causes a blessed sense of restfulness and peace to spring up in the heart, and thus we have the peace of God within us. The connection between peace and holiness is close and essential. It is impossible for anyone to understand consecration until they have experienced reconciliation. Holiness must be based on righteousness, and righteousness is only possible to those who have accepted the Lord Jesus as God's righteousness through faith. So long as there is any enmity in the heart, or even any uncertainty as to our acceptance in Christ Jesus, holiness is an impossibility. May not the forgetfulness of this fact be the cause of surprise and disappointment at Christian Conventions from time to time? May it not be that many go to such gatherings longing to be made holy who have not settled this question of their standing before God and their peace as the result of acceptance of Christ's atonement? To understand and experience what holiness means before enjoying peace with God is like trying to take a second step before attempting the first. Only through peace can holiness come, and only as we have blessed personal experience of God as the God of peace can a prayer like this be answered.

3. THE PROSPECT.

"Unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Once again the Apostle prays with special reference to that glorious day to which he was always looking and pointing his readers. As he looks forward to that day he uses again a favourite word, "blameless," and suggests to us the great and wonderful possibility of being so consecrated and preserved that we may lead a blameless life day by day until the coming of our Lord. Holiness is thus associated once again with the great future. The Apostle finds in the coming of the Lord one of the most potent reasons why Christians should be consecrated and preserved. This close and intimate connection between holiness, and what we term the Second Advent, needs much stronger emphasis in daily living and in church teaching than it often has in the present day. There is, in its way, nothing more powerful as a reason for holiness than the thought of the certainty and imminence of the Lord’s coming.

4. THE PROMISE.

"Faithful is He that calleth you, Who also will do it." Lest we should be tempted to think that so wonderful a prayer could not be fulfilled in daily experience, the Apostle adds this blessed assurance that God, Who puts this ideal before us, will enable us to realise it. The promise is undoubted--"Who also will do it." What He has promised He is also able to perform. If only our hearts are right with Him, and are willing to say, "Yea, let Him take all," God will, indeed, consecrate and preserve us blameless unto the end. The guarantee of this lies in His Divine faithfulness. "Faithful is He that calleth you." We are touching the bed-rock of Divine revelation when we contemplate the faithfulness of God. This phrase is often found in the New Testament: "God is faithful." "The Lord is faithful." "Faithful is He." "This is a faithful saying." If our hearts will only rest upon this we shall find in it, not only the most exquisite joy and assured peace, but also the ground of our perfect confidence that He will accomplish His purposes in us, and glorify Himself in our lives.

It is well and necessary from time to time to look at holiness from the human point of view, and to see our duty and responsibility; but it is equally essential and important that we should also dwell upon holiness, as in the passage before us, from the Divine standpoint, and keep well in view the glorious realities of God’s faithfulness, God’s power, God’s grace. To be occupied unduly with self in the matter of holiness is to become self-centred, morbid, fearful, and weak; to be occupied with God is to be restful, quiet, strong, confident, and ever growing in grace.

03.03-III. APPROBATION AND BLESSING.

III. APPROBATION AND BLESSING.

"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."-- 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Two words sum up the Christian life--Grace and Glory; and both are associated with the two Comings of the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace particularly with the first Coming, and Glory especially with the second. This twofold aspect of Christianity comes before us in the prayer of the Apostle which we now have to consider.

1. THE REASON OF THE PRAYER. This thought is brought before us very clearly in the Revised Version: "To which end we also pray." In the Authorised Version it is: "Wherefore also we pray." Following the original, the R.V. refers definitely to what has preceded. The whole context is a reason for the prayer which now follows. The Triumphant Future is part of the reason of his prayer. "When He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believe in that day." The Apostle looks forward to "the crowning day" that is coming, and bases upon this glorious hope the prayer that follows. The Testing Present is another part of the reason for this prayer. The Church of Thessalonica was suffering persecutions and afflictions, and was passing through the fire of testing (2 Thessalonians 1:4-7); and it was this fact--their then-existing severe experiences--that prompted the Apostle to pray for them, as well as to express the hope concerning their deliverance from the furnace of affliction.

Thus present and future are blended in his thought, and form the ground or reason of his intercession.

2. THE NATURE OF THE PRAYER.

Two elements sum up this beautiful prayer.

He asks for the Divine Approval on their life: "That God may count you worthy of your calling." God’s "calling" is His summons into His kingdom. The kingdom may be regarded both as present and future. In the Gospels it would seem as though the "calling" were limited to His invitation or appeal, while in the Epistles it appears to include the believer’s response to the call. For this reason it is sometimes spoken of as God’s "calling," and at others, as in this case, as "your calling." The thought of a Divine calling responded to by the believer is prominent in the teaching of St. Paul, and should be carefully studied. Even in these Epistles to the Thessalonians, the idea is frequently found (1 Thessalonians 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:14).

"Count you worthy" is a notable phrase repeated from 2 Thessalonians 1:5 : "Counted worthy of the kingdom of God." Seven times this verb is used by St. Paul. As we ponder it we catch

something of the wondrous glory of our life as contemplated by the King of Kings. Surely, it may be said, the believer can never be "worthy"; and this is true if he is considered in himself. But just as it is with justification, which means "accounted just," so with sanctification--by the unspeakable grace of God we are actually "counted worthy." Hooker's well-known words about justification may be quoted in this connection as illustrating the thought of worthiness in sanctification. "God doth justify the believing man, yet not for the worthiness of his belief, but for His worthiness Who is believed." So we may say, God doth count the believing man worthy, yet not for any personal worthiness, but for the worthiness which is wrought by grace. We must, however, not fail to notice that the believer is responsible for his use of grace, and that the very thought of God counting us worthy has included in it the thought of scrutiny with a view to decision.

He seeks the Divine Blessing on their life: "And fulfil every desire of goodness and every work of faith with power." This, which is the rendering of the R.V., seems, on the whole, the more intelligible and appropriate. It means, "all that goodness can desire, and all that faith can effect." It blends together the two ideas of aspiration and activity--the aspiration of goodness and the activity of trust--and it prays that God would fulfil with power, or powerfully, every aspiration that comes from goodness, and every activity that springs from faith. Just as in the familiar words of the Collect for Easter Day, God first puts into "our minds good desires," and then by His "continual help" we are enabled to "bring the same to good effect." By "His holy inspiration we think those things that are good, and by His merciful guiding we perform the same."

3. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PRAYER.

Notice the twofold consequence here stated.

He expects that God will be glorified in us. Glory in the New Testament, and, indeed, in the whole Bible, is the outshining of splendour, and the Apostle seeks in answer to prayer that Christ may reveal in our lives the glory of His grace. This includes both our present and future lives. Christ is to be manifested by and glorified in us here, and He will be manifested by and glorified in us hereafter (2 Thessalonians 1:10). What an unspeakable privilege and what a profound responsibility lie in this simple fact that Christ is to shine forth from our lives, and that men around us are to see something of Christ as they associate with us. One of the most beautiful testimonies ever given to a Christian was that of a poor dying outcast girl to a lady who had befriended her: "I have not found it hard to think about God since I knew you."

He also expects that we shall be glorified in Christ. This is, in a way, more wonderful still. There is to be a reciprocal glory; and, actually, marvellous though it seems, we are to have our share of glory in Christ. This, again, has its application to the present, as well as to the future, for every life that is loyal to Christ is glorified in union and communion with Him. And in the great future it will be seen and known on every hand who have been faithful to their Lord and Master. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as stars in the kingdom of their Father."

4. THE GUARANTEE OF THE PRAYER. The Apostle scarcely ever prayed without reminding himself and his readers of the secret whereby prayer is answered. Accordingly he closes this prayer with a reminder that the guarantee of its fulfilment is the grace of God--"According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

God is the Source of all grace. How lovingly the Apostle speaks of "our God" and "our Lord Jesus" in this verse! Elsewhere in his Epistles we also find this appropriating phrase, "Our God" (1 Thessalonians 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 3:9; 1 Corinthians 6:11). As in the still more personal phrase, "My God," which we find about seven times in his writings, St. Paul expresses his consciousness of personal possession and the blessed reality of fellowship with God. "This God is our God," as the Psalmist says.

Christ is the Channel of grace. The Lord Jesus Christ being associated with God in this connection is a reminder that it is "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" as much as the grace of our God. He mediates grace to us, and through faith in Christ we are linked to God as the "God of all grace."

What a cheer and inspiration it is to have the assurance and guarantee that even a prayer like this, with its high standard and far-reaching possibilities, can and will be answered. Christianity provides not only an appeal, but a dynamic. He Who bids, enables; He Who calls, provides. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is at once a precept, a promise, a provision, and a power. The religions of the world often tell us to "Be good," but it is left for Christianity to proclaim that "He died to make us good." As a result, the Christian can say with Augustine: "Give what Thou commandest and then command what Thou wilt." That is: "Only give me the spiritual power, and then I can do anything that Thou requirest of me." As the Psalmist cried: "I will run in the path of Thy commandments, when Thou hast set my heart at liberty."

Thus the Christian life is at once a life of Grace and a life of Glory. "First Grace, then Glory." "No Grace, no Glory." "More Grace, more Glory." "If Grace, then Glory."

"Grace, ’tis a charming sound, Harmonious to the ear;

Heaven with the echo shall resound, And all the earth shall hear."

03.04-IV. LOVE AND PEACE.

IV. LOVE AND PEACE.

"The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ."-- 2 Thessalonians 3:5, R.V.

"The Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means."-- 2 Thessalonians 3:16.

It is striking to note the number of prayers in these two short Epistles to Thessalonica. They are probably the earliest of the Apostle’s writings, and the frequency of his prayers is a significant testimony to his thought for his converts and their needs.

Hardly less striking is the variety of the prayers, of which we have already had several proofs. There are still two prayers to be considered in the second Epistle, very terse petitions, yet full of suggestiveness and importance. It will be convenient to consider these two together, not only because of their brevity, but also because of the spiritual connection between them.

1. THE GOAL. The context of the prayer is noteworthy. The Apostle had been asking for their prayers, more particularly for deliverance from evil men. Then comes the strong assurance that God in His faithfulness would keep them from evil, together with the expression of his own personal confidence concerning them that they would be faithful to his counsels and commands. And then follows the prayer of our text in which he asks that their hearts may be directed to that Divine goal which is, and ever must be, the true home of the soul.

"Your hearts." Once again does the Apostle lay stress on this central reality of their spiritual and moral being. The heart is the citadel of the life, and the usage of the term in the Word of God must ever be kept clearly before us. It includes, as we have already seen, intellectual, emotional, and volitional elements. There is no such contrast in the New Testament between "the head" and "the heart" as we are now often accustomed to make, for intellect, feelings, and will are all comprised in the Biblical meaning. If, therefore, the heart is right, all else will be right. It was for this reason that Solomon gave the counsel to keep the heart "above all keeping," since "out of it are the issues of life."

"Into the love of God." The phrase seems to suggest the direction of the heart towards a goal--"Into the love." This must mean first and foremost the love of God to us, for this is the true goal and home of the soul. Home is at once a protection, a fellowship, and a joy. "There’s no place like home;" and there is no place like the love of God as a home for the soul. In that love we find constant protection, for all the refuge and safety of a true home are experienced there. In that love we find the fullest, truest fellowship, for "truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3) ; and we know also "the fellowship of the Holy Ghost." Not least of all, in this home of the soul, is perfect and permanent satisfaction. Just as when the door closes upon us and we know that we are within the privacy, comfort, cheer, and fellowship of home, we find blessed restfulness and satisfaction, so when the soul enters the home of God’s love it soon

realises the fulness of satisfaction, for it is "satisfied with favour, full with the blessing of the Lord." Love that is deep, unfathomable, constant, pure, unchanging, Divine, is our everlasting home. It is recorded that Spurgeon once saw a weathercock with the words on it, "God is love." On remarking to the owner that it was very inappropriate, since God's love did not change like a weathercock, he received the reply that the real meaning was, "God is love whichever way the wind blows." This is the experience of the believer. Whatever comes, wherever he is, he knows that "God is love."

It is possible, perhaps probable, that this phrase, "the love of God," may also include our love to God. At any rate, in several passages it is almost impossible to make a rigid distinction between the two ideas (cf. Romans 5:5). The one is the source of the other, and "we love Him because He first loved us." Love from God begets love to God, and when once the soul has entered into God's love as its goal and home, love at once begins to be the spring, the strength, the sustenance, and the satisfaction of its life.

"Into the patience of Christ." The Authorised Version has somewhat misread this verse by translating it "into the patient waiting for Christ," which would need another expression in the Greek. It really refers to active, persistent, steady endurance rather than to patient waiting. It refers to present patience, not to a future prospect. The patience of Christ must mean the active endurance which is like His, the endurance of which He is the pattern. How marvellously He "endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself"! How striking is the statement that "He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem"! Whether in suffering or in service, our Lord "endured as seeing Him who is invisible"; and having endured to the end, He became our Saviour. But "the patience of Christ" is also the endurance which comes from Him. He is not only our pattern, but also our power, since He enables us to endure with a like endurance to His own. As the Apostle says elsewhere: "I have power for all things in Him who is empowering me." To have a pattern without the power to realise it, to have our Lord's example without His efficacy and energy, would be of little practical use except to discourage and to mock us; but He who sets the standard supplies the strength, and our hearts are thus enabled to enter into and abide in the endurance of Christ. The need of patient endurance is obvious. Those early Christians of Thessalonica were soon put to the test. A few days and their new-born experiences were severely proved. Persecution, ostracism, suffering, and, it may be, death put a real strain upon their Christian profession; yet they endured, and the Apostle's prayer was answered; for we know with what joy he received tidings of their endurance and continuance (2 Thessalonians 1:4). The same endurance is needed today, though the circumstances are very different. Sin is still powerful, and trials, suffering, sorrow and death are found on every hand. Many things would tempt us from our allegiance and continuance. Like the Psalmist, we see the wicked prospering, and we are ready to burst out with the faithless cry: "I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." (Psalms 73:13) Or we have been toiling in the vineyard for long without seeing any fruit, and like the prophet, we are tempted to cry: "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought." (Isaiah 49:4) Then we hear the voice of the Apostle reminding us of "the love of God" and "the patience of Christ." The secret of patience is love. If only we live in the love of God we shall thereby find the grace of patience. The union of love and patience was exemplified in our Lord's earthly life. He kept His Father's commandments and abode in His love, and if only we will continue in His love we shall thereby be enabled to keep His commandments, and endure as He endured.

2. THE GUIDE.

"The Lord direct your hearts." We need direction. Sin has blinded us, and kept us from knowing the way home into the love of God, and into the endurance of Christ. Still more, sin has biassed our hearts, and kept us from going along the way. Thus we need nothing short of a Divine direction. If the Lord does not make straight our way home we never shall arrive there.

How does our Lord direct our hearts? First, by constant and ever-increasing experience of His love. "God is love," and as it is of the essence of love to communicate itself, God is ever revealing to our hearts and bestowing upon them His own Divine love. Along the straight pathway He guides the soul into deeper and fuller experience of His unchanging, unerring, and unending love.

He also guides by bestowing upon us an ever-fuller experience of the power of Christ. Patient endurance is not learned all at once, and the Lord leads us as we are able to bear His disclosures and His discipline. Every lesson of testing brings with it a fresh experience of grace, and every call to endure carries with it the assurance of sufficient strength and power. The means used for our direction, as we have already seen, are three in number, but the truth is so important that it needs renewed emphasis. The Lord directs us by His Word. Its examples, its counsels, its promises, its warnings, it anticipations, its incentives all come with force and blessing upon the heart, impelling it to go the right way home. He also directs us by His Holy Spirit dwelling within us. The Divine Spirit possesses and purifies our thoughts, cleanses and clarifies our motives, freshens and fertilises our soul, sanctifies and sensitises our conscience, guides and guards our will; and thus "every virtue we possess, and every victory won, and every thought of holiness" are the work of the Holy Spirit of God in guiding and directing our hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. The Lord also guides by His Providence. He uses the circumstances of our daily life to indicate His will. The discipline, the thousand and one little events and episodes, the ordinary experience of daily duty, the shadows and the sunshine, are all part of His providential guidance as He leads us along the pathway home into the love of God. All things are continually working together for good to them that love God.

Now we pass to consider the second and complementary prayer.

3. THE GIFT. In this concluding prayer of the Epistle the Apostle sums up by speaking of that which is in some respects the greatest gift of God in Christ, the gift of perfect and perpetual peace. Our first need is peace of conscience. The burden of sin weighs heavily upon the awakened soul, and the condemnation of the law consciously weighs upon it. As we look back over the past, and realise what it has been, we long for rest in the removal of condemnation and the bestowal of forgiveness. Our hearts cry out for peace with God. Our second need is peace of heart. The soul set free from the burden of condemnation and guilt soon finds the need of a new strength, new interests, new hopes. The past has been obliterated by mercy, but the present looms large with difficulty. Temptations to fear and discouragement arise, and the soul longs for peace. Peace with God by reconciliation must therefore be followed by the peace of God through restfulness of heart day by day. Our third need is peace of fellowship. The true Christian life is never solitary, but is lived in association with others. Our relationship to Christ necessarily carries with it a relationship to those who are in Christ with us, and as a consequence the peace which is ours in Christ is expressed in peace and fellowship with our fellow-believers. The context of this prayer shows that the Apostle had this aspect of peace in mind, and no true peace can be enjoyed with God that is

not shared with our fellow-Christians. Our Lord has broken down the wall of partition between us; He has made us all one in Himself, for He is our peace.

4. THE GIVER. The source of this threefold peace is "The Lord of peace Himself." By His death He brings us peace of conscience, by His Resurrection life peace of heart, by His Holy Spirit peace of fellowship. "Peace I leave with you" (John 14:27) is the legacy of His Death. "My peace I give unto you" is the gift of His Spirit. On the Resurrection evening He came with this twofold peace. First, He said, "Peace be unto you," (Luke 24:36) and "showed them His hands and His side," thus assuring them of peace of conscience through His Death. Then He said unto them again, "Peace be unto you," and bestowed upon them His Holy Spirit, thus guaranteeing to them peace of heart. His own peace, which had been so marked a feature of His own life and ministry, was now to be theirs. He, the possessor of peace, was now to be the provider of peace to them. The title, "The Lord of peace," in this passage is very noteworthy. It is only found here, though the title "God of peace" occurs several times. What are we to understand by it? Surely it is a hint to us that only in His Lordship, acknowledged and experienced by us, can we find peace. In very significant words we read in the prophet of "His government and peace." First government and then peace, since peace is only possible as a result of government. In like manner we read in the psalm of "righteousness and peace," (Psalms 85:10) for it is only as He is "the Lord our righteousness" that He becomes the Lord our peace. When the government is upon His shoulder, and He is the Lord of our life, the inevitable and blessed result is "peace, perfect peace." The continuity of this peace is very noteworthy--"Give you peace always." It is a constant peace. It is independent of circumstances, and does not change with changing experiences, since it is independent of our variableness, and depends entirely upon the Lord of peace and His Divine gift. Peace is associated with our permanent relationship to God in Christ, and a relationship of this kind is unalterable by any experiences or circumstances. The Lord gives peace always. The channels of this peace are also significant--"Peace always by all means." "In every manner," by all conceivable channels and methods this peace comes. No circumstance or condition of life can be ours which does not give some opportunity for the bestowal, experience, and enjoyment of peace. Not only does peace come "always," but "all ways."

Love, Patience, Peace--how beautiful and suggestive the combination and association! Patience is the fruit of love, and peace is the fruit of patience. When the soul is dwelling in the love of God patience and peace flow naturally into the life, and are as naturally exemplified in it. And so the heart rejoices in the love, reproduces the patience, and reposes in the peace of the Lord of peace, because it is ever at rest in the presence and grace of "the God of love and peace."

03.05-V. KNOWLEDGE AND OBEDIENCE.

V. KNOWLEDGE AND OBEDIENCE.

"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father."-- Colossians 1:9-12. The Epistles of the (first) captivity of the Apostle (Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon) represent his maturest experiences. As a consequence the prayers found in them are particularly noteworthy, revealing some of the deepest things of the writer’s spiritual life. In this respect they are at once tests and models for us; and it is perhaps not too much to say that careful and prolonged prayerful meditation on the prayers found in these Epistles will prove one of the most valuable and helpful methods of deepening the spiritual life. The first of these we now consider.

1. THE REASON OF THE PRAYER.

Colosse was one of the Churches which Paul had neither founded nor visited (Colossians 2:1). Christianity was brought there by Epaphras, one of his disciples (Colossians 1:7). But the Apostle was as keenly interested in its spiritual welfare as if he had been instrumental in founding it. So when he had heard of their faith and love (Colossians 1:4), and the fruitfulness of their life (Colossians 1:6), he thanked God on their behalf (Colossians 1:3), and prayed this prayer. Deep interest in the spiritual life of others was one of the prominent marks of the Christian character of St. Paul. His was no self-centred life, for he was ever keenly alert to appreciate the marks of grace in others. This is a test, and at the same time a rebuke, for us. How unlike we are to a Christian of the type of Barnabas, of whom we read: "Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad" (Acts 11:23). This is only possible by having "a heart at leisure from itself"; and when we are thus deeply interested in the marks and manifestations of the Divine working in other people’s lives we shall not only praise God on their behalf, but also, like the Apostle, pray for them; and thus the blessing will extend and deepen.

2. THE NATURE OF THE PRAYER. The main point of his prayer was that they might be "filled with the knowledge of His will." The will of God known and done is the secret of all true living. It was the key-note of our Lord’s earthly life. He came to do the will of the Father, and in one of the deepest experiences of His life He said: "Not My will, but Thine be done." (Luke 22:42) He told His disciples that His meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him; and He taught them to pray, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10) The will of God is the substance of revelation, for what is the Bible from beginning to end but the revelation of God’s will for man? Perhaps the most all-embracing prayer is: "Teach me to do Thy will" (Psalms 143:10); and certainly the ideal life is summed up in the phrase, "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:17) Well might the Apostle pray for these Christians of Colosse to be filled with the knowledge of God’s will. The word rendered "knowledge" means "mature knowledge," and is one

of the characteristic words of these four Epistles written from Rome. The Apostle evidently regarded mature knowledge, or deep spiritual experience, as the pre-eminent mark of a ripening Christian. In this respect St. John bears the same testimony, in his reference to the three stages of the Christian life represented by "little children," "young men," and "fathers." The little children have; the young men are; the fathers know (1 John 2:12-14). This spiritual knowledge or experience is the great safeguard against error, in that it gives power to distinguish between good and evil, between truth and falsehood. The measure of this knowledge is to be carefully noted--"filled with the knowledge of His will." The word also implies a fulness which is realised continually--not a bare knowledge, but its completeness; not an intermittent stream, but a perpetual flow. When the soul experiences this it is provided not only with the greatest safeguard against danger, but also with the secret of a strong, growing, powerful Christian life. The characteristics of this knowledge should be observed: "In all wisdom and spiritual understanding." "Wisdom" is a general term which implies the capacity and faculty for adapting the best means to bring about the best ends in things spiritual. "Spiritual understanding" is the specific coming or putting together of principles by means of which true action is taken. It really means "putting two and two together," comparing ideas and principles, for the purpose of adopting the best in any given course of action. Of the importance and necessity of wisdom and spiritual understanding scarcely anything need be said. Christian wisdom, Christian understanding, Christian perception in the thousand and one things of life--this surely is one of our greatest necessities and choicest blessings. How many errors would be avoided, how many wanderings checked, by means of this spiritual wisdom! Still more, how much joy would be experienced and how much genuine service rendered, if we were always saying and doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right way.

"Filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." This means for its complete realisation constant touch with that Book which presents the clearly expressed will of God. The will of God is in that Word, and when the Word is illuminated by the Spirit of God we come to know His will concerning us. No one will ever have the full knowledge of that will, no one can possibly be mature in experience, if the Word of God is not his daily, definite, direct study and meditation. It purifies the perception of the faculties by its cleansing power; it illuminates the moral faculties with its enlightening power; it controls the emotional faculties with its protective power; it energises the volitional faculties with its stimulating power; and thus in the constant, continuous use of the Word of God in personal practice, with meditation and prayer, we shall become "filled with the full knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."

3. THE PURPOSE OF THE PRAYER.

Knowledge is not an end in itself, but the means to an end; and so the Apostle states the purpose for which he asks this knowledge of God’s will: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all-pleasing ... fruitful ... increasing ... strengthened ... giving thanks." Their life is to be influenced by this knowledge--"walk worthy of the Lord." Knowledge is to be translated into practice. "Walking" is the characteristic Bible word descriptive of the character of the Christian life, the full expression of all our powers. As it presupposes life, so it means energy, movement, progress; and for this, knowledge is essential. How can we walk unless we know why and whither we go? The knowledge of God’s will gives point and purpose to the activities of life.

"Walk worthy of the Lord." What a profound and searching thought is here--"Worthy of the Lord." Surely this is impossible; yet these are the plain words of the inspired writer. To walk worthy of the Lord--it is almost incredible, and yet this is one of the possibilities and glories of grace. The Apostle is fond of the word "worthy." We are to walk worthy of our vocation (Ephesians 4:1), worthy of the Gospel (Php 1:27), worthy of the saints (Romans 16:2), worthy of God (1 Thessalonians 2:12). We may be perfectly sure that Paul would not put such an ideal before us if it could not be realised. God’s commands always imply promises.

"Unto all pleasing." Bishop Moule beautifully renders this phrase: "Unto every anticipation of His will" (Colossian Studies). "Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth Thee" (P. B. version). What a glorious ideal! We are so to walk as to please Him in everything. Not only doing what we are told, but anticipating His commands by living in such close touch with Him that we instinctively know the thing that will please Him. These words sound a depth of the spiritual life with which comparatively few are familiar; and yet here they are, facing us definitely, with their call to realise that which God has placed before us. The specific details of this worthy walk are next brought before us in four pregnant phrases:

"Being fruitful in every good work." Notice every word of this sentence. Our life is to be characterised by good works, and in each and every one of these we are to be fruitful, manifesting the ripeness, and, if it may be so put, the beauty and lusciousness associated with fruit. Mark, too, that it is "fruitful in every good work," that is, in the process of doing the work, and not merely as the result or outcome of it. The very work itself is intended to be fruitful apart from particular results. There may be very few results of our service for God, but the service itself may and should be fruitful.

"Increasing in the knowledge of God." Notice the difference between the knowledge of His will and the knowledge of Himself. "That I may know Him" (Php 3:10); "They might know Thee" (John 17:3); "Ye have known Him" (1 John 2:13). The knowledge of His will will lead us to the knowledge of Himself, and beyond this it is impossible to go.

"Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." The Apostle’s thought pours itself out in rich abundance in these words. It seems as though he could not adequately express the possibilities and characteristics of the Christian life about which he prays. They are to be "strengthened," and not only so, but "with all might." The principle or standard of it is "according to His glorious power," and the end of it is "unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." The man of the world might see in this phrase an anticlimax, when it is said that the end of strength is patience and longsuffering; and yet Christianity finds its ideal in energy expressed in character, activity manifesting itself in passivity, and might in meekness.

Notice, too, the suggestive addition, "with joyfulness." Patience and longsuffering without joy are apt to be cold, chilly, unattractive. There is a stern, stoical endurance of suffering which, while it may be admired sometimes, tends to repel. But when patience and longsuffering are permeated and suffused with joyfulness, the very life of Christ is lived over again in His followers. Resignation to the will of God is only very partially a Christian virtue; but when we take joyfully the things that come upon us we are indeed manifesting the very life of God Himself.

"Giving thanks unto the Father." This is the crowning grace for which the Apostle prays--thankfulness. How much it means. The heart full of gratitude and gladness, the life full of brightness and buoyancy, the character full of vitality and vigour. The joy of the Lord is, indeed, the strength of His people, and when this element of thanksgiving characterises our life, it gives tone to everything else, and crowns all other graces.

4. THE CHARACTER OF THE PRAYER.

We have seen what the Apostle desired for the Christians of Colosse, and in so doing we have learnt some of the deepest secrets of Christian living. It remains to notice the characteristics of this prayer, in order that our prayers may be taught and guided and inspired with power. His prayer was urgent--"Since the day we heard." From the moment the tidings came by Epaphras of the Christian life in Colosse the Apostle's heart went up to God in prayer. His prayer was incessant--"Do not cease to pray." Again and again he asked, and kept on asking, so fully was his heart drawn out in prayer for these Christians whom he had never seen. His prayer was intense--"And to desire." This was no mere lip service. His heart had evidently been stirred to its core by the tidings of the Christian life at Colosse, and as he heard of their faith, their love, their hope, their holiness, their service, a deep, intense, longing desire came into his soul to seek for still fuller and deeper blessing on their behalf. What a man he was, and what prayers his were! His prayer was offered in fellowship with others--"Since the day we heard." Timothy was associated with the Apostle in these petitions. United prayer is one of the greatest powers in the Christian Church. "If two of you shall agree as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done." (Matthew 18:19) Personal prayer is precious, united prayer is still more powerful.

Thus in these verses we have one of the fullest, deepest and most precious of the Apostle's prayers, and as we consider its union of thought and experience, of profound teaching and equally profound revelation of Christian life, we learn two of the most urgent and necessary lessons for the Christian life today. The first of these shall be given in the words of Bishop Moule: "Beware of untheological devotion." If devotion is to be real it should be characterised by thought. There is no contradiction between mind and heart, between theology and devotion. Devotional hours do not mean hours when thought is absent. Meditation is not abstraction, nor is devotion dreaminess. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind" (Luke 10:27) is an essential part of the commandment. If genuine thought and equally genuine theology do not characterise our hours of devotion, we lose some of the most precious opportunities of grace and blessing. A piety which is mere pietism, an evangelicalism which does not continually ponder the profound truths of the New Testament, can never be strong or do any deep service. We must beware of "untheological devotion."

We must also beware of "undevotional theology." This is the opposite error, and constitutes an equally great danger. A hard, dry, intellectual study of theology will yield no spiritual fruit. Accuracy in knowledge of Greek, careful balancing of aspects of truth, large knowledge of the doctrinal verities of the New Testament, are all essential and valuable; but unless they are permeated by a spirit of devotion they will fail at the crucial point. Pectus facit theologum--it is the heart that makes the theologian; and a theology which does not spring from spiritual experience is doomed to decay, to deadness, and therefore to disaster.

When, therefore, our devotions are theological, and our theology is devotional, we begin to realise the true being, blessing, and power of the Christian life, and we go from strength to strength, from grace to grace, and from glory unto glory.

03.06-VI. CONFLICT AND COMFORT.

VI. CONFLICT AND COMFORT.

"For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ."-- Colossians 2:1-2.

Although he was in prison the Apostle was constantly at work for his Master, and not least of all at the work of prayer. If ever the words orare est laborare, "to pray is to labour," were true, they were true of St. Paul, for to him to pray was to work with all his might, as we shall see from a study of another of the prayers offered in his Roman prison.

1. WHAT PRAYER MEANS.

Prayer is described as a conflict. We have a similar expression used of the prayers of Epaphras, in the words "labouring fervently" (Colossians 4:12). The same word "conflict" is associated with faith, "the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12), and with the "good fight" of the Apostle’s entire life (2 Timothy 4:7). Prayer regarded as a conflict includes the two ideas of toil and strife. The toil of prayer shows us the work involved in it. Sometimes we hear the expression, "If you can do nothing else, you can pray," as though prayer were the easiest of all things. As a simple fact, it is the hardest. No man knows what prayer means unless he knows what it is to "labour" in prayer. The strife involved in prayer implies opposition--the opposing force of one who wishes above all things to check and thwart our prayers. We discern something of this opposition in the well-known words, "We wrestle" (Ephesians 6:12); and the words of the hymn are as true as they are familiar-- "And Satan trembles when he sees The weakest saint upon his knees." The Apostle knew by spiritual experience that to pray was to rouse up against himself a mighty opposition, and it was this force that made his prayer such a "great conflict." No believer should be surprised at his prayers "being hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). It is evidently one of Satan’s main objects to get the Christian to restrain prayer. The Christian man or the Christian Church that continues instant in prayer may rest assured of malignant opposition from the hosts of spiritual wickedness in high places. On the other hand, we may be sure that Satan scarcely troubles himself about the believer or congregation whose private, family, and public praying is neglected or thought little of. Prayer is, therefore, a "great conflict." It is not solicitude only, but a struggle; not merely anxiety, but activity. As Bishop Moule says: "Prayer is never meant to be indolently easy, however simple and reliant it may be. It is meant to be an infinitely important transaction between man and God. And therefore very often, when subjects and circumstances call for it, it has to be viewed as a work involving labour, persistency, conflict, if it would be prayer indeed" (Colossian Studies, p. 124). The Bishop goes on to quote a familiar incident which illustrates this great truth: "A visitor knocked betimes one morning at the door of a good man, a saint of the noblest Puritan type--and that was a fine type indeed. He called as a friend to consult a friend, sure of his welcome. But he was kept waiting long. At last a servant came to explain the delay: ’My master has been at prayer, and this morning

he has been long in getting access.'" The practical question for us is whether this is our idea of prayer, or whether we are merely playing at prayer, and not regarding it with true seriousness. If we know what it is to have "great conflict" in prayer, happy are we. If we do not, we may well ask God to search our hearts and change our minds about prayer.

Prayer is characterised by unselfishness. The conflict of the Apostle was not self-centred. It was on behalf of others: "Great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea." This is the essence of prayer--intercession on behalf of others. If our seasons of prayer are largely taken up with prayers for our own needs, however genuine, we are failing at a crucial point; but if our time is mainly taken up with prayers for others, we shall soon find that our own blessings begin to abound. "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth." (Proverbs 11:24)

Prayer also implies sympathy. The Apostle was praying for people whom he had never seen, and probably never would see. This is not easy--indeed, is very difficult--but it is a real test of spirituality. "Out of sight, out of mind." We are tempted to limit our prayers to friends whom we know, causes in which we are interested, subjects spiritually near and akin to us. Not so the Apostle, whose heart went out to the whole Church of God in every place where he knew through friends that little bodies of Christians were to be found. His sympathy was at once quick, wide, and deep, and it is one of the supreme tests of true spirituality to have a sympathy possessed of all these three characteristics. Our sympathy may be quick and yet narrow, or wide but not deep, or even deep and not wide; but to be at once quick, wide, and deep in sympathy is to be a true follower of Christ. As we ponder these things--conflict, unselfishness, sympathy--do not our hearts condemn us? Instead of conflict, how easy-going have been our prayers! Instead of unselfish, how self-centred, instead of sympathetic, how contracted! Thus the Apostle searches and tests us as we dwell on his wonderful life of prayer.

2. WHAT PRAYER BRINGS.

What were the objects for which the Apostle prayed so earnestly on behalf of these unknown Christians? What were the precise gifts that he sought for them from God? This is no unnecessary question, for the same gifts will surely be suitable to us.

He asked for spiritual strength: "That their hearts might be comforted." St. Paul always went to the very centre and core of things, and so we find him constantly praying with reference to the "hearts" of these Colossian Christians. Since, as we have seen, the "heart" in Scripture is the centre of our moral and spiritual being, if the heart is right, all will be right, for "out of it are the issues of life." He prays that their "hearts" might be comforted--that is, in the full sense of the word, encouraged, exhorted, strengthened. "Comfort" includes the three elements of strength, courage, and consolation. We must be strong, brave, and cheery. This is the full meaning of the term "Comforter" as applied to the Holy Spirit. He is the One Who gives strength, courage, and consolation. This, too, is the true meaning of the familiar phrase of the English Prayer Book, "Comfortable words"--words that minister strength, fortitude, and cheer. The fact that this thought of "hearts comforted" was often in the mind and on the lips of the Apostle shows the importance he attached to it (2 Thessalonians 2:17; Ephesians 6:22). With hearts made strong, courageous, and cheerful, Christians can face anything; while with hearts that remain weak, fearful, and sad the Christian life is a prey to all the temptations of the Evil One. It is exactly similar with a Church or a congregation of Christians, for one of the supreme needs in any community is comforted

hearts--the centres of life made strong, courageous, and happy. Then it is that Churches live, grow, extend, and witness for Christ in the demonstration of the Holy Spirit the "Comforter."

He asked for spiritual unity: "Being knit together in love," or, quite literally, "having been compacted in love." He prayed that these Christians might be kept together, knit together, joined together in a spirit of love. Solitary Christians are always weak Christians, for "union is strength." If Christians are not knit together, the cause of Christ must necessarily suffer, for through the severances caused by division the enemy will keep thrusting his darts. That is why the Apostle elsewhere urges them "earnestly to strive to keep the unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3). One of the greatest powers that Satan wields today is due to the disunion among the people of God. It is true of the Christian home, congregation, and denomination. The wedge of discord is one of the enemy's most powerful weapons. On the other hand, where the brethren dwell together in unity, the Lord commands His blessing. In almost every Epistle the Apostle emphasises unity, and we can readily understand the reason. This unity is only possible "in love." It is the love of God to us that unites us to Him, and it will be the love of God in us that unites us to our brethren. There is no power like love to bind Christians together. We may not see eye to eye on all aspects of truth; we may not all use the same methods of worship and service, but if we love one another God dwells in us and among us, and adds His own seal of blessing to the work done for Him. Let every Christian be fully assured that in so far as he is striving, praying, and labouring for the union of God's people in love, he will be doing one of the most powerful and blessed pieces of work for his Master, and one of the greatest possible pieces of disservice to the kingdom of Satan. Contrariwise, the Christian man or Christian Church that stands out for separateness and exclusiveness is one of the best allies of Satan, and one of the most effective workers for the kingdom of darkness.

He asked for spiritual certitude: "Unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding." Wealth is a favourite metaphor of St. Paul, and is used to denote the fulness and abundance of the Christian life as conceived by him. Mark how he piles phrase upon phrase--"understanding," "fulness of understanding," and then "wealth of fulness of understanding." To the Apostle, the mind was one of the essential powers and principles of the Christian life. So far from thinking according to a modern fashion that the less one uses the mind the better Christian one is, St. Paul, following his Master, ever emphasised the duty and glory of loving God "with all the mind." This wealth of the fulness of "understanding" means an abundance of conviction, both intellectual and moral, that Christianity is what it claims to be, and that the Christian life is the perfect satisfaction of all the different parts of man's nature. He prays that they may "rise to the whole wealth of the full exercise of their intelligence" (Moule). Just as we find elsewhere "the fulness of faith" (Hebrews 10:22), "the fulness of hope" (Hebrews 6:11), and "much fulness" (1 Thessalonians 1:5), so here the Apostle desires them to enjoy to the full the intelligent grasping of assurance of Christian truth which was theirs in Christ. In the same spirit Luke writes to Theophilus: "That thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed." (Luke 1:4) A firm conviction of the understanding is one of the greatest needs, as it is also one of the greatest blessings, of the Christian life. If a Christian cannot say, "I know," "I am persuaded," he is lacking in one of the prime essentials of a vigorous experience. Let us ponder, then, this remarkable phrase, "the whole wealth of the fulness of intelligence," and see in it one of the absolute necessities of daily experience. But how does it come? It is the result of the foregoing "comfort" and "love." Hearts

made strong mean minds fully assured. Hearts full of love mean intellects full of knowledge and conviction. Let no one say that love is blind: on the contrary, it is love that sees and knows. It was the Apostle of love who was the first with spiritual insight to say, "It is the Lord," on that memorable early morning on the Lake of Galilee. It is the Christian with a heart strong and full of love who will have the "wealth of the fulness of intelligence." The same is true of a Church, for when it is strong and united in love, there will come such an influx of conviction and certitude that the world will be impressed by the demonstration of the truth of the Christian Gospel.

He asked for spiritual knowledge: "To the full knowledge of the mystery of God and the Father, even Christ" (not as A.V.). Here, again, we have a favourite word of these Epistles, "full knowledge," that is, ripe, mature experience; and it means the experience of all that is summed up in the one word "Christ." In view of the dangerous errors, then rife and increasing, of a special knowledge confined only to a few, to an intellectual aristocracy, the Apostle lays stress upon the possibility of every Christian becoming acquainted in personal experience with all the knowledge of God that is stored up in Christ. He declares Christ as the Image of God (Colossians 1:15), as the Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18), as the One in Whom all fulness dwells (Colossians 1:19), as the Redeemer from sin (Colossians 1:20), as the Hope of glory (Colossians 1:27), as the One in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). There is no mistiness here, no vagueness, no hesitation, no limitation, but a full, free, open opportunity for all believers to become acquainted with Christ in His Divine fulness. This is the crowning-point of the Apostle’s prayer, for in the full knowledge of Christ everything else is included. This knowledge, at once intellectual, moral, and spiritual, is the safeguard from all error, the secret of all progress, and the guarantee of all blessing.

Let this prayer, then, be our constant and careful study. We shall find in it much to rebuke the shallowness, the selfishness, the dulness, and the sluggishness of our prayers; and we shall also find in it a model of instruction, and the inspiration of all true petition and intercession. The Christian who learns from the prayers of the Apostle will learn some of the deepest secrets of the Christian life.

03.07-VII. WISDOM AND REVELATION.

VII. WISDOM AND REVELATION.

"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power."-- Ephesians 1:15-19.

If prayer for others is a barometer of our own spiritual life, we can realise what St. Paul felt was necessary for himself by his prayers for others. In Ephesians there are two petitions, and nothing fuller and deeper is found in any of the Apostle's writings. This Epistle represents the high-water mark of Christian privilege and possibility.

1. THE FOUNDATION.

We see from Ephesians 1:15 that his prayer is closely and definitely based on what precedes, and this introduces us to a feature not hitherto found. Up to now the prayers at the opening have been recorded almost immediately after the personal greetings. But here a long paragraph intervenes, and the prayer is not recorded until after fourteen verses full of spiritual teaching have been given. This section deserves special attention because it is the basis of the prayer. Let us review it briefly in order to obtain the true perspective of the petition. The key-thought is in verse 3 (Ephesians 1:3), where the Apostle praises God for having actually blessed them "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Then comes a wonderful statement of the way in which these blessings had become their own. (a) They had been eternally purposed in God the Father (vers. 3-6a) (Ephesians 1:3-6); (b) they had been historically mediated through God the Son (vers. 6b-12) (Ephesians 1:6-12); (c) they had been spiritually applied by God the Spirit (vers. 12-14) (Ephesians 1:12-14). And in connection with each Person of the Sacred Trinity practically the same phrase occurs in this paragraph, showing that all the blessings were given in order that they might be used for the Divine glory: "To the praise of the glory of His grace" (Ephesians 1:6); "To the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:12); "To the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:14).

Now it is upon this wealth of provision that the Apostle bases his prayer: "On this account." God had so wonderfully blessed them in Christ by His Spirit, and this fulness of blessing was so clearly intended to be used to the praise and glory of God that he could pray, as he does here, assured that the answer would come. God's revelation of Himself is invariably and inevitably the foundation of our prayers. Because of what He has done and is doing we can be sure of grace. Because His power has provided "all things that pertain to life and godliness" we can be certain of power for daily living.

2. THE APPEAL. The names and titles of God are particularly noteworthy and are always full of spiritual significance, shedding light on the passages in which they occur. St. Paul prays to "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ." This title as it stands is unique, though already he has referred to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:3), and will refer again to "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" in connection with prayer (Ephesians 3:14). "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ" seems to suggest the highest point and peak of power and grace. God, as the God of Christ, is the primary source of all blessing.

He is also "the Father of Glory." This, too, is a phrase not found elsewhere. He is the Father to Whom all glory belongs as its Divine source. In Acts 7:2 He is "the God of glory," and in 1 Corinthians 2:8 Christ is "the Lord of glory." In Romans 6:4 Christ is said to have been raised from the dead "by the glory of the Father." Glory is a characteristic quality of God. It is the manifestation of His splendour and the outshining of His excellence. All radiance, all brightness, all magnificence come from Him and are intended to be returned to Him in praise. The glory of God in Romans is threefold: it is God’s proof for man’s past life (Romans 3:23); it is God’s prospect for man’s future life (Romans 2:1); it is God’s principle for man’s present life (Romans 15:7). And the association of glory with prayer seems to suggest that the praise of His glory which is to characterise our life can only come from God Himself as the Father of glory. If our lives are to be lived "to His praise," His must be the power. If our lives are to manifest His glory, His must be the grace. "Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory."

3. THE REQUEST.

Now we come to this profound prayer which teaches the inmost secrets of the spiritual life.

(1) A Divine Gift. "May give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation." He has spoken of the wealth of blessing stored up in Christ (Ephesians 1:3), and of God’s grace abounding to us in all wisdom and prudence (Ephesians 1:8). Now he asks for wisdom and illumination to perceive all this for themselves as a personal experience. The word "spirit" seems to refer to their human faculty, though of course as indwelt and possessed by the Divine Spirit. But the absence of the definite article from the word "spirit" seems to suggest a gift rather than a Person. The Holy Spirit of God enters into our spirit, and the result is wisdom and revelation. These two words refer to general illumination and specific enlightenment. He desires his readers to enter fully into the meaning of these great realities to which he has given such full expression (Ephesians 1:1-14).

(2) But this Divine gift is only possible by means of a simple yet important condition. It is "in the full knowledge of Him." The word rendered "knowledge" is characteristic of these prison epistles, and always means "full knowledge," the mature experience of the spiritual man. It is invariably connected with God; it refers to the deep, growing, ripening consciousness which comes from personal fellowship with Him. Philosophy can only say "Know thyself," but Scripture says, "Know God." This is how wisdom and revelation become ours, and Christian history and experience testify abundantly to the simple yet remarkable fact of spiritual insight and moral understanding which are due solely to fellowship with God. Nothing is more striking than the fact of a deep, spiritual apprehension and appreciation which are independent of intellectual conception and verbal expression. Believers can have a true spiritual consciousness of God without the possession of great capacity or attainments. Many whose natural education and intellectual opportunities have been slight have had this spiritual perception in an uncommon degree, and it

always marks the spiritually ripe Christian. It is not the one whose intellectual knowledge is critical, scholarly, and profound, but he whose spiritual insight is suffused with grace, love, and fellowship. This does not mean that natural knowledge or culture is to be despised or avoided as evil, but that the two kinds of knowledge should be carefully distinguished. The Christian Church has at least for the last three hundred years set great store by knowledge and science, but deeper than all this is the spiritual instinct, insight, knowledge, and illumination which constitute the supreme requirement of the true Christian life. We can see this spiritual perception in its various stages in several passages of the New Testament. We have seen how St. John divides believers into three classes (1 John 2:12-14). But while in his repetition the Apostle can vary the description of the "children" and the "young men," when he has to speak the second time of the "fathers" he has nothing new to say, for they cannot be otherwise or more fully described than as those who "know Him Who is from the beginning."

(3) The immediate consequence of this fellowship is that the eyes of the heart become permanently enlightened (Greek). Keeping in view the Scripture truth of the "heart" as including the elements of Mind, Emotion, and Will, the result of fellowship with God is that every feature of the inner life becomes purified and enlightened. The mind is illuminated to perceive truth, the emotions are purified to love the good, and the will is equipped to obey the right. It is not that new objects meet the gaze so much as that a new and deeper perception is given to enable the heart to see and understand what had hitherto been dark and difficult. This illuminated heart is one of the choicest blessings of the spiritual life and one of the greatest safeguards against spiritual error. "Ye have an unction ... and ye know" (1 John 2:20). "The Son of God hath come, and hath given us an understanding" (1 John 5:20). Many of the problems affecting the spiritual life are solved only in this way. Criticism, scholarship, intellectual power may be brought to bear upon them, but they will not yield to this treatment. The illuminated heart of the babe in Christ is often enabled to understand secrets which are hid from the wise and prudent.

(4) The outcome is a permanent spiritual experience. "That ye may know," i.e. possess an immediate, instinctive, direct knowledge (eidenai). Three great realities are thereupon mentioned as the objects and substance of our spiritual knowledge.

(a) The first is "What is the hope of His calling." "His calling" is the appeal and offer of the Gospel with all its Divine meaning and purpose, and "the hope of His calling" is that which is intended by and included in the offer of God. This "hope" is either that to which God calls us, or by which He calls; either objective or subjective; either the substance or the feeling. Hope when regarded as objective, as the substance of our experience, is full of promise, on which the believer fixes his faith. Hope when regarded as subjective, as the possession of the soul, is full of inspiration, as it encourages and confirms belief that "He is faithful that promised." Hope as an objective reality is fixed on Christ, and since God has a purpose in calling us, we can exercise hope. Hope as a subjective realisation is based on the fact of experience. God calls us by the Gospel, and therefore hope becomes possible. Hope is the top-stone of life and follows faith and love (cf. Ephesians 1:15). Faith draws the curtain aside; hope gazes into the future; while love rejoices in the present possession of Christ. Faith accepts; hope expects. Faith appropriates; hope anticipates. Faith is concerned with the person who promises; hope with the thing that the person promises. Faith is concerned with the past and present; hope with the future alone. Hope is invariably fixed on the future and is never to be regarded as merely a matter of natural temperament. It is specifically

connected with the Lord’s Coming, and we are thus reminded that the calling of God covers past, present, and future. It starts from regeneration and culminates in the resurrection of the body at the Coming of Christ.

(b) The second is "The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." This may mean the wealth which God possesses for them or in them; our wealth in Him or His in us. If we take it in the former sense it will mean that God is the inheritance and we are the heirs; that the saints now possess imperfectly, and anticipate in its fulness, the inheritance of grace, the spiritual Canaan which they are to enjoy here and hereafter. If, however, we take it, as is more likely, in the latter sense, it will mean that we are the inheritance and God is the Possessor and Heir. We must never forget that the Biblical ideas associated with "heir" and "inheritance" always refer to possession, and not, as in ordinary phraseology, to succession. In the Bible the heir does not merely expect, but already enjoys in part that which he will possess in full hereafter. Adopting, then, the second of these interpretations, the saints belong to God and are precious in His sight. They are His peculium, or special treasure, like Israel of old (Deuteronomy 4:20). They have been formed for Him and are to show forth His praise (Isaiah 43:21). He sets store by them, as is suggested by the significant words, "Hast thou considered My servant Job?" There are several indications in Scripture that God values and trusts His people; "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him" (Genesis 18:19). "The Lord taketh pleasure in His people" (Psalms 149:4). "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and He (that is, God) delighteth in his way" (Psalms 37:23). And the "wealth" is a further proof of the value placed on believers by God. Five times in Ephesians the Apostle uses this metaphor of "riches," showing his thought of those who have been "bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20). Believers are God’s riches, wealth, treasure; they belong to Him in view of that day on which He will enter in full upon His inheritance when He comes to be glorified and admired in them that believe (2 Thessalonians 1:10). And we are to see this, to know it, to realise the spiritual possibilities of each believer and all God’s people together as God’s own inheritance.

(c) The third is "the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe." In this marvellous association of almost inexpressible thoughts the dominant note is "power" (dúnamis), and the Apostle prays that the Ephesian Christians may know what this means. Power is a characteristic word of St. Paul as expressive of Christianity. The Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16). By the Resurrection Christ was designated "the Son of God with power" (Romans 1:4). He is "the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Man needs power, not merely a philosophy or an ethic, but a dynamic, and it is the peculiar privilege of His Gospel to bring this to us. But let us try to analyse this power. There are no less than four comparisons stated or illustrations given. (1) It is exactly the same power that God wrought in Christ at the Resurrection. Nothing less than this is the standard of the Divine working. We are to possess and experience the spiritual and moral dynamic exercised by God on Christ when He raised Him from the dead. This is described as "the exceeding greatness of His power." The same adjective is used of grace (Ephesians 2:7), and of love (Ephesians 3:19), and it is intended to express the superabundance of that power which was put forth in the Resurrection and is now exercised on our behalf. Then the four words used for power are particularly noteworthy: "power," "energy," "strength," "might." Each conveys an aspect of this great spiritual force. "Might" is power in possession; "strength" is power as the result of grasping, or of coming into contact with the source of that power; and "energy" is a power in

expression. (2) Not only so, but the power exercised by God in the Ascension is also intended to be bestowed on and experienced by us. When we are told that Christ was set at God’s right hand far above all powers, we can understand something of the Divine might exercised. (3) Still more, it is the same power by means of which God put all things under the feet of Christ. This, too, is the Divine force and energy for believers. (4) Not least of all, it was Divine power that gave Christ to be "the Head over all things to the Church," and it is exactly this power that is exercised on our behalf. When we contemplate all this as intended by God for us, we can see something of the vigorous and victorious life He can and will enable us to live. As we review this wonderful prayer it is impossible to avoid noticing that the first petition refers mainly to the past ("His calling"); the second mainly to the future ("His inheritance"); and the third mainly to the present ("His power"), though of course each petition has its bearing on the other two points of time. Every part of our life is thus adequately supplied and intended to be abundantly satisfied. Nor may we omit to observe that all through the prayer the emphasis is on God: His calling; His inheritance; His power. Everything is regarded from the Divine standpoint, because we are not our own but His. The contemplation of this glory of the Divine love and grace overwhelms the soul with "wonder, love, and praise." In the presence of such a prayer, dealing with such profound realities, three thoughts naturally arise in our minds. (a) How little we know, and how much we might and should know. (b) How little we are, and how much we might and should be. (c) How little we do, and how much we might and should do. And yet if we will but remind ourselves of the simple secret of true living, as here described, we might become and accomplish infinitely more than we have ever experienced up to the present. "To us-ward who believe." Faith is the simple yet all-sufficient secret. Trust relies on God and receives from Him. It puts us in contact with the source of blessing, and in union with Him we shall find spiritual illumination, spiritual insight, spiritual experience, and spiritual power that shall all be lived and exercised to His praise and glory.

03.08-VIII. STRENGTH AND INDWELLING.

VIII. STRENGTH AND INDWELLING.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of Whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."-- Ephesians 3:14-19.

"In no part of Paul’s letters does he rise to a higher level than in his prayers, and none of his prayers are fuller of fervour than this wonderful series of petitions. They open out one into the other like some majestic suite of apartments in a great palace-temple, each leading into a loftier and more spacious hall, each drawing nearer the presence chamber, until at last we stand there" (MACLAREN). The second prayer in Ephesians possesses remarkable affinities with the first; indeed, the two are complementary, and many of the expressions call for close comparison.

1. THE STANDPOINT.

"For this cause" (Ephesians 3:14). To what does this phrase point back? Some associate it with verse 1, "For this cause," thinking that St. Paul, having been diverted from his main teaching in Ephesians 3:1-13, here resumes it in the form of a prayer. But perhaps it is still better to regard the resumption of the main teaching as coming in Ephesians 4:1, where the Apostle again speaks of himself as "the prisoner." This would make chapter 3 wholly parenthetical, so that instead of the present prayer being based on the teaching of chapter 2 the Apostle is led here to speak of his ministry (Ephesians 3:1-13) and its outcome. His ministry is a gift, a trust, a stewardship, and its purpose is the proclamation of the Gospel and its results in the accomplishment of God’s purposes for Jew and Gentile. On this view the standpoint of the prayer is associated closely with his ministry and its effects, as seen in the immediately preceding verses. It is because of his remarkable ministry, given to him by God, and all the spiritual privileges brought to the Gentile Christians thereby that he is able to work for them (Ephesians 3:13), and also to pray for them (Ephesians 3:14). Thus, while the prayer in chapter 1 looks at their life from the standpoint of the Divine purposes, this prayer will be occupied with their spiritual privileges in Christ.

2. THE ATTITUDE.

"I bow my knees unto the Father" (Ephesians 3:14). The intense reverence of the Apostle in this allusion to bowing his knees is particularly noteworthy. As a rule the Jews stood for prayer (Luke 18:11-13), and prostration seems to have been an exceptional posture. But in connection with Christians, kneeling is mentioned (Acts 7:60; Acts 9:40; Acts 20:36). Nothing could more beautifully express the true attitude of the soul before God than this posture of the body. At the same time the use of the word "Father" indicates the other side of the truth and confidence with which we approach God. He is at once our God and our Father (Ephesians 1:17), and our attitude

must be expressive both of our adoration and of our assurance. He is great and good, and we approach Him as the Holy One and the Loving One.

3. THE ADDRESS.

"The Father from Whom every family in heaven and earth is named." It is interesting that the title "God" is not associated with this prayer as in chapter 1, although the thought of Deity is found in the allusion to bowing the knees. And in addition to God as the Father He is described as the One "from Whom every family (Greek, 'fatherhood') in heaven and earth is named." This seems to mean that whatever element of family life exists, it comes from God, that all true spiritual life in heaven or earth has its origin in the Father. The scope of the prayer is particularly noteworthy, as we contemplate God as the Fount of every fatherhood and the Parent of all men everywhere. Such a statement will do more than anything else to guard us against narrow or purely selfish desires as we approach God in prayer.

4. THE APPEAL.

"That He would grant you" (Ephesians 3:16). As in the former prayer, the Apostle is clear that what he is about to ask is essentially a Divine gift. It comes from above, whether he is seeking knowledge (Ephesians 1:17) or power (Ephesians 3:16). At every step God must give and the believer must receive. It would be well for us in our Christian experience to emphasise this simple but searching truth. "Every good and every perfect gift comes from above." (James 1:17) 5. THE STANDARD.

"According to the riches of His glory" (Ephesians 3:16). Here again we begin to realise something of the fulness of the prayer to be offered. The measure of the Apostle's desire is not our own poverty, but God's wealth; we are to look away from ourselves to the infinite riches of the Divine glory. In the former prayer he asked that we might know the riches of God's glory. But here there is something more; we are to experience them in our heart and life.

6. THE PETITIONS. In general St. Paul asks for two great spiritual blessings, the inward strength of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling presence of Christ. These are inseparable, and we may regard the first as essential to the second, and the second as the effect of the first. But the prayer goes into detail and each part of the petition calls for careful meditation.

(1) "Strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man" (Ephesians 3:16, R.V.). As wisdom was the burden of the former prayer (Ephesians 1:17), so strength is the main thought here. The order, too, is significant; wisdom and power, since power without knowledge would be highly dangerous. This strength comes from the Holy Spirit; He is the Agent of God's enabling grace. And the strength is to extend "into the inward man." The contrast seems to be between the inward and the outward, as in 2 Corinthians 4:16; Romans 7:22. The strength is not of the body, or of the mind, but of the soul. The "inward" is not exactly identical with the "new" man, but emphasises the inner essential life of the spirit as contrasted with the outer life of the body. "The hidden man of the heart."

(2) "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:17, R.V.). This is the outcome of the inward strength of the Spirit, and almost every word needs attention. The indwelling of Christ is virtually identical with that of the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22), although of course Christ and the Holy

Spirit are never absolutely identified in Holy Scripture (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). It is only in regard to the practical outcome in the believer's experience that the indwelling of Christ and the Spirit amount to the same thing. This is to be a permanent indwelling and not a mere passing stay, just as believers together are described as a temple for God's permanent habitation (Ephesians 2:22, Greek). This permanent indwelling of Christ is to be "in your hearts." Almost every prayer is thus concerned with the "heart," the centre of the moral being, and the Apostle prays that Christ may make His home therein. This is no mere influence, but a Personal Presence, the Living Christ within, and it is to be "through faith." It is faith that admits Christ to the heart, allowing Him to enter into every part of the "inward man." And the same faith that admits Him permits Him to remain, reside, and rule. Faith, in a word, is the total response of the soul to the Lordship of Christ.

(3) "That ye, being rooted and grounded in love" (Ephesians 3:17). Here again the original expressions imply permanent results, and the two words "rooted" and "grounded" are beautifully complementary. The one refers to a tree, the other to a house, and the expressions point to those hidden processes of the soul which are the result of Christ's indwelling and the Holy Spirit's working. The power of the Spirit and the indwelling of Christ tend to our permanent inward establishment in the element and atmosphere of Christian love. This is one of the seven occasions in this short Epistle where we find the Pauline phrase, "in love," referring to the sphere and atmosphere of our fellowship with God. The love no doubt means primarily and perhaps almost exclusively God's love to us, as that in which we are to "live, and move, and have our being."

(4) "May be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth" (Ephesians 3:18, R.V.). Here again the emphasis is on strength, and the Apostle prays that we may have full strength to grasp, may be quite able to accomplish this purpose. Spiritual ideas can never be appropriated by intellectual action alone. It is not by brilliant intellect but by spiritual insight that we become "able to comprehend." Although there is now no specific reference to love, it would seem as though the idea of verse 19 (Ephesians 3:19) is already in view, and, assuming this to be the case, we have four aspects of the Divine love which we are to be strong to grasp. Its "breadth" means that there is no barrier to it, reminding us of the extent of the Divine counsels; its "length" tells us of the Divine foreknowledge and His thought of us through the ages; its "height" points to our Lord in heaven as the goal for the penitent believer; its "depth" declares the possibility of love descending to the lost abyss of human misery for the purpose of redemption. And the ability to grasp the Divine love in this fourfold way is to be experienced with "all the saints." It is impossible to accomplish it alone; no spiritual exclusiveness is thinkable in this connection, to say nothing of the lower forms of egotism and selfishness. Twice in this brief writing does the Apostle refer to "all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18), thereby reminding us of the place and power of each saint in the spiritual economy of God. One saint will be able to comprehend a little, another saint a little more, and so on, until at length all the saints together are "strong to grasp" the Divine love. The wider our fellowship the fuller and firmer our hold of the love of Christ. This is doubtless why public worship is so strongly emphasised in the New Testament. "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I." (Matthew 18:20) The experiences of our fellow-worshippers are always intended to be, and usually will be, of help to our own fuller realisation of our Lord and Master. The soul is justified solitarily and alone, but it is sanctified only in the community of believers.

(5) "And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19). If we are correct in interpreting Ephesians 3:18 of the Divine love, the present verse will be the climax of this part of the prayer, and it has been helpfully suggested that we have here the "fifth dimension" of the love of Christ after the four already mentioned. Not only are they to experience breadth and length and height and depth but also the inwardness; they are to know by personal experience the love of Christ as it can only be known by those who have fellowship with Him. It is a love that surpasses knowledge, just as His power surpasses everything (Ephesians 3:19). The paradox of knowing that which surpasses knowledge will not be misunderstood from the standpoint of spiritual experience, because it is the difference between apprehending and comprehending. We know, and know deeply, increasingly, blessedly, and yet all the while there are infinite stretches of love beyond our highest experiences.

(6) "That ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3:19, R.V.). This is the climax of the prayer and is the culminating purpose of the work of the Spirit and the indwelling of Christ. Strength, indwelling, love, and knowledge are to issue in fulness, and we are to be "filled unto all the fulness of God." In the former prayer this fulness is associated with Christ and with His body the Church (Ephesians 1:23), but here it is specifically associated with God and ourselves as believers in Christ. When these two passages are associated with Ephesians 5:18, which speaks of the fulness of the Spirit, we have the word "fulness" connected with each Person of the Blessed Trinity. What it means for the soul to be filled to overflowing with the presence of God itself is beyond our comprehension; it can only be a matter of personal experience as we seek to fulfil the proper conditions. Such a prayer for the fulness of God is best expressed in Miss Havergal’s words-- "Lord, we ask it, scarcely knowing What this wondrous gift may be; But fulfil to overflowing, Thy great meaning let us see."

03.09-IX. LOVE AND DISCERNMENT.

IX. LOVE AND DISCERNMENT.

"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all judgment: that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."-- Php 1:9-11.

One of the most beautiful elements in the Pauline Epistles is the intimate relation which evidently existed between the Apostle and his converts. This is especially the case in the Epistle to the Philippians, for in no other writing is there such a full revelation of the heart of St. Paul and of his love to those with whom he was united in Christ. As, therefore, he knew them so intimately, so he prayed for them, the prayer revealing at once their need, and his conviction as to essential things. Prayer is always strong in proportion to our acquaintance with the spiritual life of others, and feeble so far as we are ignorant of their needs.

1. THE DEFINITE REQUEST.

Let us mark the opening words: "this I keep on asking" (Greek). There was one thing for which he asked continually, and this seemed to him to sum up everything in their life.

(1) He prayed for love; "your love." As they already possessed life, he wished it to be expressed in love. The Epistle is full of this subject. No writing is so truly characterised by the love of St. Paul for his converts, or of his converts for St. Paul (see Php 4:14-18). Let us again remind ourselves that love in the New Testament is something definite, tangible, strong, practical, intense. It is more than sentiment, though of course it includes that; it is more than emotion, though undoubtedly it includes that; it is more than desire, though obviously it includes that. Love is the outgoing of the entire nature in self-sacrificing service. It is the sympathy of the heart and the devotion of the life to its object. As such it is the supreme proof of the reality of our Christian profession. "If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments" (John 14:15, R.V.). "Lovest thou Me ... feed My sheep" (John 21:16). "Seeing ye have purified your souls ... love one another from the heart unfeignedly" (1 Peter 1:22, R.V.). It was with no cynicism, but with a wonderful astonishment, that the heathen used to say, "See how these Christians love one another." When therefore the Apostle prayed for love he was asking that the Philippian Christians might possess and manifest the very finest, truest, most powerful, and most attractive proof of their Christian life.

(2) He prayed for abounding love; "that your love may abound." Not only some, but abundant love; not a little, but much. Love to be real must be kept full, intense, overflowing; it calls for continual reinforcement, replenishing, and the abundance of love is the measure and proof of the possession of abundant life.

(3) He prayed for increasing love; "that your love may abound yet more and more." Expression is piled upon expression in order to emphasise the importance of love and its progress. Love is

intended to grow and not to remain stationary. Just as life makes progress, so must its result similarly develop in love. The motto for the Christian is "more and more." This is why there is so much in the New Testament about growth, for just as it is with natural life so it must be with spiritual. Constant increase, development, progress, extension, expansion must mark it at every step.

(4) He prayed for discerning love; "that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment" (R.V.). The two words "knowledge" and "discernment" are particularly noteworthy. One expresses the principle, the other the application. Again we observe this word "knowledge" as a characteristic expression of the Apostle in these prison-epistles. "Full knowledge" (Greek) is one of the marks of a growing Christian life, and is proved by spiritual perception, spiritual feeling, spiritual discernment. There is a world of difference between intellectual ability and spiritual insight. Many people are clever, but not spiritual, while many people are often truly spiritual without being possessed of much intellectual capacity. Much is said in Scripture about sight in regard to things spiritual. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see" (John 3:3). "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). There are many people in our congregations of average intellect, and perhaps with mental powers decidedly below the average, who are nevertheless full of profound spiritual wisdom because love to Christ has given them keenness of vision and depth of insight.

2. THE IMMEDIATE PURPOSE. This constant progress and abundance of love was intended for a very practical purpose; "so that ye may approve the things that are excellent" (Php 1:10, R.V.). The discernment already mentioned was intended for spiritual discrimination. They were to be enabled to distinguish, to prove, and thereby to approve. As Lightfoot points out, "love imparts a sensitiveness of touch, a keen edge to the discriminating faculty in things moral and spiritual." In things spiritual at least love is not blind, but keen-sighted. It is endowed with a spiritual discernment which is able to distinguish not only between good and bad, but between good and better, between better and best, and between best and excellent. The words, "approve the things that are excellent," occur also in Romans 2:18, and the meaning seems to be first that they were to "distinguish the things that differ," and then as a result they were to "approve the things that transcend." This spiritual discernment is particularly needful today, as the Christian soul is surrounded by so many views and voices. Much that appears on the surface to be attractive and charming contains within it the elements of spiritual danger and disaster, and it is only by spiritual discernment which comes from abounding and increasing love to Christ that the soul is safeguarded against evil and led to approve and follow the things that are superior. It is a vivid picture that the prophet gives of the Messiah when he describes Him as endowed by the Spirit of God and made of "quick scent in the fear of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:3, Hebrew). It is this "quick scent" that by the same Spirit the Lord Jesus Christ bestows upon those who love Him with all the heart.

3. THE PERMANENT RESULT.

Every Christian grace is intended for practical and permanent effect in character. Our lives are not to be intermittent, but continuous in their expression of grace and blessing, and all that the Apostle has been praying for and desiring on behalf of his Philippian Christians was intended to develop and express in them the solid and permanent realities of Christian character.

(1) Sincerity; "that ye may be sincere" (Php 1:10). This has to do with motives. The word is thought to mean "tested in the sunlight." Our lives are to be manifestly true, genuine, sincere, "transparent." "Motive makes the man," and from time to time it is essential that we should allow ourselves to be tested and judged in the sunlight of our perfect fellowship with Christ, just as St. Peter, when asked by his Master, said, "Lord, Thou knowest all things." Sincerity is one of the essential features of the true Christian life. The believer, if he is to do the will of God and commend the Gospel to others, must have no doubtful arrière pensée but a life lived moment by moment in the perfect brightness of the presence of perfect holiness.

(2) Consistency; "void of offence" (Php 1:10, R.V.). This has to do with conduct. Not only are we to be inwardly true, but outwardly sure. Our lives must not hinder others, or put a stumbling-block in their way. Just as the Master said, "Blessed is he whosoever is not put to stumble by Me," so must it be with every follower of Christ. Our lives are to be stepping-stones, not stumbling-blocks.

(3) Character; "being filled with the fruits of righteousness." This has to do with our permanent life both within and without, though the emphasis is on being rather than on doing. Character is the highest point and peak of the Christian life, for just as fruit is the outcome of the life of a tree, so character is the fruit of Christian living, and is the best proof of its existence. The Apostle’s word suggests that we are to be "permanently filled" (Greek) with the fruits of righteousness, those things that are right, straight, true, correct, upright, without any deflection on either side. The Lord Who is our Righteousness works in us the fruits of righteousness by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

4. THE ULTIMATE OBJECT. The Apostle looks forward "unto the day of Christ" (Php 1:10, R.V.), and then speaks of the Christian life being lived "unto the glory and praise of God" (Php 1:11). Everything is to tend towards the manifestation of the splendour of God in human life whereby others will be led to acknowledge and praise Him (Matthew 5:16). And this will reach its culminating point in the "day of Christ," that time when Christian people will stand before their Master and receive the reward of their life and service rendered to Him (Php 1:6, Php 2:16). This was the Apostle’s constant thought, and towards this he strained every nerve (Php 3:11-21). It expresses the highest ideal of Christian living, for day by day we are to live with this wonderful thought of "the glory and praise of God," and day by day we are to look forward to the coming of Christ as that day in which our life will find its fullest realisation, its complete satisfaction, and its unending joy. And all this reminds us of the essential simplicity of life, for there is nothing complex, or involved, or mysterious, or difficult in a life lived day by day to the praise of God and in the light of the coming of our Master. As we review this prayer we may feel perfectly sure that the Apostle meant it to be answered, and indeed, he himself gives us the hint of how this may come to pass when he tells us that the fruits of righteousness are "through Jesus Christ." This is only another way of expressing what he has already shown, his confidence that the possession of the Christian life is the guarantee of its complete realisation and full perfection by the indwelling presence and work of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Php 1:6). Let us therefore take heart of grace as we contemplate this prayer and the other prayers of the Apostle. We must not be depressed, or disheartened, or discouraged, as we ponder the marvellous details and contemplate the stupendous heights of the Christian life as depicted by St. Paul’s wonderful spiritual insight. On the contrary, we must remind ourselves that he would not have prayed these prayers unless he had been certain that God would answer them, and they will assuredly be answered as we set

ourselves resolutely, humbly, lovingly, trustfully to fulfil the required conditions, "through Jesus Christ our Lord."

03.10 APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

Considerations of space have prevented the inclusion of all the Prayers of St. Paul, but for the treatment of the prayer in Rom. XV. 13 (Romans 15:13) reference may perhaps be permitted to the author's Royal and Loyal (ch. 5:) and to his Devotional Commentary on Romans (vol. 3: p. 103 ff.). And a fuller treatment of 2 Thessalonians 3:16 is given in his The Power of Peace. For the thorough exegetical foundation of the passages included in these prayers of the Apostle special attention should of course be given to the various modern standard Commentaries. The following have proved of particular value in the preparation of these pages. On Thessalonians: Milligan, Frame, Eadie, and Ellicott. On Romans: Sanday and Headlam, Godet, and the Notes by Lightfoot. On Ephesians: Armitage Robinson, Westcott, and Eadie. On Philippians: Lightfoot and Ellicott. On Colossians: Lightfoot and Ellicott. Preachers will find it nothing short of an education in Greek to ponder the passages under the guidance of these master-minds. The first step in all true expository preaching is the consideration of the words and phrases in order to elicit their full exegetical value. Following this, and based upon it, will come the spiritual teaching and personal application, and for this purpose the following books will be found of great value. On Thessalonians: Denney in the Expositor's Bible. On Romans: Bishop Moule in the same series. On Ephesians: G. G. Findlay in the Expositor's Bible, with R. W. Dale's well-known Lectures. On Philippians: Rainy in the Expositor's Bible, and Jowett's The High Calling. On Colossians: Maclaren's peerless treatment in the Expositor's Bible, with Bishop Moule's Colossian Studies, and a useful American work, Oneness with Christ, by Bishop Nicholson. The subject of this book is definitely treated in The Prayers of St. Paul, by W. B. Pope, D.D.; The Pattern Prayer Book, by E. W. Moore; Preces Paulinæ, a valuable old book by an anonymous author, which is now only obtainable second-hand. On the general subject of Prayer, which will naturally be given attention in the expository preaching and teaching on this special topic of St. Paul's petitions, the following among other books may perhaps be mentioned: Waiting on God, by Andrew Murray; The Hidden Life of Prayer, by D. M. M'Intyre; Prayer, by M'Conkey; Praying in the Holy Ghost, by G. H. C. Macgregor; Quiet Talks on Prayer, by S. D. Gordon; and Prayer: Its Nature and Scope, by H. C. Trumbull.

sermon index

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net