

The New Thing Which Is Old

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks explores God's consistent response to human deviation throughout history, emphasizing His unwavering commitment to His original purpose and the importance of a faithful remnant.

Scripture: Genesis 22:16, Psalm 24:1, Acts 15:18, Hebrews 4:3

Topics: "God's Faithfulness", "Divine Reactions"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that while God continually initiates new things throughout history, these 'new' actions are actually rooted in His eternal purpose and original design. He illustrates this through biblical examples, showing how God's reactions to humanity's deviations lead to renewed revelations and the restoration of His rights. From Abel's sacrifice to the remnant in Babylon, Sparks highlights that God's plan is unwavering, and He will always find a faithful remnant to fulfill His purpose. The sermon concludes with the assurance that God will continue to react and restore, even amidst spiritual decline, as seen in the New Testament with figures like Zacharias, Mary, and Simeon. Ultimately, Sparks reassures that God's commitment to His original intention remains steadfast, and He will always seek those who align with His will.

Transcript

NOTE. - The term 'reaction', as employed in these chapters, means that acting-again on the part of God when that which ostensibly represents Him no longer truly represents Him, either vitally or adequately. He reacts AGAINST what is merely ostensible and FOR what is living and wholly according to His mind.

There are two things which we need to keep very clearly before us. These two things, as we put them, may seem to contradict one another or be paradoxical.

1. All the way through the ages, God has constantly done a new thing.
2. That which, from man's standpoint, has always been God's new thing, from His own standpoint has not been new at all.

"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world". (Acts 15:18)

"The works were finished from the foundation of the world". (Hebrews 4:3).

In all His fresh activities and revelations, God is working backward to an original position and design. God never leaves His original premise.

This is a far more important truth and law than may at first be recognised. It carries with it these three things:-

1. God has before Him all the time the finished and completed thing, and He knows exactly, to a detail, what He wants.
2. He must and will have that. He cannot be denied it, and He will never give it up or take less.
3. Whenever there is a deviation from or a falling short of it there will be a Divine reaction, and God will begin again, somewhere, somehow. A hurried survey of these reactions through history will both establish the fact and bring out the nature and features of that upon which He has set His heart and which He is determined to have. The earlier instances and forms are very simple, but the greater truths and principles are there, either patent or latent.

When the first deviation - that of Adam and Eve - has taken place, the reaction of God is through Abel and his altar. That altar stands for the securing for God of His rights in creation - in man and the earth. While Cain offers the fruit of the earth and of his own effort, he ignores the curse resting upon all such, and he with his offering is rejected. God's seal is upon Abel's way. The elements are these:-

1. God has a right to all.
2. God can and will only have that without the trace of the curse in it.
3. In order to remove the curse, the cursed thing must be destroyed in death, in either an actual or a representative living form; and a new life must emerge over which death has no power.
4. Fellowship with God is thus, and only thus, possible.

From Abel to Noah the deviation becomes more intense and deliberate. The earth - which is the Lord's - is taken possession of by man for his own ends. God reacts to this in the deluge. Emerging from the judgment, Noah builds an altar and offers sacrifice, and in so doing declares, in intent and effect: "The earth" (the renewed earth) "is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 24:1). Again God gets His rights - PROPHETICALLY - through death and resurrection. But all too soon deviation sets in again. Even Noah is a part of it and fails.

Babel is built and cursed, and under that curse men are scattered to the four corners of the earth. Enoch breaks a long line of death and darkness, as God's reaction. Then, when, it would appear that the testimony has disappeared from the earth, there is another Divine reaction and Abraham is apprehended. With Abraham, while the old elements reappear, new ones appear. The features of his life are:-

1. Revelation. - Vision.
2. A walk of faith. - Relationship.
3. A country. - The Instrument.
4. An altar. - The Basis.

5. Conflict. -The Challenge.

6. A covenant. - The Assurance.

7. A city. - The ultimate Object.

8. Death and Resurrection. - The Method.

These factors are elemental and eternal, and behind all historical, typical, symbolic, or earthly presentations, spiritual realities persist unto a universal realisation. Isaac comes in, not as a separate breaking in of God, but to give special prominence to the method by which everything has its fulfilment. In his very being he is death and resurrection, and, as such, the way by which human limitation is changed for universal expansion and realisation (Genesis 22:16-17). There are other elements in his life which foreshadow the intentions of God - such as his marriage with Rebekah.

The next reaction of God comes with the growing up of Jacob and Esau. These were twin brothers, and represent two halves of a whole; two developments from a spiritual origin; two histories from a holy beginning. Esau takes the earth course, the course of the world and the flesh. Heavenly callings and inheritances are obscured by temporal interests, pursuits, and fancies. The gratifying of the soul life in its earthward relationship is the limit of his horizon. Jacob becomes the type of that which receives the heavenly calling and vision, and passes through the experience of the withering of the flesh to be a spiritual instrument in relation to a heavenly purpose. With Jacob there is a still further introduction of Divine elements. Up to this point the altar has fixed the bounds of advance. That factor remains basic, but Jacob goes a further step. At Luz he has an open Heaven; a revelation of God; a connecting link between Heaven and earth; a voice from God heard; and certain truths from God deposited with him. On the strength of all this he erects a pillar, anoints it with oil, and calls that place "Bethel", "the house of God".

Thus, the House of God, an abiding heavenly object comes into view, and is defined by all those elements which we have mentioned. A "pillar" in Scripture always stands for a witness or a testimony (Genesis 31:51; Isaiah 19:19-20; 1 Timothy 3:15; and many others). All this has to be seen more fully; we are only seeking in this chapter to indicate the truth and establish our fact, or rather to point out an established fact.

We make a long leap and come to Israel in Egypt. Here in this mighty reaction or intervention of God all the elements so far mentioned are gathered up. God is working back to His original purpose. The elements are clearly seen:-

The Altar; the heavenly people for a House of God; a revelation; a testimony; a conflict; a country and city in view, and so on. This God secures, even if it means hurling a mighty empire to judgment.

Thus commences the long and chequered history of that which was intended to be in itself a revelation of the mind of God. But again and again they departed and deviated and the Lord had to take up things from the inside. Thus we have those movements back to God's original thought under Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29:1-9), under Josiah (2 Chron. 35:17-19), and others. But in none of these was the heart of the entire people restored. It was a partial thing. No sooner had the leader gone than the apostasy and declension set in and deepened. It was not the common inclination of the whole people to return, but the strong lead of a few which influenced them for a time - and then they declined or reverted to their worldliness and idolatry. These were beautiful breaks of sunshine in days of deepening spiritual darkness and departure. At length, even these ceased; there was hardly a residue of faithfulness found amongst the people, and

they were all sent into captivity. Babylon is the synonym for confusion, lost distinctiveness, lost testimony, spiritual paralysis, and a false life. Yet, even here God does not abandon His intention and in Babylon He reacts to things in and by a small group of men: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego. They are faithful to all the elements of the Divine purpose and have their prayer-gaze fixed upon Jerusalem.

At length the Lord breaks in and reacts again. It is by but a remnant, but this weak and chastened remnant is His instrument for reviving and perpetuating His testimony in the earth. There follow the heart-warming events as recorded in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah. It is a great epoch, but, alas -

'The radiant morn hath passed away,

And spent TOO SOON her golden store.'

More apostasy, declension, until we get the terrible conditions recorded in Malachi, leading up to the awful announcement: "Ye are cursed with a curse." How black and dark things are! Were they ever worse? And yet - and yet - God is not defeated; for, in the midst of and over against the blackness, there is that which - because of the darkness - represents the most blessed triumph.

"Then THEY that feared the Lord spake often one with another: and the Lord hearkened (bent down), and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day wherein I do make A PECULIAR TREASURE". (Mal. 3:16,17).

Malachi closes, and for three or four hundred years there is chaos. Surely now the testimony has ceased and faithfulness has disappeared? Surely now the Lord has lost everything?

Take up the New Testament record, as Luke essays to give a certain history to his friend Theophilus. He does not travel far before he lights upon certain people of whom he says very significant things from our present point of view. He speaks of one Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth, "both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless". (Luke 1:5-6).

Then he speaks of Mary, to whom the angel Gabriel said: "Thou that are endued with grace, the Lord is with thee". (1:28).

A little later he refers to another thus: "And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit..." (2:25-26).

And yet a little further on this: "And there was one Anna, a prophetess... she... spake of him to ALL THEM THAT WERE LOOKING for the redemption of Jerusalem." (2:36,38).

Thus we see that there is still left a remnant of the faithful after hundreds of years of seeming death. God maintains a representative company.

Then comes the revival of Pentecost - surely a new beginning of God. They are wonderful days; but again, all too soon, we come upon signs of declension. In not a few places in the New Testament Scriptures do we find expressions indicating that the general condition is marked by sad contradiction of and inconsistency with the testimony. Jude, for instance, has a sorry business in his letter; but even there we find the thing which is true, indicated by the discriminating words: "BUT YE, beloved, building up

yourselves on your most holy faith..." (Jude 20). This is the offset to the declension to which he refers.

At length we come to the Revelation, where parts of the Church are well-nigh completely decadent. Grievous things have to be laid to its charge. What will the Lord do? He may have to set the main thing aside, but He will not abandon His purpose. There are those in every place who are true, hungry, dissatisfied with things as they are, wanting to go on with the Lord. These are the Lord's reactionary instrument. These are the 'overcomers' who hear what the Spirit is saying. These are God's new beginning by which He comes back to His first purpose.

We have thus hurriedly ranged the whole Scriptures to reveal the method of God. We should like to pursue it through the ages since New Testament times, but that must wait. We close this introductory consideration by saying that what God has always done He will do again, and when that which is ostensibly His representative instrument on the earth ceases to be actually and vitally such, although He may have raised it up Himself and used and blessed it, He may have to look within the general condition for those who will pay the price and give to Him the fuller measure for which He ever seeks.

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