

Explore the Book

a summary by Pat Evert

The author gives wonderful insight into the meaning of the Bible. He explains many difficult things to understand, but mostly I appreciate his aid in showing the distinct contribution of each book of the Bible and how it fits into the message of the whole. May God increasingly bless you as you go from book to book learning of the great heart and passion of our God.



The Old Testament (39)

HISTORICAL (17)

Basic Law (5)

1. [Genesis](#) – Destitution (through the sin of man)
2. [Exodus](#) – Deliverance (through the power of God)
3. [Leviticus](#) – Dedication (accepted through atonement)
4. [Numbers](#) – Direction (by the Divine guidance)
5. [Deuteronomy](#) – Destination (by the Divine faithfulness)

Pre-Exile Records (9)

1. [Joshua](#) – Possession (Israel occupies the land)
2. [Judges/Ruth](#) – Declension (Israel betrays her trust)
3. [I Samuel](#) – Transition (Theocracy now a Monarchy)
4. [II Samuel](#) – Confirmation (Davidic throne confirmed)
5. [I Kings](#) – Disruption (break-away of ten tribes)
6. [II Kings](#) – Dispersion (both kingdoms into exile)
7. [Chronicles](#) – Retrospection (Adam down to the Exile)

Post-Exile Records (3)

1. [Ezra](#) – Restoration (Remnant returns to Judea)
2. [Nehemiah](#) – Reconstruction (Jerusalem wall rebuilt)
3. [Esther](#) – Preservation (of the NON-returned Jews)

EXPERIENCE (5) Inner Life-Heart

1. [Job](#) – Blessing through Suffering (self-life dies)
2. [Psalms](#) – Praise through Prayer (the new life in God)
3. [Proverbs](#) – Prudence through Precept (in Wisdom's school)
4. [Ecclesiastes](#) – Verity through Vanity (world cannot satisfy)
5. [Song of Solomon](#) – Bliss through Union (Christ fully satisfies)

PROPHECY (17)

Basic Prophecy (5)

1. [Isaiah](#) – Jehovah is Sovereign and Savior
2. [Jeremiah](#) – Retribution and Restoration
3. [Lamentations](#) – Prophet of the Broken Heart

4. [Ezekiel](#) – They shall know I AM Jehovah
5. [Daniel](#) – All shall know that I AM Jehovah

Pre-Exile Prophets (9)

1. [Hosea](#) – Persevering love
2. [Joel](#) – Day of the Lord Comes
3. [Amos](#) – Judgment for abused privilege
4. [Obadiah](#) – Prophetic justice
5. [Jonah](#) – Salvation is of the Lord
6. [Micah](#) – Present judgment, but future blessing
7. [Nahum](#) – Doom of Nineveh
8. [Habakkuk](#) – Questions of faith
9. [Zephaniah](#) – Through judgment to blessing

Post-Exile Prophets (3)

1. [Haggai](#) – From this day on I will bless you
2. [Zechariah](#) – I am jealous for Zion
3. [Malachi](#) – Behold He shall come, but ...

The New Testament (27). The Inter-testament Period

HISTORICAL (5)

1. [Matthew](#) – Promise King attested and rejected
2. [Mark](#) – the Lord's servant, mighty worker
3. [Luke](#) – Behold the Man
4. [John](#) – the Word became flesh
5. [Acts](#) – Renewed offer of the Kingdom to the Jews

EXPERIENCE AND DOCTRINE (22)

Christian Church Epistles (9)

1. [Romans](#) – the Gospel, the power of God to salvation
2. [1st / 2nd Corinthians](#) – Christ our Wisdom / our Comfort in trial
3. [Galatians](#) – Liberation through the gospel
4. [Ephesians](#) – our heavenly position in Christ
5. [Philippians](#) – the mind of Christ
6. [Colossians](#) – Christ the fulness of God to us
7. [1st / 2nd Thessalonians](#) – Christ our Hope / Patient waiting & working

Pastoral and Personal (4)

1. [1st / 2nd Timothy](#) – a charge and a challenge
2. [Titus](#) – Caution to maintain good works
3. [Philemon](#) – the gospel way of salvation

Hebrew Christian Epistles (9)

1. [Hebrews](#) – Christ the new and living way
2. [James](#) – the proofs of faith
3. [1st / 2nd Peter](#) – Christ our example / True knowledge
4. [1st / 2nd / 3rd John](#) – Truth / continuance / truth and love
5. [Jude](#) – Contend for the faith
6. [Revelation](#) – the risen Christ enthroned

***** THE OLD TESTAMENT *****

In Genesis we have RUIN through the sin of man. In Exodus we have REDEMPTION through the blood of the Lamb and the Spirit of power. In Leviticus we have COMMUNION on the ground of atonement. In Numbers we have DIRECTION during pilgrimage, by the overruling will of God. In Deuteronomy we have the double truth of renewed and completed INSTRUCTION, and the pilgrim people brought to the pre-determined DESTINATION. Is not this the order of the experience of the people of God in all ages? There is also an unmistakable 5x progressive revelation of God in His relationship with His people. In Genesis we see the SOVEREIGNTY of God in creation and election (in the choosing of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants; and in covenanting the land of Canaan to them as their predestined inheritance). In Exodus we see the redeeming POWER of God in His deliverance of Israel from Egypt, “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.” In Leviticus we see the HOLINESS of God in His insistence on the separation and sanctification of His redeemed people. In Numbers we see the GOODNESS and SEVERITY of God – severity toward the unbelieving generation which came up from Egypt but never entered the covenanted inheritance, and goodness toward their children, in providing, preserving and protecting, till Canaan was occupied. In Deuteronomy we see the FAITHFULNESS of God – faithful to His purpose, His promise, His people, in bringing the redeemed to the promised possession.

From Genesis to Deuteronomy all have to do with Israel’s PREPARATION for Canaan. The remaining 12 historical books have to do with Israel’s OCCUPATION of Canaan. These 12 may be further divided into 9 and 3. The first 9 cover the pre-exile, the Davidic kingdom is still in the land; whereas the remaining 3 cover the post-exilic, “Remnant” is back in the land.

The 400 Year Periods of Israel’s History

- From Birth of Abram to Death of Joseph in Egypt (The Family Period)
- From the Death of Joseph to the Exodus from Egypt (The Tribal Period)
- From the Exodus to Saul, the 1st of the kings (The Theocratic Period)
- From Saul to Zedekiah and the Exile (The Monarchy Period)

THE POETIC BOOKS: These 5 books are EXPERIENTIAL. The 17 historical books are concerned with a NATION (the Hebrew race); the poetical books are concerned with INDIVIDUALS (the human heart). There is a spiritual progress in these poetic books. The book of Job speaks of THE DEATH OF THE SELF-LIFE. Through the fires of affliction and a new vision of God, Job is brought to the end of himself. He sees himself as God sees him. The self-life with all its self-goodness and self-reason and self-religion, etc. is laid bare and laid low. The man who at first is said to have been the best man on earth (1:8), is found at last on his face before God exclaiming, “I abhor myself in dust and ashes!” (42:6).

Next, in Psalms we see THE NEW LIFE IN GOD, expressing itself in praise and prayer, in adoration and supplication and intercession, in faith and hope and love, in fear and joy and sigh and song, and in every frame that godly hearts know.

In Proverbs we are in God’s school, learning a HEAVENLY BUT PRACTICAL WISDOM FOR LIFE ON EARTH; while in Ecclesiastes we are taught not to set our affection on anything under the sun, but to LET OUR TREASURE BE ON HIGH. Finally, the Song of Songs completes the

progress by symbolically expressing the SWEET INTIMACY OF COMMUNION WITH CHRIST IN ALL THE FULLNESS OF HIS LOVE.

This progress is also the necessary order in true Christian experience. That which the Song of Solomon represents can never be experienced until we experience the Book of Job. Death is peaceful enough, but dying is hard. The self-life never dies without a struggle, but the afterward makes rich compensation!

THE PROPHETICAL BOOKS

The first 5 books are known as the Major Prophets, and the 12 to follow are the so-called Minor Prophets. And the 12 may be still further divided into 9 and 3 which are pre-exilic and post-exilic. In the Major Prophets we find all the basic ethical features of the Old Testament prophecy and of Messianic prediction. In Isaiah the coming Messiah is seen both as the suffering Savior and as the ultimate Sovereign who reigns in world empire. In Jeremiah, where we have Jehovah's full case against Israel, He is the righteous "Branch" of David, and the ultimate restorer of the judged and dispersed people. In Ezekiel, looking beyond intermediate judgments, we see Him as the perfect Shepherd-King in whose glorious reign the ideal temple of the future is to be erected. In Daniel, who gives us the most particularized program of times and events in their successive order, we see the Messiah "cut off" without throne or kingdom, yet standing up at last as universal Emperor on the ruins of a crashed Gentile world-system. The 12 Minor Prophets conform to the general frame already formed for us in Isaiah through Daniel. The prophets were a succession of messengers raised up for a special period – that of declension and apostasy. They were inspired of God to transmit a message of warning and entreaty before the stroke of Divine judgment laid the two Hebrew kingdoms low beneath the heel of their heathen captors. "Lamentations" marks Judah's actual plunge into the night of the Babylonian exile. There were many other unnamed prophets; there were also many more writings of the prophets not included in the inspired Scriptures.

The prophet is one who speaks in the place of another. He would make known the will of One above them, and express higher thoughts and purposes than his own, as one who is entrusted with direct authority from God to speak on His behalf. In the course of Israel's history we notice the rise of five distinct orders – Priests, Levites, Judges, Kings and Prophets. The office of the prophet was extraordinary rather than ordinary. As His ordinary servants and teachers, God appointed the priests and levites. They taught what the Law enjoined, and they performed the sacred rites which it demanded. But, when Israel turned away from it – then appeared the prophet, to rouse, to excite, to warn the people, and to call them back to the real purport of their own institutions.

*** THE NEW TESTAMENT ***

In the New Testament, every book of the Old Testament is quoted from, except Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Lamentations. Or, in another way, in the New Testament there are 260 chapters, of which 209 have references to the Old Testament, leaving only 51 chapters with no reference. Thus the Old and the New Testament are interwoven with the weave of constant reference, allusion, and quotation. And no single reference in the New contradicts the Old, or undermines its authority. They all accept its full authority and its Divine nature.

Historical & Foundational

The Acts of the Apostles covers a suspense period in which our Lord's return was contingent upon the reaction of Israel to the renewed offer of our Lord Jesus as Messiah-Savior-King. Had there been a national response, the Lord would have returned in kingdom glory without further postponement.

In the Old Testament there seems to be a sorting out of the true Israel as through a sieve – dividing the nation, captivity in exile, return of the remnant. In the New Testament there seems to be the reverse, that of a growing, spreading, multiplying and maturing of the body of Christ.

The Christian Church Epistles

Romans – Galatians = Christ and the Cross. (Origin) {Faith}
Ephesians-Colossians = Christ and the Church (Identity) {Love}
Thessalonians = Christ and His Coming (Goal) {Hope}

Addressed to churches, the emphasis is the mystery of the Church which is Christ's body. It begins with its doctrinal treatise and ends with its apocalypse of the Lord Jesus as it relates to the Church. Paul in this section addresses seven churches (the number of completeness), as in Revelation. In this we have the complete embodiment of the Holy Spirit's teaching for us Christian believers for the present dispensation. They are in a three-fold order: 1) Doctrine, the norms of the subjects they deal with, 2) Reproof, referring to wrong conduct, and 3) Correction, referring to wrong doctrine.

Each of those personal encounters becomes an invitation to breathe more slowly, speak more softly, and act more graciously as a way of coming into greater harmony with the light of your divinity. This allows you to feel safe in your body, not as a result of personal circumstances, but based on how compassionately you are willing to respond to the situations at hand.

Book	Christ seen	The Gospel	In Christ	Key word
Romans	Power of God	Its message	Justification	Righteousness
I Cor.	Wisdom of God	Its ministry	Sanctification	Wisdom
II Cor.	Comfort of God	Its ministers	Consolation	Comfort
Galatians	Righteousness of	Its mutilators	Liberation	Faith
Ephesians	Riches of God	The heavenlies	Exaltation	Blessed
Philippians	Sufficiency	The earthlies	Exultation	Gain
Colossians	Fullness of God	Philosophies	Completion	Filled
I Thes.	Promise	Church's future	Translation	Working
II Thes.	Reward	The antichrist	Compensation	Waiting

The Pastoral Epistles

These Pastoral Epistles are so named and grouped because they are addressed to Christian pastors. They have a positional significance which should not be overlooked, fitting as they do, between the two cohesive main groups of New Testament epistles, i.e... the nine Christian Church Epistles and the nine Hebrew Christian Epistles. The nine-fold groups noticeably differ from each other in viewpoint and emphasis. The Pastoral Epistles, coming between them, fulfill a meaningful function. As the book of the Acts marks the transition from the distinctive message of the Gospels to that of the Epistles, so these Pastoral Epistles, both by their nature and their position, mark the transition from the special doctrinal contribution of the Church Epistles to the new emphasis and aspects of the Hebrew Epistles.

If there is any part of the Bible which Christian MINISTERS should study it is that part which particularly addresses them, namely the Pastoral Epistles. They are known as such because they have to do with the organized church from the pastor's point of view, although they are full of instruction for ALL Christian believers. These Pastoral Epistles have a special interest in three ways: (1) in their subject-matter, (2) in their leading ideas, (3) in their positional significance.

The Hebrew Christian Epistles

Addressed to Hebrew believers, and contain a Hebrew atmosphere – how the gospel effects the nation of Israel, and their divinely granted religion. It begins with its doctrinal treatise and ends with its apocalypse of the Lord as it relates to the nation Israel. At the beginning of the “Church Epistles” the Book of Romans shows us that salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ is the ONLY way. But in Hebrews we are shown that salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ is the BETTER way – there is a “better” Deliverer, even Jesus, and a “better” sacrifice, i.e. Calvary; and a “better” principle, i.e. faith.

Genesis & the Apocalypse

Genesis answers the question, “How did all begin?” In broad outline and majestic language Revelation answers the question, “How will all issue?” Mark the contrasts between the two books.

We see in Genesis	We see in Revelation
In Adam	In Christ
The first paradise closed	The new paradise is opened
Dispossession thru human sin	Repossession thru Divine grace
The curse imposed	The curse removed
Access to the tree of life lost	Access to the tree of life regained
The beginning of sorrow and death	No more death, neither sorrow
A garden defilement entered into	A city nothing defiling shall enter
The evil triumph of the serpent	The ultimate triumph of the Lamb
The walk of God w/man interrupted	The walk of God w/man resumed

The Garden in Genesis gives place to the City in Revelation, and the one man has become a race. In Genesis we see human sin in its beginnings, in Revelation we see it in its full and final developments, in the harlot, the false prophet, the beast and the dragon. In Genesis we see sin causing physical death on earth, in Revelation we see sin issuing in the dread darkness of the second death in the beyond. In Genesis we see the sentence passed on Satan, in Revelation we have the sentence executed. In Genesis we have the first promise of a coming Savior and salvation, in Revelation we see the promise in its final and glorious fulfillment. Genesis causes anticipation, Revelation effects realization. Genesis is the foundation stone of the Bible, Revelation is its capstone.

From the beginning of the world to its end, there is no place you can look and not see Jesus. He is everywhere. He is All in all. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:17)

The central chapter of the Bible is Psalm 118, in between the shortest and the longest chapters in the Bible. There are 594 chapters before and after it. What is the central verse in the Bible? Psalm 118:8, "It is better to trust the LORD than to put confidence in man." This is the center of God's perfect will for our lives.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

GENESIS: THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY – IN EVENTS & ELECTION

I. PRIMEVAL HISTORY; FOUR OUTSTANDING EVENTS

The Creation – Divine Sovereignty in Physical Creation

God's Eternal Priority

The Fall – Divine Sovereignty in Human Probation

God's Moral Authority

The Flood – Divine Sovereignty in Historical Retribution

God's Judicial Severity

Babel Crisis – Divine Sovereignty in Racial Distribution

God's Governmental Supremacy

II. PATRIARCHAL HISTORY; FOUR OUTSTANDING PERSONS

Abraham – Divine Sovereignty in Election

Supernatural Call

Isaac – Divine Sovereignty in Election

Supernatural Birth

Jacob – Divine Sovereignty in Election

Supernatural Care

Joseph – Divine Sovereignty in Direction

Supernatural Control

Genesis gives us the origin and initial explanation of all that follows. Here we have in germ all that is later developed. From Adam to Abraham we see the course of degeneration: first in the individual Adam, then in the family-Cain and his descendants, then in the nations – the

antediluvian civilization; and then persisting throughout the race, as such, at Babel. Then there comes a new departure, we see the process of regeneration operating: first in the individual- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; then in the family-the sons of Jacob; then the nation-Israel; all with a view to the ultimate regeneration of the race. Running through it all we see the principle of Divine election. God chooses whom He will in sovereign grace. Then in the wonderful biography of Joseph, we see the sovereignty of God in direction – the overruling and infallible directing of all happenings, however seemingly contrary, to the predetermined end.

THE CREATION

How did it all begin? To accept this first verse of Scripture makes it easy to accept all lesser miracles to follow. The first verse simply states the fact of the original creation, and leaves it there, in the dateless past. Then verse 2 tells of a chaos which came later. And then the six days that follow describe the reformation of the earth with a view to its becoming the habitation of man. In man we see the crowning purpose of the whole. Man's liberty was to be conditioned by loyalty. Amid many provisions there was just one prohibition. This constituted the point of probation.

THE FALL

How did sin get in? The tempter could only tempt. There need not have been sin, and there was no need to yield. God had made it easy to resist such temptation. Adam and Eve had been forewarned. The command was plain. The warning was emphatic. Obedience was easy, for God had surrounded them with abundant satisfactions, and given them the most distinguished place in His earth creation. Adam's was a clear choice, it would seem, to be one with Eve in her fall. As for the results: Innocence was no longer. They experienced the first appearance of shame. He lost the pristine glory about his body, the original glory of unfallen man, in Eden; once bathed in the glory – light of that unsullied communion with God, their whole bodies must have shone. The faculty of conscience and with it came fear, Adam and his wife fled from God and tried to hide from Him. There had come about a spiritual alienation of man from God. The reign of spiritual death had set in.

THE FLOOD

The Flood is mentioned in such close connection with the fall so that we don't miss its significance, even though it occurred about 1600 years later. In Ch.3 we have the fall. In Ch.4 we have Cain and the Cain line – the sons of men. In Ch.5 we have Seth and the Seth line – the sons of God. In Ch.6 the two lines cross, with tragic moral results. In Ch.7 judgment falls – the flood. The separation of the two lines was vital. Their confusion was fatal, and divine intervention became unavoidable. The Divine insistence all the way through is that the spiritual seed come out and be separate. The 'sons of God' could not be fallen angels, for angels are sexless and therefore incapable either of sensuous experience or of sexual processes; nor are they capable of reproduction. The flood of Noah's day is different from the prehistoric flood of which our geologists speak (Ge.1:2; II Pet.3). Noah was the 10th from Adam in the Messianic line. Satan may do his worst, and man may sink to his lowest, and judgment may fall to the utmost; but the ultimate purpose of Jehovah cannot be thwarted.

THE BABEL DISPERSION

Marked restraints are now imposed. The duration of human life is greatly curtailed. The soil now takes more toil and gives less in return, and flesh is now included in man's diet. A restraint of fear towards man is put upon the beasts. A death penalty is put upon the slaying of man by man. Amid these restraints the faithfulness of God stands out in the sign of the rainbow; a

Divine promise of hope for the future. But, yet another restraint was imposed, that of the confusion of tongues. The pluralizing of human language was a culminating restraint measure. It was precipitated by a human confederacy to establish a big racial center, with a high astral tower. Its wrongs lay in the fact that its builders were defying the Divine command to spread and replenish the earth. "Let us make us a name. Let us not be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. Let us rebel." And from this time on Babel, or Babylon, becomes the symbol-city of 'this present evil world,' energized as it is, by the arch-rebel Satan.

TYPE TEACHING IN GENESIS:

The one all-sufficient authority for Old Testament typology is the clear warrant of the New Testament. Studied with good sense and a careful eye to New Testament teaching, the typology of the Old Testament is a priceless treasure-mine. It argues superhuman wisdom and foreknowledge. No doctrine should be built upon a type or types independently of direct teaching elsewhere in Scripture. Types are meant to amplify and vivify doctrine, but not to originate it. They are illuminative but not foundational. For if they are types, then they are not originals, but representations of things other than themselves. Also, the parallelism between type and antitype should not be pressed to fanciful extremes. Types, it would seem, are not meant to be exact replicas of those things which they typify, but to enrich and illumine our understanding of the more essential features of the antitype.

SEVEN GREAT MEN OF GENESIS:

Adam is a type of the natural man, unregenerate human nature. If we want to know the awful capacities of evil which are within Adamic human nature, we only need to trace the Cain line with its records of godless culture, earthly-mindedness, vanity, violence and rebellion against God. If we would know what can come from the same human material when under the renewing and transforming power of Divine grace, we need to follow the line of the MEN OF FAITH.

1) Abel – The man of "spiritual desire." His name means exhalation or vapor, speaking of ascent to higher regions. Cain was a tiller of the ground with earthly interests and holdings. Abel was a keeper of sheep, a tent-dwelling pilgrim, desiring something beyond. Abel, the man of spiritual aspiration, offers a sacrifice which is at once a confession of sin, and the expression of strong desire for fellowship with God on the ground of forgiveness through sacrifice and faith.

2) Enoch – The man of "spiritual choice." Enoch is forever immortalized as the man who walked with God. It was not God going Enoch's way, but Enoch going God's way. Behind this walk with God was Enoch's full and final 'choice' of God's will and way. His name means dedicated.

3) Noah – The man of "spiritual renewal." Noah's experience of being saved through water is a typical anticipation of regeneration, of which Christian baptism is the symbol (I Pet.3:21). In Ch.6 we see Noah still on the ground of the old world. In Ch.7 we see him separated from the old world, in the ark (Christ), and by the water (regeneration). And later we see him going forth into a new life in a new world – which speaks of newness of life through regeneration. The post-flood patriarchs, following the typifying of regeneration, in Noah, exhibit in a typical way, the qualities and characteristics of the regenerate life.

4) Abraham – The life of faith

5) Isaac – The life of sonship

6) Jacob – The life of service

7) Joseph – The life of suffering and glory

Note the progressive order.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

EXODUS: THE DIVINE POWER IN REDEMPTION

- I. THE EXODUS (1-18) Out of bondage
 - Projected (1-4)
 - Obstructed (5-11)
 - Effected (12-18)
- II. THE LAW (19-24) A lesson
 - Moral Commandments (19-20)
 - Social Judgments (21-23)
 - Religious Ordinances (24+)
- III. THE TABERNACLE (25-40) Into Relationship
 - Designed (25-31)
 - Delayed (32-34)
 - Completed (35-40)

The exodus from Egypt marks the birth of a nation. Its counterpart in the Gospel is seen when Moses and Elijah appear with Christ on the Mt. of transfiguration and they spoke of His 'Exodus,' when He should leave this world. He would also be a Leader, to take out nations from this house of bondage, into a new life, liberty and fellowship.

Egypt is a type of the world in its:

- (1) material wealth and power,
- (2) wisdom and false religion,
- (3) despotic prince, Pharaoh, who is a type of Satan,
- (4) organization on the principles of force, aggrandizement, ambition and pleasure,
- (5) persecution of the people of God,
- (6) overthrow by Divine judgment.

Supremely, the Exodus was an expression of the Divine power. This becomes the Old Testament unit of measure for God's power – Yet this Old Testament unit of measure is superseded by the greater manifestation of the Divine power in the resurrection (Exodus) of Christ. Like Exodus it is a marvel of:

Exodus of Israel	Exodus of Christ
Judgment in miraculous plagues	God has dealt with sin, and the overthrown Satan and his hosts
Grace in blood-marked dwellings	Exempting of the blood-sealed believer from judgment, by the cross
Might in clearing a way through the sea	Raising up Christ from the dead and His exaltation as Prince and Savior far above all
Guidance in the pillar of cloud and of fire	In the giving and ministry of the Holy Spirit

Exodus of Israel	Exodus of Christ
Provision in supplying food and drink	Blessing the believer with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ
Faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant	In whom all the kindred of the earth are blessed
Condescension in the Tabernacle, where God dwelt with His people	The abiding of the Holy Spirit within the believer, transforming the human personality into a temple of the Living God

Both the Exodus of Israel and the salvation of Christians were a mighty emancipation, one a physical and temporal deliverance opening up the way to an earthly Canaan; the other a spiritual and eternal deliverance opening up the way to Heaven., the one was national and therefore limited, the other universal with its characteristic word “whosoever.”

Both by the blood of a lamb slain, one the sheltering blood of many animals, the other that of the precious blood of Christ; both were forever afterwards commemorated in a Passover feast.

THE LAW

A parenthetical pause in and of the Abrahamic Covenant to teach:

- (1) a standard of righteousness,
- (2) to expose and identify sin,
- (3) the Divine holiness.

Obligatory religion will not suffice; Christ alone will meet our need and God’s.

THE TABERNACLE

God’s eternal desire being fulfilled – “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people”.

Concerning the furniture:

The brazen altar is intended to teach us, at the very threshold, the only way of approach for sinful man unto his holy God is through atoning sacrifice, a Sacrifice which is at the same time a confession of man’s sin and a satisfaction to God.

Next we come to the laver of brass, containing the water for the cleansing of those who ministered in the things of the sanctuary. This speaks of regeneration and spiritual renewal.

Within the tabernacle we find the table of showbread which speaks of sustenance for the spiritual life.

And on our left we see the seven-branched golden lampstand speaking of spiritual illumination. Before us is the golden altar of incense, fragrantly symbolizing acceptable supplication.

Then, within the veil, we find the ark speaking of covenant relationship between God and His people, and upon it the blood-sprinkled,

shekinah-lit mercy seat speaking of intercession in the very presence of God, and of the very life of God imparted.

There is a remarkable parallel in John’s Gospel as though John were leading us, in exactly the same order as found in the Tabernacle. In Ch.1 we behold the Lamb of God, in Ch.3 he takes us to the laver, “Unless a man be born of water and the Spirit...” In Ch.4-6 he takes us to the table of showbread and we see that Christ is the Living Water and the Bread of Life. In Ch.8-9 the golden lampstand is likened to the Light of the world. In Ch.14-16 Jesus explains to us the altar

of incense, offering up acceptable prayers in His name. Then in Ch.17 the Lord takes us within the veil and we are given a glimpse of His high priestly ministry of intercession for us in the presence of God. He is the ground of our access and acceptance by a new relationship (Jn.20:17). And in Ch.20:22 the very life of God is imparted to the blood-bought believer by the Holy Spirit.

The High Priest's garments were for glory and beauty. They are seven in number.

First, he is clothed with the tunic of linen – the righteousness of Christ,

Next the sash of linen, allowing no perspiration of the flesh

in the ephod, the High Priest bears Israel's tribes collectively upon his shoulders.

Then in the breastplate, he bears them individually upon his heart. Then, as he bears them thus before God, he bears all their imperfection, and completely covers it all up in his own glory and beauty,

In the seamless robe of blue with the hem of pomegranates and bells

On the turban

And on the plate of pure gold God sees 'Holiness to the Lord' shining from the High Priest's brow, and the people are accepted in him. "It shall be always upon HIS forehead, that THEY may be accepted." As Aaron was to bear the holy crown ALWAYS, so Christ bears it always for us, so that in Him WE become ALWAYS ACCEPTED.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

LEVITICUS: THE DIVINE HOLINESS – FELLOWSHIP THROUGH SANCTIFICATION

I. THE GROUND OF FELLOWSHIP – SACRIFICE (1-18)

The Offerings (Absolution) 1-7

The Priesthood (Mediation) 8-10

The People (Purification) 11-16

The Altar (Reconciliation) 17

II. THE WALK OF FELLOWSHIP – SEPARATION (18-27)

Regulations concerning the People 18-20

Regulations concerning the Priests 21-22

Regulations concerning the Feasts 23-24

Regulations concerning the Land 25-27

Leviticus was written to show Israel how to live as a nation in fellowship with God, and thus to prepare the nation for the high service of mediating the redemption of God to all nations. Israel then, must be taught the holiness of God, and Leviticus reveals this in three ways, (1) in the sacrificial system, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission," pressing upon the conscience the seriousness of sin; (2) in the precepts of the law, the one divinely revealed standard for character and conduct; (3) in the penalties attached to the violations of the law. Involved in this revelation of Israel's holy God is the imperative insistence on Israel's separation from the other nations. God, who dwells among His people in fellowship with them speaks 'out of the Tabernacle' (1:1). The people therefore, are not addressed as sinners distanced from God, like those of the other nations, but as being already brought into a new relationship, even that of fellowship, on the ground of the blood – sealed covenant. The sacrifices in Leviticus do not mean to set forth how the people may BECOME redeemed (for their redemption has already been wrought through the paschal lamb of the Exodus. No, the Levitical sacrifices are

prescribed in such wise as to set forth how the new relationship MAY BE MAINTAINED. With good reason Leviticus holds the central place among the five books of Moses, for with its doctrine of mediation through a priest, absolution through a sacrifice, and reconciliation at the altar, it is the very heart of the Pentateuch – and of the Gospel. Leviticus stands in the same relation to Exodus that the Epistles do to the Gospels. In the Gospels we are SET FREE, by the blood of the Lamb. In the Epistles we are indwelt by the Spirit of God. In the Gospels God speaks to us FROM WITHOUT, in the Epistles FROM WITHIN. In the Gospels we have the GROUND of fellowship – redemption, in the Epistles we have the WALK of fellowship with God – sanctification. These Levitical sacrifices are perhaps the most complete description of our Savior's atoning work anywhere given to us. In the first seventeen chapters we are dealing with NON-MORAL regulations, whereas in the remaining ten we are dealing with regulations concerning MORALS. The first part has to do with WORSHIP, the second part has to do with PRACTICE. In the first part all relates to the Tabernacle, in the second all pertains to character and conduct. Part one shows the WAY TO GOD – by sacrifice; part two shows the WALK WITH GOD – by sanctification. The first part deals with CEREMONIAL and PHYSICAL defilement, the second part deals with MORAL and SPIRITUAL defilement. In the first part PURIFICATION is provided, in the second part PUNISHMENT is to be inflicted. The first part has to do with CLEANSING, the second has to do with CLEAN LIVING. In other words, part one shows the Godward FOUNDATION of fellowship, the second shows the manward CONDITION of fellowship. The first part says, "The blood cleanses us" and the second part says, "...if we walk in the light."

THE OFFERINGS:

The first three are sweet-savor offerings, voluntary; the other two non-sweet offerings, compulsory. The sweet-savor offerings typify Christ in His own meritorious perfections. The non-sweet savor offerings typify Christ as bearing the demerit of the sinner. The sweet-savor offerings speak rather of what the offering of Christ means to GOD; the non-sweet savor offerings speak rather of what the offering of Christ means to US. The BURNT offering typifies Christ's "offering Himself without spot to God." It foreshadows Christ on the cross, not so much bearing sin as ACCOMPLISHING THE WILL OF GOD. We are shown the perfection of Christ's OFFERING of Himself, as God sees it. The MEAL offering exhibits typically the perfect manhood of Christ. The emphasis here is on the LIFE which was offered. It sets forth the perfection of character which gave the offering its unspeakable value. The PEACE offering speaks of restored COMMUNION, resulting from the perfect satisfaction rendered in Christ. God is propitiated, man is reconciled, there is peace. As for the non-sweet savor offerings, the SIN offering typifies Christ as sin bearer, 'made sin for us,' while the TRESPASS offering speaks of sins (plural), and typifies Christ as Expiatory, making restitution for the injury caused by our wrong doing. The Levitical offerings certainly did not make atonement for sin in the theologically accepted sense of the word. They merely COVERED, or put away from judicial view, the sins of the O.T. believers, through the forbearance of God, until the one real atonement was effected on Calvary, which the Levitical sacrifices anticipated and prefigured.

THE PRIESTS:

If fellowship is to be maintained, there must not only be a SACRIFICE, but a PRIEST. The Lord Jesus is both in one, to His believing people, so that we have access to God by "a new and living way," a new way because it is the way of the CROSS, which speaks of the one final sacrifice for sin; and a living way because it is the way of the RESURRECTION, which speaks of the one ever-living Priest on high. Aaron is anointed (8:12) BEFORE the slaying of the sacrifice, his sons AFTER it, along with the sprinkling of the blood upon them (8:30). Aaron the

High Priest, prefigures the Lord Jesus, while his sons typically anticipate the believer-priests of today. The sinless Lord Jesus needed no blood-sprinkling before receiving the anointing of the Holy Spirit; and in Aaron's being anointed alone, before the blood shedding, we see a discriminating type-picture of the incarnate Son of God, who until He gave Himself on Calvary, stood absolutely alone. Without the blood-shedding, Aaron and his sons could not be together in the anointing.

THE PEOPLE:

They must be clean both inwardly and outwardly, both sanitarily clean and sacrificially cleansed. The purpose of the teaching of this section is to, "make a difference between the unclean and the clean" and "the priest shall make an atonement for you to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord." This section deals with clean foods (11), clean bodies(12-13), clean clothes (13), clean houses (14), clean contacts (15), and a clean nation (16).

THE ALTAR:

Five times, and with severe explicitness, the one Divinely ordained place of sacrifice is stipulated. There is one place, and only one, where God, in sovereign grace, has elected to meet with penitent sinners, and that is the cross – of which the altar at the door of the Tabernacle was a type. None other sacrifice! None other priest! None other altar! It is well to note that even the blood has no atoning value unless it be on the altar (17:11). It must be the blood; and it must be the one altar. Every offering was an execution of the sentence of the law upon a substitute for the offender, and every such offering pointed forward to that substitutional death of Messiah which alone vindicated the righteousness of God in passing over the sins of those who offered the typical sacrifices.

OUR WALK:

Mere POSITIONAL sanctification (as in part one) is not enough; there must be PRACTICAL sanctification (which is the purpose in part two). We have in Ch.18 sex prohibitions, Ch.19 general admonitions, and Ch.20 penal sanctions against offenders. Here God shows us His estimate on chaste sex relationships. There's nothing more vital to any people than the adequate safeguarding of matrimonial and family relationships.

THE PRIESTS:

As the tabernacle was a three-fold structure, so corresponded the nation (1) the congregation, (2) the priesthood, (3) the High Priest. And as the three parts of the Tabernacle became successively holier, so was it to be with the nation – Israel's sanctification was to reach its culminating expression in the High Priest. Every true believer is a priest by virtue of life-giving union with the Lord Jesus, and nothing can break that union where it really exists; but all Christians do not enjoy the same intimacy of fellowship, or exercise the same ministry within the veil! Union is one thing, communion is another. Life is one thing, ministry is another. Standing is one thing, state is another. Relationship is one thing, serving within the veil is another. What deformities and defilements debar many of us from that elevated walk and ministry which might be ours!

THE FEASTS:

There were 5 annual set seasons (mo'adim) shown in Ch.23.

- 1) The Feast of Passover v.5-14
- 2) The Feast of Pentecost v.15-22

- 3) The Blowing of Trumpets v.23-25
- 4) The Day of Atonement v.26-32
- 5) The Feast of Tabernacles v.33-44

Of these only 3 were really feasts (chaggim). The three great feasts of Israel were (1) the Feast of Passover, which included the Feast of Unleavened Bread, (2) the Feast of Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Firstfruits, and (3) the Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Ingathering. All five annual gatherings were special SABBATHS; and they were all times of holy CONVOCATION, or assembling together of the people for worship and joyous thanksgiving. The Sabbatical system of Israel was meant to be a 7-fold revolving cycle of seventh day, seventh month, seventh year, and a seven-times-seven of years. There seem to have been ten Sabbaths given, the five above, and:

- 6) The weekly Sabbath
- 7) The seventh day of Unleavened Bread
- 8) The eighth day of Feast of Tabernacles
- 9) The seventh year Sabbath
- 10) The Jubilee Sabbath

The purpose of all these set seasons was to acknowledge that all harvest and other blessings came from God; that each new month and year should be dedicated to Him. The unifying idea running through them is the recognition of Jehovah as the Source and Sustainer of His people's life. They are called the feasts OF THE LORD; but alas, in the New Testament times they'd deteriorated into feasts OF THE JEWS.

The Passover was commemorative of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. The slaying of the lamb speaks of salvation, the feasting speaks of fellowship. The seven days of unleavened bread speaks of the daily walk of the redeemed, that they must be separate from evil, and be a holy people. The cessation from works speaks of resting in our acceptance with God through the ascending odor of the burnt offering. The Passover barley-sheaf marked the COMMENCEMENT of the grain harvest; the Pentecost wave-loaves marked its COMPLETION. The Passover wave-SHEAF was the grain as direct from God's harvest; the Pentecost wave-LOAVES were the grain as ready for man's food. Pentecost typifies God's people gathered by the Holy Spirit and presented before Him in connection with all the preciousness of Christ. The two wave-loaves were baked with leaven, that is, despite the presence of evil in the nature, there is acceptance and communion through the divinely provided sacrifice of Christ.

The next three 'set seasons' came within a few days of each other. Also they were separated by a wide gap from the earlier two feasts of the year. These observances of the seventh month look on to the time of Israel's regathering at the end of the present age. The blowing of the trumpets is in preparation of the two great events which followed in this seventh month, namely, the annual Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles, the completion of the harvest ingathering. The Lord Jesus, Israel's true High Priest, has entered into the heavenly sanctuary, with the blood of the one perfect sacrifice, but He is yet to come forth again to His people. At that time there shall be a penitent Israel. Then shall they look, in believing contrition, on Him whom they pierced, and they shall be saved. It will be then, also, that the type fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles will take place, and the glory of Israel's final ingathering. This feast lasted longer than any other and it was to be the year's supreme season of festive joy. It points us forward to that seventh millennium of history yet to be (Zech.14).

THE LAND:

The land is mentioned 30x in these three chapters. The two periodic Sabbaths of rest unto the land were to be an acknowledgment of the Divine proprietorship of the land, and of Israel's tenure on the ground of covenant relationship. They also were to serve as a check upon covetousness. Every seventh year the Hebrew must suspend effort after gain, and in the Jubilee all must go out free. These were meant to develop the people's faith in God. This was also to secure as far as possible the equal distribution of wealth, by preventing excessive accumulation of land or capital in the hands of a few while the mass should be in poverty. The key to the seventh-year Sabbath is the word REST. It was a rest (1) for the land, (2) from manual toil, (3) from debt. The key to the year of Jubilee is the word LIBERTY. It brought liberty (1) to the slave, (2) to property, (3) to the ground itself. The seventh year Sabbath of rest following the six years of toil, speaks of that seventh great thousand-year period yet to be which will be brought in by the second coming of Christ. The Jubilee speaks of that glorious condition of things FOLLOWING the millennial reign of Christ. After (the seventh) seventh day Sabbath of the old week and the old dispensation, the day of resurrection, of the outpoured Spirit, of a new order of things; so the Jubilee looks on to the new heaven and new earth yet to be, during which all rule and authority shall have been brought beneath Christ's feet, even death. That inheritance of the earth which was forfeited through sin, this glorious Jubilee of the ages shall bring back to us.

The new Jerusalem descends from heaven, and the redeemed and glorified assume possession of the purchased inheritance (Ro.8:21).

The central figure in Leviticus is the High Priest. The central chapter is 16 – the annual Day of Atonement. The central theme is fellowship through sanctification. The central lesson is "you shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy." The word "holy" is used over 80x in Leviticus.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

NUMBERS: THE DIVINE GOODNESS & SEVERITY

THE OLD GENERATION (SINAI TO KADESH) 1-14

The Numbering 1-4

The Instructing 5-9

The Journeying 10-14

THE TRANSITION ERA (IN THE WILDERNESS) 15-20

The Wandering

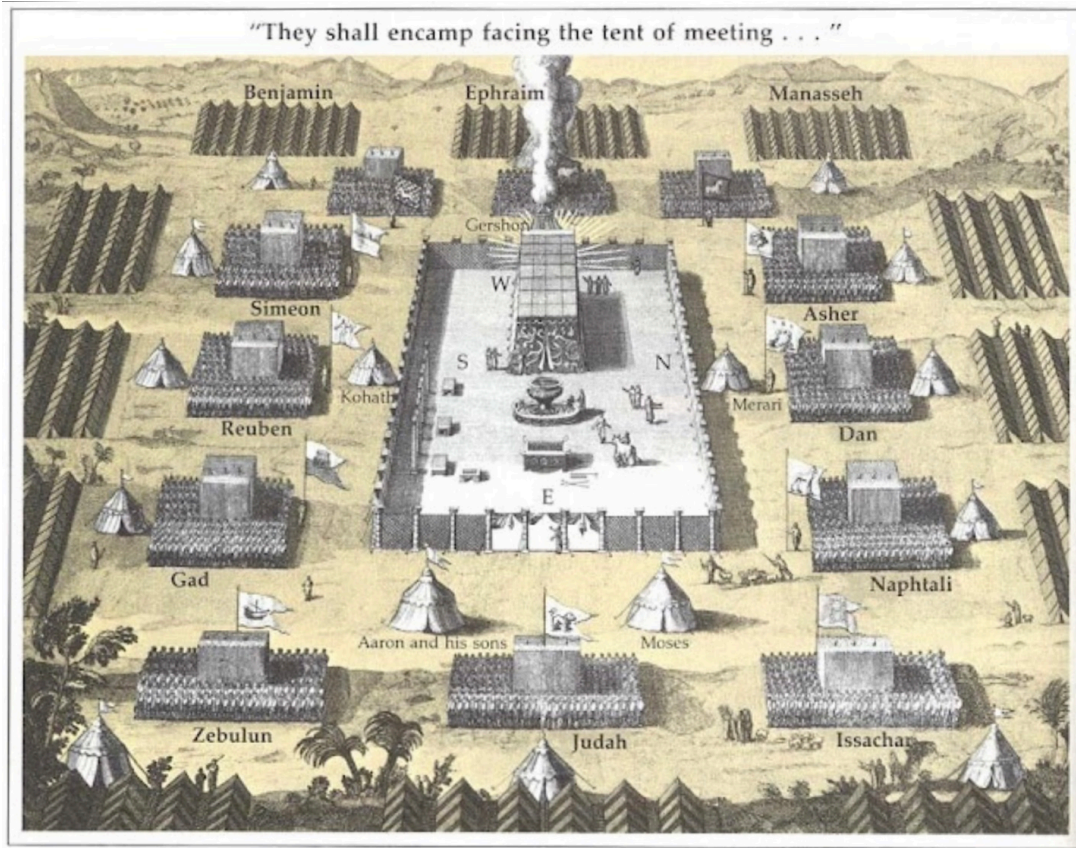
THE NEW GENERATION (KADESH TO MOAB) 21-36

The New Journeying 21-25

The New Numbering 26-27

The New Instructing 28-36

The Hebrew and Greek names for the book certainly give its gist, "in the wilderness" and "numbers." First the census is taken, with the primary object of determining Israel's military strength. Then the camp is strategically distributed with a view to facilitate orderly mobility.



Numbers deals with two different generations of people – first with the generation that came up from Egypt but perished in the wilderness; and second, with the new generation that grew up in the wilderness and then entered Canaan. Coming between the two groups, and unmistakably marking them off, we have the wilderness “Wandering”- the period of transition during which the old generation died off and the new generation grew up. The twentieth chapter records the death of Aaron. Numbers 33:38 tells us that Aaron the priest “died there, in the fortieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt.” Thus the death of Aaron marked the lapse of forty years from the Exodus, and thirty-eight years from the beginning of the ‘wandering’; and we know that 38 years completed the ‘wandering.’ Aaron’s death is the most important time mark in the whole book of Numbers. The central message of the book is Romans 11:22, “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God.” In the one case we see the awful inflexibility of the Divine justice. In the other case we see the unfailing faithfulness of God to His promise, His purpose and His people. The New Testament interprets the book of Numbers for us:

- 1) Behold the goodness and severity of God (Ro.11:22)
- 2) Let him that thinks he stands take heed... (I Co.10:12)
- 3) Take heed lest there be in you...unbelief (He.3:12)

THE OLD GENERATION:

Estimatedly two and a half million people were mobilized, and the quadrangular camp round about the Tabernacle was about twelve miles square. The primary purpose of this numbering was a military one. It gives us the man-power of the newly-formed nation. The Levite census, unlike the others, was to include all Levite males from a month old. God would count all the

Levites as peculiarly His own instead of the firstborn from all the other tribes. Mark clearly the difference between the ministry of the Levites and that of the priests. The priests had to do with the ceremonial, sacrificial and spiritual ministries of the Tabernacle. The Levites had to do with the material of the Tabernacle itself – its erection, transportation, preservation and maintenance; such as the tending of animals for the sacrifices, and the preparing of incense. In the first few chapters we have the soldier, the priest, the Levite – warrior, worshipper, worker. Both warring and working were to center in fellowship with God – with the Tabernacle at the heart of the camp. In the consecration of the Levites, their cleansing was twofold, partly done UPON them and partly done BY them; even so in our cleansing, there is the Divine side and the human side. The cleansing done BY them was to “shave all their flesh, and wash their clothes” (8:7). There must be a detachment from all those habits and impurities of common life which cling to us as closely and easily as our clothes, and which seem as much a part of us as our very hair. Especially in our Christian service there must be the application of death to that which is merely natural and of the flesh by the bringing of the word of God to bear on heart and conscience. There must be the water – daily cleansing of our conduct in the teaching of the word; and there must be the razor – daily self-judgment and uncompromising disallowance of that which grows of the flesh.

The first four chapters have given us the outward formation of the camp. The next five deal with the inward condition of it. The key is 5:3, “That they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell.” After the mobilization of the people for war (1-2), the appropriation of the Levites for service (3-4), and the instruction of the camp in holiness (5-8), comes the crowning lesson of fellowship and guidance (9-10:10). The people’s pilgrimage Passover in Ch.9 was both retrospective and prospective. It was the memorial of a past deliverance, and it was the pledge of a prospective inheritance. Similarly, to the Christian pilgrim today, the Lord’s table is both a memorial and a pledge. As for the Divine guidance, it was unmistakable and infallible. Israel’s many thousands were spared the confusion of being left to search out by themselves a doubtful course which might have brought them to disaster. They were to make no plans of their own. They were not to know the route for even one day ahead. When they camped they could not say how long they would be staying. When they marched they could not say how long they would be moving. To watch that guiding pillar was all they were required to do. On that guidance they were absolutely dependent; and following that guidance they were absolutely safe. If He guided Israel thus, how much more will He guide us who are, through grace, members of His body, one spirit with the Lord!

In the first ten chapters we see the camp of Israel at Sinai, marked by every preparation and provision for advance, for conquest and possession. At the very heart of the camp giving unity, strength and glory to it was the sanctuary, speaking of God as the center of His chosen people. Chapters 10-14 make sad reading. How strange to find Moses saying to Hobab his Midianite father in law, “Leave us not, I pray thee... that thou may be eyes to us!” How soon the temptation comes to look away from the guiding pillar of cloud and fire! Such is the weakness of the human heart; we profess to trust in God, and then look to man. Then after only three days’ journey the people are complaining. Murmuring against God’s providences leads on, bit by bit, to open rebellion. They murmur at the way God led them, and at the food God gave them. Soon Israel’s highest leaders, Aaron and Miriam contentiously question Moses’ leadership. Trace Israel’s downward course in numbers from discontent to lust, despising the Lord, speaking against His servants, provoking, tempting, doubting God, rebellion, presumption, discouragement, striving and speaking against God, and at last gross whoredom and idolatry. The details of Israel’s breakdown at Kadesh are well known. The ten saw with the eye of the

flesh. The two saw with the eye of faith. Israel disbelieved, then rebelled, even bidding that Caleb and Joshua be stoned (14:10), and suggesting the appointment of a new leader who should take them all back to Egypt (14:4). The cutting irony is that Israel was but a stone's throw from the prize. Israel disobeyed. Judgment fell. Moses' touching intercession is heard for the nation; but the judgment of the 40 years' "wandering" is imposed (14:29-30). UNBELIEF DEFEATS THE UNBELIEVER.

THE WANDERING:

This needless, tragic delay of 38 years intervenes, and Numbers thus becomes distinguishingly THE BOOK OF ARRESTED PROGRESS. Within two years the people of Israel were at Kadesh-Barnea the gate of Canaan. Thirty-eight years later, there they were again, at the very same spot. Why? Well, there was the mixed multitude of pseudo-Israelites who were allowed to travel with them, and who were not really one at heart either with the people or with the project. At the Kadesh mutiny there was a collapse of organization. The people ceased to be pilgrims, and became nomads. During the "wanderings" there is no record of any concerted movings. It would rather seem that the Tabernacle abode throughout at Kadesh, and that roving, breakaway bands dispersed more or less widely into the surrounding region, recognizing Kadesh as a center, and regathering there toward the end of the long delay. There were not two comings to Kadesh – one at the beginning of the 38 years of wandering and the other at the end. There was only one coming recorded in the summary of Israel's movements given in Numbers 33, and similarly, in the review of the journeyings given in Deuteronomy 1 & 2. Also in Num.20:1 it says that the people "abode" in Kadesh, suggesting a long stay there (Deut.1:46). Kadesh, which means holy or sanctuary, may possibly have received its name because of the long stay of the Tabernacle there. The Hebrew word translated 'shall wander' in 14:33 is literally 'shall pasture.' Going with the judgment is an implicit assurance that the Lord will shepherd them and provide for their needs. The generation which excommunicated itself at Kadesh had henceforth no heritage in Israel. Their lives were spared at the time, but their own professed wish that they had died in the wilderness was turned back on them (14:2,28); and another generation took their place before the history of the theocracy could be resumed. The Kadesh breakdown and the thirty-eight years' suspension may well speak to us of that still graver breakdown at Calvary and the present long suspense-period in Israel's history, during which God is calling out for Himself a spiritual people in Christ irrespective of nationality. Chapter 15 begins, "And the Lord spoke... When you come into the land..." We don't know how soon or how long after the Kadesh revolt these words are spoken, but it is striking that the first recorded word of God after Israel's turning from the land is a reference to their eventual entering it. Man's delay does not mean God's defeat. Greater than man's failure is God's faithfulness. In the 20th chapter we find significantly grouped together the death of Miriam, the sin of Moses, and the death of Aaron. Aaron's death is the event by comparison with 33:38 marks the end of the wandering. Thus Aaron, representative of the priesthood, could not lead Israel into the promised rest; nor could Miriam, representative of the prophets; nor could Moses, representative of the Law. This was reserved for Joshua, who in a unique way was a type of our heavenly Savior and Captain, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Meribah rock-smiting incident is stamped with strong type-teaching. Moses was told simply to SPEAK to the rock, but he exasperatedly struck it twice with the rod. The Rock (Christ I Cor.10:4), having been once smitten (Ex.17:5) need not be smitten again. The striking of it again would imply, in type, that the one sacrifice was inadequate, thereby contradicting the finality and abiding efficacy of Calvary.

THE NEW GENERATION:

The old generation is no more. A new generation has arisen. First, there is JEHOVAH'S NEW RESPONSE TO ISRAEL. "The Lord hearkened to the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites" (21:3). During the wandering, there has been no such response. Rather the contrast is seen in Dt.1:44, "And the Amorites...chased you as bees do, and destroyed you...but the Lord would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you." Second, here is ISRAEL'S NEW VICTORY. Hormah was the place of humiliating defeat at the beginning of the wandering (14:45). Now, at the end of the wandering, as Israel re-emerges into the light of the Divine purpose and favor, there is victory in the place of the old defeat. Also, there is the WELL OF SINGING (v.16-18). There is no record of any singing between this well of song and that which Israel had sung at the Red Sea. Have we found that just beneath the hard surface of life's most arid stretches there is that crystal stream following us from the Rock, and ready to gush forth at the voice of prayer and the song of faith. In the new numbering the total harmonizes with the whole story of Numbers. At the beginning of the forty years the number is roughly 600,000; and again at the end of the forty years. They are no further forward for the whole period. There is arrested progress even numerically.

Balaam is a walking paradox – a true and a false prophet both in one. He is a true prophet in that he knows the true God, has a real faith in Him, has real dealings with Him, receives real communications from Him, conveys real messages from Him. Yet he is a false prophet in that he also resorts to the use of magical arts, is called a soothsayer (Josh.13:22), and prostitutes his strange prophetic gift for base gain. The Spirit of Jehovah, whom Balaam is double-mindedly invoking, comes upon this man not because he is a worthy vehicle, but despite him, crushing his secret thought to curse Israel, and sovereignly overriding the stratagems of hypocrisy, so that he who in his heart would fain curse Israel for reward is actually made the mouthpiece of marvelous benedictions. Balaam himself seems to have been driven eventually to realize the futility of any endeavoring to circumvent the will of God, for in chapter 24:1 we are told that "when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments." Note the three New Testament references to Balaam. In II Pet.2:15 we read "the WAY of Balaam" which is the prostitution of a spiritual gift for base gain. In Jude 11 we read "the ERROR of Balaam" which is the secret idea that the will of God may be circumvented under the cover of an outward respect for His word. In Rev.2:14 we read "the DOCTRINE of Balaam" which is the counsel to ruin by seduction the people who cannot be cursed by permission (31:16).

The three main types in the Book of Numbers are the Smitten Rock (20:7-11; I Cor.10:4), the Brazen Serpent (21:4-9; Jn.3:14), the Cities of Refuge (35; Heb.6:18). Salvation by this serpent of brass was outside the Tabernacle, and apart from all ordinances, sacrifices and priestly ministrations. It was not Aaron the priest who had to erect the brass serpent, but Moses the layman. The Lord Jesus, according to Jewish law, was a layman, for He was neither of the family of Aaron nor of the tribe of Levi. So also were the apostles. The point is that the Tabernacle was the appointed means of access for those who were already in covenant relationship with God, and who were healed of the serpent venom.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

DEUTERONOMY: THE DIVINE FAITHFULNESS

I. LOOKING BACKWARD (1-11)

Review of the Way since Sinai (1-3)

Review of the Law from Sinai (4-11)

II. LOOKING FORWARD (12-34)

Final Rules and Warnings to Israel before

Entering the Earthly Inherit. (12-30)

Final Words and Actions of Moses before

Entering the Heavenly Inherit. (31-34)

The Hebrew name `Haddebbharim' means "The Words" and our own title Deuteronomy was taken from the Greek Septuagint `deuteros' (second) and `nomos' (law). In Deuteronomy we have a second giving of the Law, or rather a new expounding of it to the new generation of Israel who had grown up in the wilderness and were needing to have the Law repeated and expounded to them before their entering into Canaan. Deuteronomy is not the giving of a new law, but an explication of that which was already given. Deuteronomy is a book of TRANSITION. First, it marks the transition to a new GENERATION; for with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, and Moses himself, the old generation which came up from Egypt and was numbered at Sinai, had passed away, and a new generation had grown up. Second, it marks the transition to a new POSSESSION. The wilderness pilgrimage was to give place to the national occupancy of Canaan. Third, it marks the transition to a new EXPERIENCE, to a new life – houses instead of tents, settled habitation instead of wandering, and instead of the wilderness diet, the milk, honey, corn and wine of Canaan. Fourth, it marks the transition to a new REVELATION OF GOD – the revelation of His LOVE. From Genesis to Numbers the love of God is never spoken of. In Deuteronomy we have the wonderful words, "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor chose you because you were more in number than any people, for you were the fewest of all people; but because the Lord loved you" (7:7-8). There is a striking parallel between the Acts of the Apostles, the 5th book of the New Testament, and Deuteronomy, the 5th book of the Old.

The Acts, like Deuteronomy marks a great transition. It marks the transition from the distinctive message of the gospels to that of the epistles. Like Deuteronomy, it marks the transition to a new GENERATION – a regeneration in Christ. Like Deuteronomy, it marks the transition to a new POSSESSION – a spiritual Canaan with "all blessings in the heavenlies in Christ." Like Deuteronomy, it marks the transition to a new EXPERIENCE – a new birth, a new life, a new dynamic in the Holy Spirit. Like Deuteronomy it marks the transition to a new REVELATION OF GOD – the revelation given in the Church epistles of "the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God," namely the CHURCH; so that now "there might be known, by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God" (Ef. 3:10). What is equally striking is that both Deuteronomy and Acts are books in which God gives His people a SECOND CHANCE. Before the new generation is committed to Joshua's charge, Moses at God's command, rehearses the Law to them. What is the book of the Acts? It is the second offer of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Jews, first at the capital, to those of the homeland, and then throughout the empire, to the Jews of the dispersion. The first eleven chapters are RETROSPECTIVE, and the remaining chapters are PROSPECTIVE. In view of the transition now upon them, they are to look backward and then forward, and to ponder both. The central message is the Divine faithfulness. In both parts of the book this is brought out in God's gracious, wise and righteous dealings with the nation in the past, and in His renewed pledges to the nation concerning the future. The basic FACT beneath all else is that which is declared in 4:4-5:

"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

Jehovah is a plurality in unity. The word translated “our God” is ELOHENU, which is the plural ELOHIM (gods), with the first personal possessive plural suffix appended to it, causing it to become elohenu, that is “our Gods.” The Hebrew word translated as “one” (echad) is a word which, strictly taken, expresses “one” in a collective sense. That is, it signifies not an absolute unity, but a compound unity. The Hebrew word for “one” in the sense of absolute unity (yacheed) is never used to express the unity of the Godhead. The name Jehovah occurs just the three times. Certainly the declaration clearly conveys that God is a plurality in unity; and it possibly suggests the Divine trinity. Israel’s God, the only true God, is One, indivisible, and incommunicable, the absolute and infinite One, on whom all depend, whom all must ultimately obey, and who alone is the true Object of the creature’s worship. To Jehovah, therefore, Israel’s undivided devotion and love are due. The basic TRUTH laid down in Deuteronomy is:

“And He brought us out from thence, that He might bring us in,
to give us the land which He swore unto our fathers” (6:23).

As for the fact “He brought us out,” we see the power of God. As for the purpose “that He might bring us in,” we see the grace of God. As for the reason “He swore unto our fathers,” we see the faithfulness of God. In the type teaching of Scripture, Canaan stands not so much for heaven, but for an experience of holiness and spiritual fullness realizable by Christians here and now, in this present life. “Faithful is He that calls you, who also will do it” (1 Th.5:24). What we cannot attain by self-effort we may obtain in Christ. The basic REQUIREMENT which God makes of Israel is:

“And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee,
but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to
love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart
and with all thy soul; to keep the commandments of the Lord,
and His statutes...” (10:12-13).

The basic requirement is obedience, loving obedience, flowing from the grateful consciousness of covenant relationship and fellowship with this glorious and faithful God. Obedience is the key-note of almost every chapter. The word “do” occurs approximately 100 times.

It is important to understand that Israel entered Canaan under the conditions set forth in the Sinai covenant, which is not the last word between God and Israel. No, there is another covenant relationship between God and Israel which lies BEHIND, stands OUTSIDE and GOES BEYOND the Sinai covenant, a covenant to the which there is no end; that is the ABRAHAMIC covenant. Nothing can destroy this covenant, which was not only sealed with blood, but confirmed with a Divine oath. No, not even Israel’s unfaithfulness can nullify it! It is an unconditional and everlasting covenant to Abraham and his posterity. Now Israel has never yet possessed Canaan under the unconditional Abrahamic covenant; the nation entered Canaan under the terms of the Sinai covenant, and we know the result. Nor has Israel ever possessed the WHOLE land as it was given to Abraham (Ge.15:18), but only the portion as it was assigned in connection with the Mosaic covenant (Nu.34:1-12). Because of the Abrahamic covenant, despite Israel’s failure, God’s covenant relationship with Israel continues. Notice that in each case the extreme penalty for violating the Sinai covenant is mentioned, namely the dispersion of Israel and the desolation of Canaan, there is an immediate follow-up reference to the Abrahamic covenant, showing that even when the Sinai covenant has exhausted itself in its final penal infliction on Israel, God can and will still be gracious to Israel on the ground of the earlier and greater Abrahamic covenant. Take for example Lev.26:33, Deut.4:27-31; 30:20. Nothing can

nullify the Abahamic covenant; for Jehovah Himself accepts responsibility for the fulfillment of the whole. He undertakes for the people's part of the covenant as well as His own; for here in Deuteronomy 30:6 we read, "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live." See also Jer.31:31-34.

Note a certain basic DIFFERENCE between the old dispensation and the new. In the Old Testament the emphasis is upon a PLACE, whereas in the New the emphasis is upon a PERSON (Dt.12:10-14). This emphasis on a place gave focus to the religious life of the nation of Israel; it fostered the sense of national unity; it was suited to the nature of the old dispensation; and without doubt, it took deep hold on the thought of the people. To the old-time Hebrew, nearness to Jerusalem and to the Temple came to mean nearness to the special presence of God. The Gentiles, living in the lands beyond, were the "far off ones." See verses like Is.49:1; 57:19; Acts2:39; and Ep.2:17. In the New Testament, this localization of the Divine presence and of worship is gently but completely superseded. The emphasis is transferred from a PLACE to a PERSON. It is no longer a material temple and a locality, but a spiritual Presence having the attribute of universality. This transference of emphasis may be seen in our Lord's dealing with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar. The woman said to Him: "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." The Lord said: "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you shall NEITHER IN THIS MOUNTAIN NOR YET AT JERUSALEM worship the Father; but the hour is coming, AND NOW IS, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Then the woman said: "I know that Messiah comes, which is called Christ; when He is come He will tell us all things." The woman herself thus looked off from place to Person; and her words evoked the wonder-inspiring reply, "I AM who am speaking to thee." It is no longer God in a temple merely, but in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same transition from place to Person is seen in Acts 8, in the account of the Ethiopian eunuch. The man had been to the right PLACE, Jerusalem; he had been for the right purpose, worship; he was reading the right book, the Scriptures; but he was returning unsatisfied. He needed a new emphasis – on the PERSON. God sent Phillip for this very reason. "Then Phillip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him JESUS."

The last utterance of our Lord before His ascension is a finally renewed emphasis on this change from place to Person: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." The emphasis here upon the Person is THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE. There are two words used in the Greek, the one emphasizing "I" the other emphasizing the "am." It is the God-Man speaking. "I AM" – with you. See here His Divine omnipresence – He is with us always and everywhere. See here His Divine omnipotence – all power in heaven and on earth. See here His Divine omniscience – seeing the end from the beginning, and speaking of the consummation of the ages. The omnipresent Christ is with each of His blood-bought people. He delights to be with the poorest and humblest of us; and He will never leave us or forsake us, for He is with us to the end.

In chapters 27-30 we see that the Law is a ministration of condemnation and death (II Co.3:7,9). The Law, although in itself holy, can only administer a curse upon such as Adam's fallen sons, if they are placed under it, because of the perversity of their nature. First, on Mount Gerizim, the mount of blessing, no stones with the Law written on them are to be erected. Why? The mount could not have been the mount of blessing had the Law spoken from it. Second, although

blessings were to be proclaimed from Mount Gerizim, where are they? The chapter gives no record of any such proclamation. There is a mercifully relieving feature however. Not only are there the great memorial stones of the Law erected on Mount Ebal; there is also an altar. As the Law testified to sin, so the sacrifices on that Mount Ebal altar testified to grace – to the provision of mercy, which lay within the Covenant, for the covering of guilt. Oh, well may we rejoice before the Lord our God at that altar! The old dispensation pronounces curse, yet is made to point to the new dispensation in Christ, which administers blessing. Under the old – curse; under the new – blessing. Thank God, the old has given place to the new!

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

JOSHUA : THE VICTORY OF FAITH

I. ENTERING THE LAND (1-5)

II. OVERCOMING THE LAND (6-12)

III. OCCUPYING THE LAND (13-24)

1. Joshua Charged – The Warrant of Faith
2. Jericho Spied – The Prudence of Faith
3. Jordan Crossed – The Crisis of Faith
4. Memorials Built – The Witness of Faith
5. Gilgal Occupied – The pruning of Faith
6. Fall of Jericho – Faith Triumphant
7. Sin of Achan – Faith Disabled
8. Sack of Ai – Faith Re-empowered
9. Guile of Gibeon – Faith Endangered
- 10-12. Rout of All Foes – Faith All Victorious
- 13-19. Division of Canaan – Faith Rewarded
20. Cities of Refuge – Faith Rewarded
21. Portion of Levites – Faith Preserved
22. Altar of Witness – Faith Unifying
- 23-24. Farewell of Joshua – Faith Continuing

The five books of Moses lead Israel UP TO Canaan, and Joshua compliments these by leading Israel INTO Canaan. The further 12 books cover Israel's history INSIDE Canaan. The book of Joshua covers a period of about 25 years. Entering, overcoming, occupying! The key thought or central message is clearly THE VICTORY OF FAITH. In this, the book of Joshua stands in sharp contrast to that of Numbers where we see the failure of unbelief – failure to enter (14:2-4), failure to overcome (14:44-45), failure to occupy (14:28-34). Spiritually interpreted, the exploits of Israel under Joshua proclaim the great New Testament truth, "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith" (1 Jn.5:4).

CANAAN AS A TYPE: If Jordan is death and Canaan Heaven, then it follows that the whole of the Christian life, right till the hour of death, corresponds to the wilderness through which the Hebrews tramped. Canaan was a place of conquest through conflict. There had been little fighting during the wilderness years, but as soon as Canaan was entered Israel must draw the sword. Enemies must be destroyed, Israel must fight. How then can Canaan typify the calm restfulness of the ultimate inheritance in heaven? Moreover, it was possible for Israel to be

ejected from Canaan by powerful foes; which eventually happened. How then can this typify that heaven of uninterrupted felicity which is pledged to the justified in Christ? We are expressly taught, in Hebrews 3 & 4, what the typical meaning of Canaan really is. They make it quite clear that Canaan pictures the believer's PRESENT position and possession in Christ. It was ordained to pre-figure that spiritual Sabbath-keeping into which we may enter here and now. "We which have believed DO enter into that rest...For if Joshua had given them rest God would not have spoken afterward of another day (of rest). There REMAINS therefore a rest for the people of God. For he that is entered into His rest has himself also rested from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore GIVE DILIGENCE TO ENTER into that rest" (He.4:3,8-11). Jordan does not typify death of the body and departure into the beyond, but that deeper union of our hearts with Christ in HIS death whereby we become completely separated unto Him, and introduced into "the FULLNESS of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." Canaan is that "breadth and length and depth and height" of the spiritual life in which we really "possess our possessions" in Christ. God has opened up to us in Christ a present experience of sanctification comparable to a fertile, fragrant, fruitful, sunbathed Canaan – a "land of corn and wine, a land flowing with milk and honey." The personality becomes controlled by the Holy Spirit (Ep.5:18), "I live, yet not I; Christ lives in me" (Ga.2:20). Perfect love fills the heart and casts out fear (1 Jn.4:18). The soul is in Beulah Land (Is.62:4). There are three things that are outstandingly characteristic.

First, Canaan was Israel's promised REST. Itinerary was to give place to settled dwelling. Instead of the inhospitable wilderness there was to be a home where they should sit down, every man "under his vine and under his fig tree." The tired hands and blistered feet were to find refreshing contrast in the responsive yields of Canaan's fertile plains and valleys. The promised rest had been wonderfully prepared for their coming. They should not even need to build the cities and houses which they would need to live in, for they were to possess "great and goodly cities which you did not build, and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and wells dug which you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant" (Dt. 6:10-11); and here they should lie down in safety, none making them afraid (Lev.26:6).

Second, Canaan was the place of BOUNTY. This was the land flowing with milk and honey, a good and a large land (Ex3:8), a land of olives and vines, of firs and cedars, of rich fruits and harvests where an obedient people should eat to the full, where the threshing should reach unto the vintage and the vintage unto the sowing time (Lev.26:5). "The land where you are going into possess it is not as the land of Egypt from where you came out, where you sowed your seed and watered it with your foot as a garden of herbs; but the land where you go to possess it is a land of hills and valleys, that drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land which the Lord your God cares for, the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year" (Dt.11:10-12).

Third, Canaan was the place of TRIUMPH. Were there enemies in Canaan? Yes, but they were a defeated foe before Israel ever struck the first blow, for God had said, "The Lord your God shall...cast out many nations before you, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you" (Dt.7:1). Israel was to remember what Jehovah had done 'unto Pharaoh and unto all Egypt' and not be afraid. Five of them should chase a hundred, and none of their enemies should be able to stand before them. God was calling Israel not merely to conflict but to an assured VICTORY. Yes, to a faithful Israel Canaan was to be the place of triumph. Resting, abounding, triumphing – this is our rich inheritance in Christ; and it may be ours in actual experience.

There is a remarkable parallel between the Book of Joshua and the epistle to the Ephesians, which is distinctively the epistle of the "heavenly places in Christ." "The heavenlies," denotes the sphere of this higher and fuller life. It indicates a union of life and mind and will with the risen Christ, a union with Him in nature, relationships and purposes, a union with Him in death to sin and to the flesh and to the world, a union with Him in service and suffering and desire, a union with Him in His resurrection and ascension, which lifts the believer to a level where there is a fullness of light and love and power and spiritual understanding unknown to others. This is life on the highest plane. Yet this indeed is God's provision; this is our inheritance in Christ Jesus. Now in Joshua we see Israel entering and possessing the earthly inheritance given in Abraham. In Ephesians we see the Church entering and possessing the heavenly inheritance given in Christ. There is a five-fold parallel, marked by the five occurrences of that expression, "the heavenlies," in Ephesians.

1) EACH WAS THE PREDESTINED INHERITANCE OF A CHOSEN PEOPLE.

God had said to Abraham, "all the land which you see, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever" (Ge.13:15). And when He brought Israel up from Egypt He said, "The Lord shall bring you into the land ... which He swore unto your fathers to give you"(Ex.13:5). In Ephesians, we find that here we have the predestined inheritance of the Church, in Christ. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing IN THE HEAVENLIES in Christ, according as He has CHOSEN US IN HIM before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Ep.1:3-4).

Israel was blessed with all MATERIAL blessings in EARTHLY places in ABRAHAM. The Church is blessed with all SPIRITUAL blessings in HEAVENLY places, in CHRIST. Note also, that to enjoy this fullness of material blessings Israel must be IN THE LAND. Similarly, to enjoy the fullness of spiritual blessings in Christ we must be IN THE HEAVENLIES. The reason why we miss them is because we are not in the place where God bestows them.

2) EACH WAS OPENED UP BY A DIVINELY ORDAINED LEADER.

"Unto this people shall YOU divide for an inheritance the land which I swore unto their fathers to give them" (Jos.1:6); and "YOU shall cause them to inherit it" (Dt.31:7). Joshua was thus the appointed administrator of the Israelite settlement in Canaan(Jos.11:23). In Ephesians we find that the Church's inheritance is opened up by the Lord Jesus.

"That you may know...what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He brought about in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand IN THE HEAVENLIES. . . and gave Him to be the HEAD OVER ALL THINGS TO THE CHURCH" (Ep.1:18-22). Thus is Joshua a beautiful type of Christ as the trustee and representative of His people. It is the ascended Savior who divides the goodly inheritance, and allots it to His believing people as by faith they plant their feet upon the promises.

3) EACH WAS A GIFT OF GRACE TO BE RECEIVED BY FAITH.

Canaan was given to Israel in Abraham, not in Moses the man of the Law. By the Law Israel could never have become entitled to Canaan. Moses was not even privileged to lead the people in. Nor can the Law ever lead US into God's promised rest for our souls in Christ. Hence, Moses must die, and Joshua must take His place; and Joshua must open up the inheritance (1:1-2).

"Even when we were dead in sins God made us alive together with Christ (by GRACE are you saved); and has raised us up together,

and made us sit together IN THE HEAVENLIES in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His GRACE in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by GRACE are you saved, through FAITH, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ef.2:5-8).

The Old Covenant rest-day was the SEVENTH. The New Covenant rest-day is the FIRST. Under the Old Covenant we must work the six days UP TO the rest. Under the New Covenant we work DOWN FROM it – from a perpetual rest already possessed in Christ.

4) EACH IS THE SPHERE OF A STRIKING DIVINE REVELATION.

Israel's entering and possessing of Canaan was intended to be a revelation of the true God to the nations of that day – "That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, that you might fear the Lord your God forever" (4:24). Israel's yet future regathering to Canaan will consummate that revelation, see Is.11:11-12; Jer.23:5-8.

The Church is a wonderful revelation of God to the powers of the spirit-realm.

"That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now UNTO THE PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS IN THE HEAVENLIES MIGHT BE MADE KNOWN BY THE CHURCH THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD" (Ep.3:8-10).

The consummating display of the Divine wisdom and purpose through the Church, to the spirit-powers in the heavenlies will be affected by the second coming of Christ, when the completed Church will be manifested with Christ in glory.

5) EACH IS DESCRIBED AS A SCENE OF CONFLICT.

In the earthly Canaan there were the giant sons of Anak, and cities walled up to heaven, and seven nations greater and mightier than Israel. They were exceedingly evil nations, and they had to be dispossessed and destroyed. God was with Israel; conflict was inevitable, but defeat was impossible, for there was an alliance invincible. So it is with that spiritual Canaan which is ours in the heavenlies.

"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness IN THE HEAVENLIES" (Ep.6:12).

Thank God as no power could withstand Joshua and Israel, so no power in the spirit-realm can withstand the power of Christ, for He has defeated Satan, and is now far above all principality and power and might and dominion (Ep.1:21). In Him victory is ours. In Him our prayer life may become a victorious spiritual warfare which shall be effectual to the pulling down of Satanic strongholds, the casting down of imaginations which oppose themselves to God, and the releasing of regenerating forces among men.

A BRIEF SUMMARY:

Chapter 3 gives us the crossing of Jordan, a major crisis of faith. To be 'brought out' of Egypt was one thing, but it was another thing altogether to 'go over this Jordan' and thus become committed, without possibility of retreat, to the struggle against the powers of Canaan in their seemingly impregnable fastnesses, with their chariots of iron, and their large armies among which were the renowned giants. To do this was to commit themselves to a course which had been condemned by ten out of the twelve spies. To the natural eye it was to hazard everything

on the chance of battle, to have no retreat, and to run the risk of losing everything. That intense crisis of the soul in which we are forced to the supreme choice whether there shall be an utter once-for-all abandonment of ourselves to the will of God, so that henceforth God is absolutely first in the soul's love and life, or whether we shall take what seems to be the easier way. Chapter 5 gives us the occupying of Gilgal. Before ever the covenant people draw the sword against the foe, God draws the knife upon THEM. Even so with ourselves, that soul crisis of death and burial to selfism, of which Jordan is the type, must be perpetuated by that continuous denial of the flesh, of which circumcision speaks. Following Israel's circumcision at Gilgal comes the Passover feast, speaking of this new fellowship with God in the place of blessing (v.10). In chapter 7 we see that secret compromise temporarily DISABLES faith. In all the 7 years' war we have the only loss, that of 36 Israelites. Notice the CENTRAL campaign (6-9), the SOUTHERN campaign (10), and the NORTHERN campaign (11). The most formidable coalitions were no match for the supernatural power which operated through Israel. The dividing of the land was by "casting lots before the Lord" (18:6). The same blend of impartiality and sovereignty is seen in the administration of spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit in the Church of Christ (I Co.12:4-11).

Notice an appearance of contradiction in verses 11:23 and 13:1 which say, "So Joshua TOOK THE WHOLE LAND, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses...There remains yet very much land TO BE POSSESSED." But these two verses are really complimentary. They are two aspects of the same situation, and it is the same with us. The decisive blow has been struck at sin and Satan and the powers of darkness by our heavenly Captain; and therefore the entire inheritance of "all blessings in the heavenlies in Christ" is ours. But we must now apply that victory, carrying it through the whole realm of our thought and life, and pressing it home to the last detail. Especially in our prayer life should there be a pressing forward in the power of this decisive victory. The distribution of the Levites (21) through the tribes is of obvious significance. They permeated the whole land with the hallowing influence of Shiloh. The teaching of the Law was a special prerogative of the Levites, who appear to have traveled through their apportioned districts. They caused the people to discern between the unclean and the clean, and in controversy stood to judge (Dt.33:10). The distribution of the Levites was the Lord's provision for the preservation of Israel's faith in the land. The gist of the closing chapters for a CONTINUING in the experience of the "fullness of blessing" there must be: 1) living close to the word of God, 2) consistent separation from all known wrong, and 3) cleaving to God with the best love of the heart.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

JUDGES : THE BOOK OF DECLENSION

EXPLANATORY PROLOGUE 1-2

MAIN NARRATIVE 3-16

ILLUSTRATIVE EPILOGUE 17-21

APOSTASY -> SERVITUDE -> DELIVERER

3:5-8 To King of Mesopotamia 8 years Othniel 3:9-11

3:12-14 To King of Moab 18 years Ehud & Shamgar 3:15-31

4:1-3 To King of Canaan 20 years Deborah & Barak 4:4-5:31

6:1-10 To the Midianites 7 years Gideon 6:11-8:35

10:6-18 To Philistines, etc. 18 years Jephthah 11:1; 12:7
13:1 To Philistines 40 years Samson 13:2; 16:31

This book covers roughly the first 350 years of Israel's history in Canaan. This is the period of the Theocratic regime, in which Jehovah Himself is Israel's "King Invisible." The Judges here described were not a regular succession of governors, but occasional deliverers raised up by God, to rescue Israel from oppression, and to administer justice. Without assuming the state of royal authority, they acted for the time as vice-regents of Jehovah, the invisible King. The authorship of the book is not known, though Jewish tradition attributes it to Samuel. The moral character of the Israelites seems to have greatly deteriorated. The generation who were contemporaries with Joshua were both courageous and faithful, and free in a great measure from the weakness and obstinacy which had dishonored their fathers (2:7). Their first ardor had now somewhat cooled, and more than once they fell into a state of indifference which Joshua found it needful to rebuke. As each tribe received its portion, they became so engrossed in cultivating it, or so much fonder of ease than of war, that they grew unwilling to help the others possess their inheritance. Another generation arose. Living among idolaters, the Israelites copied their example, intermarried with them, and became contaminated with their abominations (2:13; 3:6).

The Judges whom God raised up were living object lessons by which God sought to preserve in Israel the understanding that faith in Jehovah, the only true God, was the one way of victory and well being. But the people responded so far as served the selfish end of the moment – the saving of their necks from bondage. They did not LOVE Jehovah one whit more for His painstaking patience; nor did they even take the lower level of serving Him from a sense of DUTY. Speaking generally, the God of their fathers was simply a convenient resort in time of extremity. When things were tolerably comfortable, barefaced betrayal of Jehovah was the order of the day. The people chafed under the disciplinary requirements of God's high calling to Israel through Abraham and Moses. They neglected the book of the Covenant, and turned quickly out of the way to indulge in the unclean and forbidden. From time to time, out of sheer pity for His humiliated and groaning people, God raised up these men, the Judges, whose exploits of deliverance – despite vulgarities and crudities in the character and behavior of the Judges themselves – were so manifestly miraculous interventions of Jehovah, in response to faith in Himself, that Israel was thereby forced to recognize Jehovah again as the one true God, and was thus encouraged to return to their first faith and love. Yet these gracious interventions had no durable effect; and Israel's early obstinacy developed into incurable obduracy. So much, alas, for Israel's first 350 years in Canaan! It is a pathetic anti-climax to the book of Joshua. The central message of the book is "FAILURE THROUGH COMPROMISE." The exploits of the Judges teach the lesson that a return to the true faith brings renewed victory; yet in their very teaching of this they but accentuate the main, stark reality, that all the failure is due to COMPROMISE. It all began when the 9-1/2 tribes which settled in Canaan did not destroy or even drive out the Canaanite nations, as God had commanded. They suffered them to remain. The other 2-1/2 tribes, Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, had already sadly compromised in choosing to settle in Gilead, on the eastern side of the Jordan. Incomplete mastery of an evil at the outset always means constant trouble from it afterwards, and often defeat by it in the end. Then, having only partially mastered the Canaanites, Israel now makes leagues with them (2:2), a thing which God had prohibited. Then, having made league with them, Israel intermarries with them (3:6), another thing God has prohibited. Then, having mixed blood in marriage, Israel descends to their ways, bows to their idols, forsakes Jehovah, and serves Baal and Ashteroth (2:13; 3:6).

Mark well these stages – incomplete mastery, military leagues, intermarriage, idolatry and complete apostasy – followed by humiliating captivity (2:14). The judges who were mercifully raised up to recall and deliver Israel, stopped the rot for the moment, but it set in again worse than before as soon as the grave silenced each Judges voice. Read Judges 2:18-19. Let these words ‘Failure through Compromise’ burn into our minds, and burn out any easy-going toleration of the unholy or questionable thing. We can never enjoy God’s promised rest for long if we tolerate only partially crushed sins to continue with us. If we make league with questionable things because they seem harmless, we shall soon find ourselves wedded to the desires of the flesh again, and down from the heights to which God had lifted us.

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (II Co.6:17-18).

Twelve Judges are successively spoken of. Of these, six stand out pre-eminently, because the whole story gathers round six successive apostasies and servitudes of Israel, and these six deliverer-judges. The six major apostasies are signalized, in each case, by the words, “And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord,” and in each case judgment falls, and servitude ensues. All these six servitudes of Israel are said to have been brought about by Jehovah Himself. Israel’s servitudes were not just accidents. They were punishments. God may confer special privileges on certain persons and nations, but He is no respecter of persons in any sense of indulgence to favorites. God may give many privileges, but He never gives the privilege to sin. The six cycles are each set out in a four-fold order: SINNING, SUFFERING, SUPPLICATION, AND SALVATION. There are things in the moral realm which are indissolubly wedded. Sin and suffering always go together, they cannot be divorced. Oh that human hearts might be persuaded of this! It is also true that supplication and salvation are similarly joined. God will be entreated by a true supplication in which there is a putting away of the evil thing; and then He will show His salvation.

Gideon, the fifth Judge of Israel, is one of the outstanding heroes in Israel’s early history. Yet we need to realize his heroism was not a product of his natural make-up, but the outcome of a transforming spiritual experience. When we first see Gideon he cuts a pathetic figure of unbelief (6:11-23). In his successive exclamations and lamentations we have the skeptical surprise of unbelief, then its uncertainty and questioning and its complaining and its false humility and its resourcelessness and its persistent doubtfulness and its seeking for signs. But now look at Gideon’s transforming experience. In the first place he became CONVERTED. “Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-Shalom” (v.26). When Gideon built that altar to Jehovah he turned his back on false gods and became a worshipper of the one true God. But Gideon went further, he became CONSECRATED. He yielded his own will to the will of God. To wreck Baal’s altar was to run counter to the popular will, and to invite death. But Gideon did it. And how remarkable was the result! Gideon’s father became converted too (v.28-32). Finally, Gideon became CONTROLLED, controlled by the Spirit of God. “The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon...” (v.34). He became at once a leader and a savior of his people. JUDGES is a perfect picture of sin, in which we let our enemies live and destroy ourselves.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

RUTH: THE LOVE THAT SUFFERS, REIGNS AT LAST

CH.1 – LOVE’S RESOLVE: RUTH’S NOBLE CHOICE

Ruth the faithful daughter cleaves to Naomi in her sorrow.

CH.2 – LOVE’S RESPONSE: RUTH’S LOWLY SERVICE

Ruth the Moabite gleaner responds to Naomi’s pressing need.

CH.3 – LOVE’S REQUEST: RUTH’S TENDER APPEAL

Ruth the virtuous suppliant appeals to the chivalrous kinsman.

CH.4 – LOVE’S REWARD: RUTH’S MARITAL JOYS

Ruth the beloved wife and mother joys in the blissful consummation.

The book opens with the words, “Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled...” The story clearly belongs to the period covered by the book of Judges, a tragic period indeed. Such a lovely story we should least expect in such a setting. The general condition was one of moral deterioration, but amid the general degeneracy there were instances of noble love and godly chivalry and high ideal. It is a true story. The principle personages were ancestors of king David. That there was a Moabite link in the chain of his genealogy must have been well known to the king, his household and most of the people of Israel.

This is one of the two books in Scripture which bear the names of women. Ruth is a young Gentile woman who is brought to live among Hebrews and marries a Hebrew husband in the line of royal David. Esther is a young Hebrew woman who is brought to live among Gentiles and marries a Gentile husband on the throne of a great empire. Ruth, however, is the only instance in the Bible in which a whole book is devoted to a woman. The book of Ruth is a love story; and one of its purposes is to extol virtuous love, and to show how it can overcome all alienations and prejudices. But it is not a love story of a romantic love between a young man and a young woman; it’s the story of a woman’s love for a woman, a young wife’s passionate and devoted love for her mother-in-law. The three pivotal figures in the book are Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. Ruth is the heroine here, despite the fact that, unlike the other two, she is not of Israel. When we think of the jealous exclusiveness of the old-time Jews, it is remarkable to find this ungrudging portrayal of Moabite Ruth as the focus of admiration. She is seen to excel even Israel’s daughters; yet this occasions not the slightest resentment, but the admiration which it merits. That the grace and virtue of Moab’s sweet-spirited daughter should have had such frank recognition speaks well for the author himself. The whole story is written in a spirit of charity. It bases itself on the truth which Christ has made the common property of the race, that in every nation a pure and unselfish love is acceptable to God. So far from asserting the exclusive privilege of the chosen people, it rather invites other races to come and put their trust under the wings of Jehovah, by showing that as soon as they trust in Him the privilege and blessings of Israel become theirs. Again, it is striking that this young Moabite, Ruth, should not only have married so honorably in Israel, but have actually become the great-grandmother of David and one of the mothers in the line of which came Messiah. The other three – Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba, recall unworthy conduct; but virtuous Ruth redeems them. And what of Boaz? It was Boaz who took Gentile Ruth into the Davidic ancestry and the Messianic line; and as Ruth passes into that line she representatively takes all the Gentiles with her, so that now both Jews and Gentiles share common hope in the coming of Him who was to be “a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of His people Israel.

LOVE’S RESOLVE:

Ruth has grown so to love Naomi that she is prepared to forgo everything for widowed Naomi's sake, and assures her that nought but death itself should part them (1:16-17). Naomi had just urged them to return to the shelter of their own parents homes. In the ancient Orient the position of unmarried women and young widows was perilous. The one place where they could find safety and respect was in the house of a husband. This alone was a woman's safe shelter from servitude, neglect or license. If they were to stay in Moab there was good prospect of their finding a husband's shelter; but there was no such prospect if they travel to Canaan, for the Hebrew sons are forbidden by their law to marry any aliens. Ruth, knowing the cost full well, she will gladly give up all, and suffer all, for Naomi!

LOVE'S RESPONSE:

Naomi is so destitute that she must allow Ruth to go even as a poverty-stricken gleaner among the roughish reapers, to fetch home at least some little for food. With beautiful self – forgetfulness Ruth goes to the fields, only too willing to make this somewhat humiliating yet honest effort after sustenance. Boaz is only too glad to extend special privileges and protection to her for the full duration of the harvest.

LOVE'S REQUEST:

Chapter 3 gives the crisis. An attachment has developed between Boaz and Ruth, yet the wealthy kinsman has not taken any practical step about it. Naomi detects the sadness that creeps over Ruth's tender spirit, and contrives a plan to find out what the intention of Boaz is, so as to bring things to a head. According to Hebrew custom and the Mosaic Law. "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger; her husband's brother shall take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her. And it shall be that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel" (Deut.25:5-6). Now when Naomi sent Ruth to Boaz, as described in this chapter, she was really appealing to him to honor this Israelite law, and thus, at the same time, give a husband's shelter to Ruth, and honor the name of Mahlon, her deceased Hebrew husband. Boaz clearly understood this, as his noble words show (10-13). Notice how both Ruth and Boaz use the word "kinsman." Ruth, in creeping softly to the resting place of Boaz, and nestling under the corner of his long robe (v.7), was simply making a legal claim in the approved manner of the time. When Ruth said, "spread thy skirt over thine handmaid," Boaz fully understood the appeal of widowed Ruth for protection, as the casting of the outward garment over the bride's head was a customary ceremony at old-time eastern marriages, in token of the husbandly protection from then on given to the bride. Boaz wakes and finds Ruth present. For a moment he is taken back, but, on hearing Ruth's words, sympathetically appreciates the situation. His gracious reply (v.10-13), reveals both his own honorableness and that of Ruth. And now the two reasons are disclosed why he had not proposed wedlock to Ruth: (1) his considerable seniority in years, (2) his not being the NEAREST kinsman. It may be also that a third reason had been in the mind of Boaz, namely, that Naomi, the wife of Ruth's father-in-law, really had the prior claim on him; though now, by this very act of sending Ruth, Naomi had waived her claim in Ruth's favor.

LOVE'S REWARD:

So the nearest kinsman handed over his right to Boaz, publicly acknowledging this by the old-time custom of plucking off his shoe, and handing it to Boaz. To Boaz Ruth was far more precious than the land. As for Naomi, her joy was brimful. She became the babe's nurse – never

did babe have tenderer nurse or sweeter mother; while the women of the place said, "Thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, is better to thee than seven sons." This precious little book of Ruth calls to us from the bygone, telling us that THE LOVE WHICH "SUFFERETH LONG AND IS KIND" NEVER FAILS OF ITS REWARD IN THE END.

TYPICAL ASPECTS

Israel as originally constituted in Canaan was a Theocracy. God was Israel's King. Israel was Elimelech (My God is King). Israel was married as it were to Naomi (Pleasantness, Favor, Blessing); and Israel's offspring were Mahlon (Song) and Chilion (Perfectness, Ornament). But under testing, Israel compromised and went astray, leaving their early allegiance to Jehovah. Elimelech died. No longer could Israel say with a perfect heart before the Lord, "My God is King." Mahlon and Chilion passed away too – the "song" of praise and the "ornament" of godliness died off; while eventually Naomi, the once "favored" and "pleasant" returns a sorry remnant, "empty" and "bitter," as in the days when the remnant returned under Ezra and Nehemiah.

But from the point of Naomi's return, Ruth (Comeliness) takes the prominent place; and Ruth is a type of the CHURCH. First we see the Ruth who gleanes IN THE HARVEST FIELD, the alien, poor and destitute; having no part or lot in Israel, or in the covenant of promise, yet seeking refuge under the wings of Jehovah, God of Israel, and begging kindness at the hand of the gracious, wealthy Boaz. The name Boaz (In Him is Strength) is a type of Christ, the strong, the wealthy, the noble, the gracious, as he looks upon the Gentile Ruth with generous favor and with tender love toward her.

Second, we see Ruth AT THE THRESHING FLOOR, having no hope in anyone other than Boaz, risking everything, believing in his kindness, staking her all on his honor and his grace and his power to redeem; coming to him poor and friendless, yet loving him because he had first loved her; lying at his feet, praying the shelter of his name, asking the protection of his arm, seeking the provision which only his love could give; and finding in him more than hope had dared to expect.

Third, we see Ruth IN THE HOME OF BOAZ. She has been graciously received by redeemer-Boaz, becomes united to him as his wife, shares with him his life, his home, and all his wealth and joys.

In acting as redeemer Boaz must exhibit the three indispensable qualifications: (1) he must have the RIGHT to redeem, (2) the POWER to redeem, and (3) the WILL to redeem. Christ as our Kinsman-Redeemer has the right as our true Kinsman, and the power as the Son of God, and the gracious willingness. Nor has our heavenly Boaz merely redeemed for us the forfeited estate of Elimelech, He has made us His bride, to share forever with Him His life, His home, His wealth, and His eternal joys.

But who is that unnamed kinsman who would not redeem? I believe it to be the Law. The Law states, "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even unto the tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord forever (Deut.23:3)." The Law is just, but it has no smile, no place, no welcome for alien Ruth. The unnamed kinsman would have paid the price for the estate of Elimelech if that were all there was to think about, but

as soon as he heard that Ruth the Moabitess was involved he refused. And the LAW can do nothing for US as sinners and spiritual aliens to God. It cannot forgive. It cannot cleanse. It cannot renew or empower us. It can only condemn us. Thank God, the Moabite who is shut out by law is admitted by grace! And those very sinners against whom Mt. Sinai thunders, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," may hear the gracious words from Mount Calvary, "He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life, and shall not come into the judgment, but is passed from death unto life!"

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

I SAMUEL: TRANSITION FROM THEOCRACY TO MONARCHY

SAMUEL: THE LAST OF THE JUDGES (1-7)

His Birth and His Youth (1-2)

His Call and His Office (3)

His Times and His Acts (4-7)

SAUL: THE FIRST OF THE KINGS (7-15)

His Appointment as King (8-10)

His Promising Beginning (11-12)

His Later Folly and Sin (12-15)

DAVID: THE ANOINTED SUCCESSOR (16-31)

His Anointing by Samuel (16)

His Service before Saul (16-20)

His Years as a Fugitive (21-30)

First Samuel is the book of the transition from the theocracy to the monarchy, covering a period of about 150 years. Its three main characters are Samuel, the last of the judges, Saul, the first of the kings, and David, the greatest of the kings. God had called Israel into a unique relationship with Himself; and God Himself was Israel's King invisible. Yet, as Samuel ages, and his sons prove perverse, the people make it the occasion to press for a human king. It was the way of human wisdom, not of faith in God. It was taking the lower level. It was a refusing of God's best, for the second best – and there is much difference between the two. Troubles increased through choosing the seemingly easier but lower way of human wisdom, in preference to God's way. The ministry of Samuel marks the institution of the monarchy and also the prophetic office. Samuel founded the SCHOOLS of the prophets, and originated the prophetic ORDER. In a very real sense, therefore, he is the first of the prophets (Acts 3:24; 13:20; Heb.11:32).

Scarcely had Moses and his generation passed before the people reverted to barbarism; and instead of realizing the grand ideal which their Law-giver had sketched for them, they sank lower and lower (as seen in Judges), until the nation seemed at the point of breaking up. The Philistines were fast reducing Israel to a subject nation. But just when it seemed that Israel must be crushed out, Samuel came. Samuel arrested the nations decay, built it up into an orderly and progressive kingdom, and planted it on the path which led it, though by an upward and tangled route, to its high destiny as teacher of the true God to mankind. Many a man who has wielded great influence in his lifetime has left nothing lasting. The means he employed for this internal growth of the nation was the founding of schools. These, besides raising Israel to a higher mental level, fostered the worship of Jehovah by teaching true ideas of the Divine nature.

Schools were the urgent need, through which the whole mental state of Israel should be raised, and men trained for educated leadership. Samuel's Book of the Kingdom (I Sam.10:25) could have little influence on a Saul who could neither read nor write; and Saul became only too like what Samuel had feared. The government which Samuel sought to establish was that of kingly power in the hands of a layman, but acting in obedience to the written law of God. We begin to see what a great figure Samuel is. He initiated the first movement toward national education, and shaped the constitutional monarchy of the nation.

Note how the change-over came about from the Judges to the Kings. It was through the insistence of the people themselves. There are three things we ought to note about this demand for a king. (1) The OUTER REASON for it was the degeneracy of Samuel's sons. (2) The INNER MOTIVE was that the people might become like the other nations. (3) The DEEPER MEANING was that Israel had now rejected the theocracy, which was the most serious thing of all; and this is emphasized in the Divine response, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected ME, that I should not reign over them." Instead of being gratefully anxious to preserve the liberties and public rights which were theirs under the theocracy, they insisted on being ruled as the surrounding peoples were ruled.

Saul, the first king of Israel, is one of the most striking and tragic figures in the Old Testament. He began so assuringly, but declined so disappointingly, and ended so wretchedly. His life can be summed up in three main parts, (1) his early promise, (2) his later decline, (3) his final failure. In his beginning he was distinguished by a STRIKING PHYSICAL SUPERIORITY. He is described as a choice young man, and a goodly: there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he; from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people (9:2). Second, young Saul showed certain HIGHLY COMMENDABLE QUALITIES OF DISPOSITION. We note his modesty (9:21,10:22); his discreteness (10:27); his generous spirit (11:13); his dash and courage (11:6,11); his capacity for strong love (16:21); his energetic antagonism against evil (28:3). Third, there were SPECIAL EQUIPMENTS which God gave him when he became king. God gave him another heart so that he became another man (10:6,9) and the Spirit of God came upon him so that he prophesied (10:10). He also had the trusty counselor, the inspired Samuel at his side, and a spectacular military victory which set the new king high in the confidence of the people (11:12).

In his later decline we see IRREVERENT PRESUMPTION. Saul, in willful impatience, violated the priest's prerogative, and foolishly presumed to offer up with his own hand the pre-arranged sacrifices of the Lord. Next we see his RASH WILLFULNESS. He rushes his men off without Divine guidance and rashly imposes a death sentence on any man who should eat food that day, with the results that his men are too weak to follow up the victory and that his hunger-smitten men sin by eating flesh with the blood, and that Jonathan comes under the death sentence through ignorance. We also notice a blend of DISOBEDIENCE AND DECEIT. Saul is told to destroy utterly the vile Amalekites; but he spares the king and the best livestock. He slips blame for the booty on the people. He even pretends the booty is for sacrifice to Jehovah. Samuel's rebuke begins, "When thou wast little in thine own sight . . ." Alas, humility had now given place to arrogance. Samuel sees right through the sham to the real – "Wherefore didst thou not obey? . . . Thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah." From this point the decline is steep. The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul (16:14) and an evil spirit troubled him. He gives way to a petty jealousy until it becomes a fiendish malice against David. Thrice he tries to kill him, then he hunts him for months on end. He knows that in seeking to kill David he is actually fighting

against God. He admits, “I know well that thou shalt surely be king”(24:20); yet, even after this, he resumes his dastardly pursuit. Well does Saul say of himself, “I have played the fool” (24:21). In his final failure this giant wreck of a man who once enjoyed direct counsel from heaven now traffics with the underworld – witchcraft and suicide. Saul’s two besetting sins were presumption and disobedience to God; and behind both these was impulsive, unsubdued SELF-WILL. The one vital condition for true fulfillment of life is obedience to the will of God. Saul was called to theocratic kingship, and so is each one of us. He was anointed of God to be the executor of a will higher than his own. He was to be the human and invisible vice-regent of Israel’s Divine King, Jehovah. He could only truly rule the subjects beneath him to the extent in which he obeyed the Supreme King above him. We are meant to rule for God, so that our lives and personalities may fulfill His will and accomplish His purpose. When we obstinately rule independently of God our true kingship breaks down; we lose the true meaning and purpose of life. In greater or lesser degree we “play the fool.” To let SELF get the upper hand in our life is to miss the best and court the worst. All of us who live for self in preference to the will of God are “playing the fool.”

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

II SAMUEL: KING DAVID’S FORTY YEAR REIGN

I. DAVID’S TRIUMPHS (1-12)

King over Judah only, at Hebron 1-4

(Civil War Period – 7 Years)

King of all Israel at Jerusalem 5-12

(Conquest Period – 13 Years)

II. DAVID’S TROUBLES (13-24)

David’s Troubles in his Family 13-18

(Amnon Sin to Absalom Revolt)

David’s Troubles in the Nation 19-24

(Sheba Revolt to Pestilence)

Second Samuel is distinctly the book of David’s reign. It opens with David’s accession over Judah, immediately after Saul’s death, and closes just before David’s death. The book therefore covers a period of some forty years. David was the real founder of the monarchy, the reorganizer of Israel’s religious worship, the preeminent hero, ruler and poet of his people. David’s great sin, recorded in chapter 11, marks the sad divide, right in the middle of the book and right in the middle of David’s forty year reign. Up to this point all goes triumphantly for David; but after this there are ugly knots and tangles, grievous blows and tragic trials. In the first part we sing David’s triumphs, and in the second we mourn his troubles – triumph through faith, trouble through sin. This book emphasizes that all sin, whether in king or commoner, whether in high or low, whether in godly or the godless, certainly brings its bitter fruitage. Sin is the destroyer of prosperity. There is no sinning without suffering. This is especially true about the lust of the eye, and sexual sin, which was the point of David’s breakdown. We should flee it as we would a viper. Let us like Job, “make a covenant with our eyes” not to look on that which is seductive, lest, weaker than we suppose ourselves to be, we should give way to sin, and thereby heap sharp thorns into our bosom.

David reigned at Hebron 7-1/2 years over Judah only, because the other tribes would not accept him as Saul's successor. God's choice of David was commonly known. Abner said, "as the Lord has sworn to David, even so I do to Him; to translate the kingdom from the house of Saul...for the Lord hath spoken to David, saying, 'By the hand of My servant David I will save My people out of the hand of the Philistines and out of the hand of all their enemies'(3:9-10,17-18). David did not force himself to the throne. He knew that he had been appointed of God to the throne; and his experience of God during the discipline of the preceding few years had taught him to bide God's timing. Thus we see that the acknowledgment of David's right to the kingship rested on three things: (1) His human kinship – "we are thy bone and thy flesh," (2) His proven merit – "thou ledest out and broughtest in Israel," and (3) His Divine warrant – "the Lord said unto thee: thou shalt be captain over Israel." This speaks of Christ's right of kingship over our lives. He is our kinsman, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. He is our Savior of proven merit, who espoused our cause and fought our foe, and brought us deliverance from the guilt and tyranny of sin. And He is king by Divine warrant, the Prince and Lord of His people, the One to whom is committed all administrative authority in heaven and earth. David, upon becoming king of a united Israel, transferred the seat of government to Jerusalem. Hebron, although a quite suitable capital while David's kingdom was confined to Judah, was too far south to become a metropolis for a kingdom uniting all the tribes. Jerusalem was a naturally strong position, which fact was also in David's mind, no doubt, when he chose to settle there.

Chapter 7 is one of the supremely great passages of the Bible, and one of the principle keys to the Divine plan of history.

"Also the Lord tells you that He will make you a house; and when your days are fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My Son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men; but My mercy shall not depart from him as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you: your throne shall be established forever" (II Sam.7:11-16).

Here we have the DIVINE CONFIRMATION OF THE THRONE IN ISRAEL. Both Saul and David were Divinely selected and anointed, but now the throne of David is confirmed by Divine appointment. Secondly, here is the PREDICTED PERPETUITY OF THE DAVIDIC DYNASTY. Three things are made sure to David, (1) a house or posterity, (2) a throne or royal authority, (3) a kingdom or a sphere of rule; and then in verse 16 all three are secured to him "forever." And thirdly in this Davidic covenant is its MESSIANIC IMPLICATION. Obviously Solomon is first in view, but also looks on to its culmination in Him who, having already been to earth as Prophet, and having now ministered in the heavenly sanctuary as Priest, shall yet return in glory as David's greater Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords, of whose kingdom there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from then on forever. It is because this Davidic covenant finally envisages Christ that it is UNCONDITIONAL. As in the Abrahamic covenant the promised "seed" was Isaac in the immediate sense, and Christ in the ultimate sense (Ga.3:16), so in the Davidic covenant the promised "son" is Solomon in the immediate sense and Christ in the ultimate. Notice that both

covenants are unconditional; and their being so is due to this fact that they both find their final fulfillment in Christ, for there can be no failure on Christ's part. Also this Davidic covenant marks a **FOURTH MAJOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE MESSIANIC PROPHECY**. The first was made to Adam (Ge.3:15) where the 'seed of the woman' should crush the head of the serpent. The second was made to Abraham (Ge.22:18) for in 'his seed' all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. The third was made through Jacob (Ge.49:18) "The scepter shall not depart 'from Judah'... until Shiloh comes." The fourth is now made to David (II Sam.7). Notice the development.

In Adam – the promise is to the RACE in general

In Abraham – it is to one NATION in the race

In Jacob – it is to one TRIBE in the nation

In David – it is to one FAMILY in that tribe

David being a man of war could not typify Christ as Melchizedek, who is King of Peace: this glory was reserved for Solomon. David established the kingdom over which Solomon reigned. But Christ will be both David and Solomon. As David He will convert or conquer all foes and set up the kingdom on earth; and as Solomon, He will reign in everlasting peace.

Wherever David turns he is a victorious warrior, while at home he is an upright and constructive administrator. The secret behind David's successive conquests is (8:14) "And the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went." While the reason for Israel's internal consolidation is given in (8:15) "David executed judgment and justice unto all the people." David was a skillful general and a virtuous ruler. Think of the broken condition of Israel at David's accession and then remember that at his death he transmitted to Solomon a united empire extending from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates and from the Red Sea to the Lebanon. Besides this, the religious development of Israel received a quickening impulse from the piety of their beloved king and the influence of his sacred poetry.

David's great sin – it is not fair or honest to emphasize this blot on David's record so as to make it appear the biggest thing in his life. If it were not for the strict honesty of the Bible itself, this black episode could easily have been withheld from us. We must view his life as a whole, his faith and obedience toward God, his general uprightness and generous-heartedness, the high-principled conduct and ardent spiritual aspirations which largely characterize him throughout his career. David was a good man as the Scripture says, a man after God's own heart. In warfare, a general may lose a battle and yet win a campaign. Although one or several battles may be lost, and lost badly, the result of the campaign may be victory. This is true of men in a moral sense; and in the case of David, the full account of his life, supported by the noble testimony of his psalms, shows decisively that though there were defeats, and one outstandingly grievous fall, the final result is such as to justify the pronouncement that he was a man after God's own heart. As Augustine said, David's fall should put upon their guard all who have NOT fallen, and save from despair all those who HAVE fallen.

Some salient lessons are: (1) **THE HONESTY AND FAITHFULNESS OF THE SCRIPTURES** in recording such a dark incident. Had the writing of the Bible been left merely in human hands, it would have contained no such chapter. David's guilt is here exposed without the slightest effort to extenuate it, much less excuse it. (2) **DAVID'S FALL OCCURRED WHEN HE WAS IN PROSPEROUS EASE**. All his foes were crushed. The pressure of dangers that had kept him prayerful was now removed. We little realize what we owe to those seemingly hard circumstances from which we long to get free, but which are God's means of keeping us

prayerful. Prosperity and ease are always perilous; and we are never so exposed to temptation as when we are idle. (3) DAVID'S SIN WAS A CULMINATION OF A PROCESS. As a rule, falls so violent as that of David do not occur without being preceded by a weakening process. David had given way to the flesh in accumulating many wives (v.5:13) a thing expressly forbidden to Israel's kings (Dt.17:17). David, by nature a man of strong passions, had indulged the flesh; and now the tragic culmination is reached. How we need to guard against the beginnings of sin! (4) DAVID'S SIN LED TO EVEN WORSE SIN. David, who had been shocked when Joab slew Abner, made Joab his accomplice in sin, and brought about the death of Uriah! Oh, the ugly chain that one sin can forge! If we do fall into sin, the one safe measure is confession and restitution. (5) DAVID'S SIN RESULTED IN YEARS OF SUFFERING. Incest, fratricide, rebellion, civil war, intrigue, revolt – all these are traceable to David's sin. What a sorry harvest sin brings! David's wrong was forgiven, but its consequences were not thereby obliterated: and the Divine sentence upon David, "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house," furnishes the key to David's following history, which was as troubled and adverse as his earlier reign had been happy and successful.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

I KINGS: THE BOOK OF THE DISRUPTION

I. THE GREAT FORTY YEARS REIGN OF KING SOLOMON (1-11)

Solomon's Accession and Early Acts 1-4

Solomon's Temple and Palace Built 5-8

Solomon's Meridian Fame and Glory 9-10

Solomon's Declension and Decease 11

II. THE FIRST EIGHTY YEARS OF THE TWO KINGDOMS (12-22)

Accession of Rehoboam: The Disruption 12

Judah Kings – Rehoboam to Jehoshaphat 13-22

Israel Kings – Jeroboam to Ahaziah 13-22

Ministry of Prophet Elijah to Israel 17-22

The splendors of Solomon's reign and the building of the temple forepicture the glory and the worship of Christ's coming kingdom upon the earth. This BOOK OF THE DISRUPTION records the division of the one united kingdom into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. In the northern kingdom (Israel) Samaria becomes the capital. In the southern kingdom (Judah) Jerusalem remains the capital. The central spiritual message of the book is 'DISCONTINUANCE THROUGH DISOBEDIENCE.' "Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon: For as much as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee..." (11:11-13). Viewed historically, Solomon represents the peak period of Israel's prosperity as a kingdom. His reign marks the most splendid and affluent period of Hebrew history. He was the last of the kings to reign over a united Hebrew kingdom. It was through Solomon's own disobedience that the disruption took place. Considered personally, his super-normal wisdom made him a wonder to all the surrounding peoples. His prayer at the temple dedication reveals lofty spiritual capacity. His successful governmental administration bespeaks his more than ordinary mental power. But he never displayed such energetic devotion to God as that of David. Typically, he typifies Christ in His yet future reign on earth. David is the type of Christ's MILLENNIAL reign, that is, His reign on the earth for one thousand years, as David's greater Son, over the restored and regathered

house of Israel. Solomon is the type of Christ's POST – MILLENNIAL reign, which Paul calls "the dispensation of the fullness of times," when Christ shall reign in that 'new Jerusalem' which comes down from God, out of heaven. Throughout Solomon's reign there was PEACE and REST. Not one war of internal disturbance broke the serenity of that forty years. Second, there was surpassing WISDOM and KNOWLEDGE. Third, there was WEALTH and GLORY – such as had exceeded all that had gone before. Fourth, there was FAME and HONOR, Solomon's name being the greatest in all the countries around Israel, and Israel being honored by all peoples. Fifth, there was JOY and SAFETY.

In the first part of the book there is the building of the wonderful temple at Jerusalem. In the second part there is the remarkable ministry of the prophet Elijah in the northern kingdom. The congregation never met WITHIN the temple, but offered worship TOWARDS it, as being the residence of Deity. It was a place for the Divine presence, and for the priests who ministered before it; and for no others. Think of David's enthusiastic provision for the temple which he himself would never see. May we have a like unselfishness toward those who are to follow us! God help us to leave our children the MORAL materials for the building of their lives as living temples! May we leave our children patterns which we have received from God; and may we leave them godly friends who will be wise and willing helpers of them when we ourselves have passed beyond! Solomon was very young when he came to the throne. His own word is that he was "but a little child" (3:7). Josephus says he was fifteen. Solomon's prayer for wisdom, in preference to wealth, power and length of days shows that the young king already possessed a marked degree of wisdom. In nothing is his early wisdom seen more clearly than that he should ask for MORE wisdom. Solomon's own words indicate that in asking for wisdom he did not mean SPIRITUAL wisdom – that insight in Divine things which comes only of regeneration and a close fellowship with God, that wisdom of which Paul speaks in the New Testament. No, in THAT kind of wisdom Solomon falls considerably behind his father David. But, he became supernaturally endowed with administrative discernment, sagacious judgment, intellectual grasp, aptitude for the acquisition of knowledge, a practical wisdom in the directing of affairs. This was indeed the wisdom of God in him. The account of Solomon's revenue and splendor is astonishing; he made silver to be as common as stones in Jerusalem. The visit of the Queen of Sheba has an interest all its own; and Solomon's generosity to her becomes a beautiful illustration of the Heavenly King's bounty to ourselves. "And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatever she asked, beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty" (10:13). As it says in Ephesians 3:20, "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us." Solomon was the richest king in all the earth, and his giving was such as corresponded with that! Philippians 4:19 says, "My God shall supply all your need according to HIS riches in glory in Christ Jesus." A greater than Solomon is here.

Alas the glory of the Solomonic period was short lived. The fault was Solomon's alone. "But king Solomon loved many strange women ... Solomon clave unto these in love... His wives turned away his heart after other gods... Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord... The Lord was angry with Solomon... The Lord said: I will surely rend the kingdom from thee." It was this infidelity of Solomon which precipitated the disruption into the two kingdoms. The wisest of all men had become the greatest of all fools, for he had sinned against light and privilege and promise such as had been given to no other man. How inferior is the greatest human wisdom to true piety. Solomon was a man of extraordinary ability, a botanist, zoologist, architect, poet, and moral philosopher; and yet a man who strangely lacked in strength of character. Moses had said

that Israel's future kings should not multiply wealth, horses, or wives (Dt.17:14-20), but Solomon did all three.

Immediately following Solomon's death the Disruption takes place. The Scriptures locate the blame for the Disruption with Solomon. It is an awful yet true indictment of him to say that the whole after history of the Disruption, the gradual decline of power and influence, the corruption of morals, and at times the almost total forgetfulness of God, were only the necessary developments of those pernicious principles and practices introduced by Solomon. In the later years of Solomon's reign the extravagant expenses of the royal court had become such as to necessitate the levying of taxes which the people were ill able to yield. The stupid behavior and fatuous reply of Rehoboam, reveal his utter inability to measure such a situation. His senseless threat to outdo his father's severities toward his subjects was the last straw. In the two lines of kings, the eight kings who reigned over Israel, every one was EVIL. Of the four kings who reigned over Judah, the two who reigned the longest (covering 66 years out of 86) were GOOD kings.

The last six chapters of I Kings are occupied with the ministry of the prophet Elijah in the northern kingdom of the ten tribes. It is from this point the ministry of the prophets in the two Hebrew kingdoms becomes more prominently emphasized. He suddenly appears on the scene as the crisis-prophet, with thunder on his brow and tempest in his voice. He disappears just as suddenly, swept skywards in a chariot of fire. Between his first appearing and his final disappearing lies a succession of amazing miracles. Old Dr. Kitto remarks, "There were two sorts of prophets: prophets of deeds, and prophets of words. Of the former there has not been among men a greater than Elijah." So far as we know he wrote nothing.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

II KINGS : THE BOOK OF THE DISPERSION

I. ANNALS OF ISRAEL, THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

This part contains the ministry of Elisha, and concludes with the death of Jehu, Israel's 10th king.

II. ALTERNATING ANNALS OF BOTH KINGDOMS

This part runs up to the Assyrian captivity of Israel. Jonah, Amos and Hosea prophesy at this time in Israel.

III. ANNALS OF JUDAH, THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM

This part ends with Judah's Babylonian captivity by which time Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Jeremiah had prophesied in Judah.

This Second Book of Kings, which opens with the translation of Elijah to heaven, and closes with the transportation of the captive Jews to Babylon, is more tragic than all which have preceded it. In chapter 17 we see the 10 tribed northern kingdom (Israel) going into the Assyrian captivity, from which they have never since returned; while in chapter 25 we see Jerusalem sacked, the temple burnt, and the southern kingdom (Judah) going into the Babylonian captivity, from which only a remnant returned.

The kings of Judah	The kings of Israel
Rehoboam 17	Jeroboam 22
Abijah (Abijam) 3	Nadab 2
* Asa 41	Baasha 24
Elah 2	
Zimri 1 week	
Omri 12	
* Jehoshaphat25	Ahab 22
Ahaziah 2	
Jehoram 12	
Jehoram 8	Jehu 28
Ahaziah 1	
Athaliah 6	
Joash 40	Jehoahaz 17
Amaziah 29	Jehoash 16
Azariah (Uziah) .. 52	Jeroboam II 41
INTERREGNUM...12	
Zechariah 1/2	
Shallum 1 month	
Menahem 10	
Pekahiah 2	
Jotham 16	Pekah 20
Ahaz 16	Hoshea 9
* Hezekiah 29	
Manasseh 55	
Amon 2	
* Josiah 31	
Jehoahaz . 3 months	
Jehoiakim11	
Jehoachin . 3 months	

The kings of Judah	The kings of Israel
Zedekiah 11	* those kings which were good (like David)

The central message of this book is that `WILLFUL SIN BRINGS A WOEFUL END.' Sinning despite warning brings ruin without remedy. Inexcusable wrong brings inescapable wrath. The disruption, when united Israel split into two kingdoms, occurred in 975 B.C. The dispersion and ruin of both the Hebrew kingdoms takes place in II Kings. The 10 tribed northern kingdom into the Assyrian captivity happened in 721 B.C., and the southern kingdom into the Babylonian exile in 587 B.C. Note that 19 kings reigned over the northern kingdom, and the kingdom only lasted 250 years; whereas Judah had 20 kings and continued for some 390 years. The kings of Israel came from 7 different dynasties, whereas all the 20 kings of Judah were of one and the same dynasty – the Davidic. In the case of Judah's kings DAVID IS THE STANDARD ACCORDING TO WHICH THEIR CHARACTER IS ESTIMATED. Repeatedly we read, "His heart was not perfect with the Lord his God as the heart of David his father". Secondly, Scripture shows the faithfulness of God to the Davidic covenant (2 Sam.7), in THE PRESERVATION OF THE DAVIDIC LINE. Repeatedly the royal line was in peril of being extinguished, but God fulfilled His word to David. For example, when the kingdom of Judah fell, on account of its sinning, the faithfulness of God continued and the line was preserved; for although God had to say to the wicked king Jehoiachin (Jeconiah), "Write this man childless," and the line of David through Solomon failed, a subsidiary line had been preserved from David through Nathan, into which line the succession now ran. And even after the Babylonian captivity the line continues in Zerubbabel, and from him the genealogical record is preserved right down to the birth of Jesus Christ, David's Son and Lord, in whom the Davidic line is perpetuated for evermore. He and He alone will re-establish the Davidic throne.

THE PROPHET ELISHA:

Elisha's ministry is an extraordinary one. It is even more interspersed with miracles than was the fiery ministry of Elijah. The full list, including the strange miracle at Elisha's grave, totals twenty. How many others were done through Elisha without being recorded, we do not know. All Elisha's mighty acts were unmistakable and unanswerable evidences of the reality and sovereign power of Jehovah, Israel's true God, from whom the nation had now outrageously apostatized. God is meeting a critical situation by supernormal measures. Apostate and degenerate as the nation has become, a final bid shall be made, by special messengers and startling miraculous signs, to recall the sinning people to Jehovah and to the true faith of Israel. Even to the last, God will seek to turn His idolatry-infatuated people from their corruptions, and thus avert the culminating catastrophe of the Dispersion which must otherwise overtake them. Alas, the louder the warning and the clearer the sign, the deafer and blinder do the unwilling people become! Doubtless there was an overridden godly remnant; but the bulk of leaders and people were wedded to their idolatries and immoral ways.

Note THE CONTRAST BETWEEN ELIJAH AND ELISHA. Such a similarity is also found between John the Baptist and our Lord Jesus. It was announced by the angel Gabriel that John, as the Lord's forerunner, should "go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk.1:17); and our Lord Himself later said of him, "This is Elijah which was to come" (Mt.11:14; 17:10-12). Elijah, like John the Baptist, came neither eating nor drinking, and was in the deserts, solitary and apart from men. Elisha, on the other hand, like our Lord Jesus, came eating and drinking

and mingling freely among the people. There were no shaggy locks nor sheepskin mantle, and there was no being fed by ravens in the lonely grotto of Cherith, but a man normally shorn and clad, having a gentle and sociable presence. Instead of the fire, the storm, the sternness of judgment, there are healing acts and gentler words. In Elisha's recurring ministries beyond the bounds of Israel we seem to see a suggestion of Him who, besides being 'the glory of His people, Israel,' was to be 'a light to lighten the gentiles.' While again, notice the similarity of miracles between Elisha and the Lord's.

Also similar is THE MAIN EMPHASIS of their ministries. Elijah's ministry, like that in the preaching of John the Baptist, is the stern call to repentance, accompanied by the warning of impending judgment; but the main emphasis all through Elisha's ministry is that of resurrection and hope of new life, if only the people will respond. Note some of his miracles: the healing of the death-giving waters of Jericho so that they give life, the saving of the armies by miraculous water supply, the raising of the Shunamite's son from death to new life, the healing of the poisoned pottage, the multiplication of barley loaves, the healing of Naaman, by that symbolic baptism in Jordan, the swimming of the iron – a new overcoming life power, the man brought to life at Elisha's grave.

Take Elijah, Elisha and Jonah together. These three prophets came in quick succession during this last period before the dispersion of the northern kingdom. Such "signs" were given through these three prophets as had never been given before, with the purpose of arresting the nation. In the case of Elijah there is the raising up of the Zarephath widow's son from death to new life. Never had a dead person been brought back to life. The unheard of had happened. Yet that crowning miracle was repeated in the ministry of Elisha, in the raising of the Shunamite's son. Indeed, it was more than repeated. An even stranger thing happened; a dead man was suddenly quickened into life again through contact with Elisha's own corpse! But, most amazing of all, there next comes Jonah's experience of something even stranger – a resurrection not merely from bodily death, but from the belly of Sheol! Look at these three men again. Elisha dies and is buried, yet in his death gives life to another – as Christ through His death, gives life to those who come into union with Him. Jonah goes down into "hell" itself, yet is brought up that he should not see corruption – as Christ Himself was not left in Hades nor suffered to see corruption (Acts 2:27). Elijah in ascending, cast down his mantle and a 'double portion of his spirit' so that his follower on earth might do 'greater works' than he himself had done – as Christ also, when He ascended up on high, poured forth the Spirit so that His followers might do the 'greater works' of which He had spoken.

EVIL KINGS OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM:

It is chronicled of every one of them that "he did evil" with the exception of Shallum, who reigned only one month. The standard according to which these ISRAEL kings are judged is the shameful reign of "JEROBOAM, the son of Nebat, WHO MADE ISRAEL TO SIN." Of Fifteen out of the eighteen kings who followed him it is said that he did evil after the example of this Jeroboam. The DISPERSION OF THE 10 TRIBES OCCURRED IN TWO STAGES. Some years before the final break-up of the kingdom, Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh, which occupied territory on the eastern side of Jordan, and which therefore first fell prey to the Assyrians (I Chr. 5:25-26). They had compromised and are the first to go into captivity. The Assyrian king who carried away these tribes is called Tiglath-pileser (II K. 15:29), and also Pul (I Chr. 5:26). The deportation of the other tribes of the northern kingdom took place about 15 years after, about 721 B.C. by Shalmaneser IV. The whole population was carried off, never to see Samaria again. Then the Assyrians planted in their stead populations which were likewise

carried from a far distance, placing Assyrian officials over them, leaving them with neither spirit nor means to revolt. Thus the land was inhabited by a mongrel mixture imported from afar. Israel had refused to accept the ennobling service of God, must now suffer and weep in degrading servitude to men (II Chr.12:8; Jer.24:5).

THE DOWNFALL OF JUDAH:

Could anything have given the sister kingdom graver cause for penitent reflection and amendment than what had then happened to the 10 tribes? The warnings uttered by Jehovah's faithful prophets had materialized with tragic exactness. Israel had over- presumed upon her covenant relationship with Jehovah, and He had now utterly cast her off.

There are three kings which call for special comment. Of HEZEKIAH it is said, "Since the days of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, there was not the like in Jerusalem" and also, "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (II Chr.30:26; II K.18:5). It seems clear that in good degree we owe to Hezekiah THE ARRANGEMENT AND TRANSMISSION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES. Clearly, his delight was in the word of Jehovah. Also, an extra 15 years were added to his life. It was in those additional years that Hezekiah's literary activities reached their high point. Judah's days were numbered. Only five more kings were to reign before the deportations to Babylon began, and four out of those five were to prove ungodly failures. The moment had certainly come for the bringing together and editing of the inspired Scriptures, with a view to their preservation and transmission; and who should be God's man for this purpose? Who was more suitable and willing than Hezekiah? Then there was MANASSEH. Was there ever an extremer contrast between father and son than that between Hezekiah and Manasseh? Sometimes the best of fathers have the worst of sons, and visa versa. What a grim enigma that the wickedest of all Judah's kings should be the longest reigning one! First we notice that Manasseh was carried captive to Babylon. Second, in captivity Manasseh repented and was forgiven of God. He thus becomes one of the most amazing instances of the pardoning love of God to extreme sinners. Third Manasseh was restored to Jerusalem, and made amends, as far as possible, for all the evil he had done. And lastly there's Josiah. JOSIAH'S LEAD TO HIS PEOPLE DID NOT REALLY CHECK THE NATIONAL DOWNGRADE. The apparent 'revival' consisted rather in outward measures taken by the king himself than in a hearty desire on the part of the people in general. There was much outward reform but no real inward return. Through prophet after prophet and providence after providence God had pleaded with His people, but they had repeatedly shown that they "WOULD not," until now, by that deadly process which ever operates in human nature, they had reached the point where they COULD not. Apostasy and idolatry had now become ingrained in the national character. Secondly, JOSIAH'S REIGN OCCURRED AT ONE OF THE MOST FATEFUL TURNING POINTS IN HISTORY. There were 1) the fall of the Assyrian empire, 2) the rise of the new Babylonian empire, 3) the formation of the Median empire and 4) the dissolution of the kingdom of Judah as an independent kingdom. In the days when Josiah carried out his reformation, the book of the Law was found. Mark the significance of this fact that it had to be found! Moreover, its teaching so astonished Josiah that he halted in the middle of his work to inquire from the prophetess Huldah. The people had so forgotten the law of their God that, when it was found, they were absolutely unfamiliar with it.

The Babylonian, Jehovah's avenger whose advent had been fore-announced through Isaiah over 100 years earlier, had now appeared. First, we call attention to the fact that THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM AND THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH ARE MOST

EMPHATICALLY ASCRIBED TO THE SOVEREIGN HAND OF JEHOVAH (II K.24:3; II Chr.36:16-21). Second, THE DEPORTATION OF JUDAH'S PEOPLE WAS IN 3 STAGES.

- 1) Third year of Jehoiakim, Daniel taken to Babylon.
- 2) Eight years later Jehoiachin is replaced with Zedekiah by Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar carries away 10,000 of the most useful and better-class Jerusalemites (II K.24:8-16), and among them were the priest and prophet (Ez.40:1).
- 3) The final deportation took place in 587 B.C. (11 years later) It was precipitated by a futile rebellion on the part of Zedekiah. The whole city, with its desecrated temple, its desolated palaces, and its now deserted dwellings, was set on fire. A third of the inhabitants died of famine, and of the plague that grew out of it (Ez.5:12). Nearly all the remaining population were then carried off into exile, only the poorest of the land being left (II K.25:11-12).

Third, THE BABYLONIANS HAD WITHDRAWN FROM JERUSALEM THERE WAS A CONSPIRACY AMONG THE JEWS LEFT IN THE LAND, WHICH RESULTED IN A FURTHER FLIGHT OF JEWS FROM JUDEA INTO EGYPT. Forth, THE DATE ON WHICH THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM BEGAN IS ONE OF UTMOST SIGNIFICANCE.

This is the first time in these historical books that an event is thus dated to the very day. On that same day a special message about it was delivered from God to Ezekiel (II K.25:1; Ez.24:1-2). Besides this, the prophet Jeremiah marks the date with the same kind of particularity (Jer.52:4). The 25th chapter of Jeremiah predicts a 70 period of desolations on Jerusalem, and mentioned again by Daniel and Zechariah (Dan.9:1-2; Zec.1:12). Then Haggai declares:

“Consider, FROM THIS DAY onward: before one stone was placed on another in the temple of the Lord, ...FROM THIS DAY onward, from the 24TH DAY OF THE 9TH MONTH, from the day when the temple of the Lord was founded, consider it... Yet from THIS DAY on I will bless you” (Hag.2:15-19).

Fifth, JUDGMENT DID NOT FALL UPON THE CHOSEN PEOPLE BECAUSE OF THEIR EVILS, BUT SIGNALLY BECAUSE THEY HAD FOULED A SACRED COVENANT. Conquered, captive, castaway – thus ends the story of Judah as an independent kingdom. There is always the double aspect to be kept in view – the human and the Divine. In the foreground, and in the immediate sense, is the human failure, as seen in the kings and the multitude. But on the Divine side there is the picture of ultimate triumph. The greatest prophet of the era writes of Jehovah, “HE shall not fail, nor be discouraged” (Is.42:4). When the throne on earth falls to pieces the throne in the heavens rides the storm. The Babylonian exile which came as a judgment on the Jews cured them forever of their idolatries, and strangely recovered to them their lost sense of Jehovah. The Law of Jehovah became exceedingly precious to them, and the true ideal of their nationhood began to be discerned again. They are still the chosen people. Scattered over the face of the earth, yet strangely one; ever persecuted, yet ever preserved; mixed in with all races, yet the most distinct people in the world.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

I CHRONICLES: THE HOUSE OF JEHOVAH

I. ISRAEL'S MAIN GENEALOGIES (1-9)

Adam to Jacob (also Esau's line) (1)

Jacob to David (also Caleb line) (2)

David to Zedekiah (and Post-exile) (3)

Tribe Genealogies and Allotments (4-8)

Post-exile Resettlement (9)

II. DAVID'S REIGN AT JERUSALEM (10-29)

The Anointed of the Lord (10-12)

The Ark of the Lord (13-14)

The Covenant of the Lord (17-21)

The Temple of the Lord (22-29)

Death of King David (29:26-30)

Israel, besides being the repository of a special Divine revelation, was the possessor of wonderful Divine promises reaching to the unborn generations. The chronicler himself knew well enough that these genealogies reveal the selective process of Divine election right from Adam downwards, and that the covenant line of redemptive purpose was to culminate in the Messiah. Especially did the preservation of the trunk and main branches of Israel's family tree become vital after the Babylonian exile (when the Chronicles were written). Our chronicler's lists link the pre-exile with the post-exile period; for chapter 9:2-34 concerns the resettlement in Judea AFTER the exile. In one quick span, from Adam to Nehemiah, they give us the main genealogies of the Israelite nation. Here is a re- outlining of the story already told in the books of Samuel and the Kings, but from a different standpoint. In fact, it is this repetition, with its characteristic additions and omissions, that the viewpoint and significance of the Chronicles are perceived.

First, as to THE UNIFYING IDEA OR EMPHASIS, all unanimously note the prominence given to the TEMPLE and matters connected with it. MAJOR OMISSIONS: David's romantic adventures, his reign at Hebron, his grief over Saul and Jonathan, his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah, the revolt of Absalom. MAJOR ADDITIONS: David's abundant preparation of material in advance for the temple (22), his preparatory numbering and distributing of the Levites and the priests (23-24), his appointment and arrangement of singers and players and porters (25-26) – all in anticipation of the temple. This emphasis persists right through the Second Book of the Chronicles. Six out of the nine chapters given to Solomon's reign refer to the temple. Also, from chapter 10 on, which marks the disruption of the nation into two kingdoms, the northern 10 tribed kingdom is throughout ignored, as being founded upon apostasy from the nation's true worship as well as from the house of David. It is solely with Judah and Jerusalem that the Chronicles are concerned, because it is that kingdom and city which hold the TEMPLE. And not only do all the remaining chapters (10-36) confine themselves to Judah, but also to that viewpoint which subordinates all else to the interests of that holy religion of which the temple was the great symbol. For instance, the reigns of Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah are given prominence because of the religious reforms and temple restorations associated with them. In Kings only 3 verses are given to Hezekiah's reforms, as against 3 chapters in the Chronicles. Everywhere in the Chronicles the TEMPLE is emphasized as the vital center of the nation's true life; and even where the temple itself is not mentioned, it is obvious that the emphasis is always upon that RELIGION which the temple represents. Even the genealogies in the 1st nine chapters lead up to the allocation of the returned "Remnant" in

Jerusalem and Judea necessary as a basis for the temple service, and the dues by which that service was to be supported.

The Chronicles were compiled AFTER THE BABYLONIAN EXILE, when the “Remnant” had returned from Babylon to Judea, under Ezra and Zerubbabel. The Chronicles were especially written for these repatriated Jews and their descendants who were to reconstitute the Jewish national life in the homeland. If we imagine ourselves back in Judea with that “Remnant,” we soon realize that there is one great lack which forces itself upon the mind, namely, there is no king. That is the crucial fact to grasp and the first key to the Chronicles,

THE DAVIDIC THRONE IS GONE !

The people were returning, not to rebuild a throne, but a TEMPLE. Indeed, this was the reason for the edict of the Persian emperor Cyrus, for the “Remnant” to Jerusalem and Judea. Even before Nehemiah is sent to rebuild the city, Ezra and Zerubbabel are sent with the remnant to rebuild the TEMPLE. In any national reconstruction we must begin there – with the temple, that is with GOD. Now that the throne is gone, there remain 3 things more important than all else. 1) There was THE TEACHING OF THE PAST. The covenant people could now see where the processes of apostasy had brought them, and it was vital that they now learn unforgettingly the teaching of their nation’s past. 2) There was THE PROPHETIC PROMISE OF THE FUTURE. Although the Davidic throne was no longer among them, the Davidic LINE was; and of this line the Messiah was to come, who should lift the Davidic throne to unprecedented splendor, and consummate Jehovah’s purpose in and through Israel, by bringing in a wonderful world-rule, with its center at Jerusalem. 3) There was THE PRESENCE OF JEHOVAH WITH THEM IN THE PRESENT. Cyrus giving his edict to rebuild the temple 200 years after Isaiah forenamed him (Is.44:28), Nebuchadnezzar’s proclamation of his conversion to Jehovah (Dan.4), and Jeremiah’s prophecies as to the exact duration of the servitude to Babylon (Jer.29:10) – all must have shown them beyond all doubt that Jehovah was with them in their return to Judea. It was most needful that the nation read its past, present and future from the Divine standpoint, and it was with this very thing in mind – to meet this need and attain this end that the Chronicles were compiled.

In view of the nation’s unique calling and the Davidic covenant, it was most important to retain unimpaired the nation’s principle genealogies; and these are carefully presented in the first 9 chapters. In view of the catastrophes which had occurred, it was important to recast the nation’s history exclusively from a religious standpoint, at least from the beginning of the Davidic kingdom; and this we find in chapter 10 onwards. In view of the fact that the temple represents the holy religion which had come to Israel by special Divine revelation; and the fact that the temple was the supreme surviving link between the nation’s great past, and its still greater prophesied future; this emphasizing of the temple we find all through the Chronicles.

The temple was now, above all things, 1) the symbol of the unity of the nation, the more so now that the earthly throne had disappeared; 2) the reminder of the nation’s high calling and function; 3) the sign that Jehovah was still with His chosen people; 4) the focus of the true emphasis in the national life. It was in the light of that temple that all the past was to be read, and the present reconstructed, and the future anticipated. Hence the compiling of the Chronicles, with their sustained emphasis on the temple and the religious aspects of things. And hence the central purpose of the Chronicles, namely, to bring home afresh to the covenant people WHERE THE TRUE EMPHASIS IN ISRAEL’S NATIONAL LIFE LAY, to convince them as to WHERE THEIR FIRST DUTY AND THEIR ONLY TRUE SAFETY LAY, AND THEREBY TO CHALLENGE THE ELECT RACE TO A RENEWED CONSECRATION as the Divinely-appointed

priest of the nations. From the pen of John Urquhart came, "Israel, unlike the other nations, has no destiny apart from God's service. This has been proved by these more than 18 centuries of what may be named national existence, but cannot be called national life. Israel has not existed, and cannot exist for itself. It is the Divinely-appointed priest of the nations. When it recognized its mission, it impressed and lead the nations. When it neglected it, it sank into insignificance. When it renounced it, Israel was bereft of fatherland and of spiritual perception and power. It wanders among the nations today in its blindness, disinherited, disrobed, and yet with ineffaceable marks of its priestly destiny.

Plainly the Chronicles are a compilation from earlier documents; about 14 of these are named (I Ch.29:29; II Ch.9:29, 12:15, 13:22, 20:34, 24:27, 26:22, 27:7, 32:32, 33:19). Chapters 6:15 and 9:1 date the books after the exile. The genealogy in 3:16-24 shows the same. The very last words of II Chronicles speaks of the edict of Cyrus. Who the compiler was is an unsettled question. The Talmud says Ezra. Samuel and Kings are more BIOGRAPHICAL; the Chronicles are more STATISTICAL. The former are more PERSONAL; the latter are more OFFICIAL. The former are more from the standpoint of the PROPHET; the latter are more from the standpoint of the PRIEST. The former give the history of the two kingdoms; whereas from the disruption onwards the Chronicles give only the history of JUDAH. In the former the emphasis is on the THRONE; in the latter its on the TEMPLE. In their total effect the books of Samuel and the Kings are an INDICTMENT of the nation, exposing its guilt; whereas the Chronicles are meant to be an INCITEMENT to the nation, encouraging new loyalty. In the Chronicles we come to a writing which does not carry us further forward (except for odd touches that reveal its post-exilic compilation), but goes back and reviews the whole story in order to derive and apply a vital lesson: THE NATION'S RESPONSE TO GOD IS THE DECISIVE FACTOR IN ITS HISTORY AND DESTINY. The Chronicles belong to the historical books and are the true link between the pre-exile and post-exile periods. They look back summarizingly over the throne period, and relate it to the throneless new period.

Chronicles – Retrospective
Ezra – Restoration
Nehemiah – Reconstruction
Esther – Preservation

In Chronicles the first-recorded outstanding public act of king David was the bringing of the ark of Jehovah to Jerusalem. David keenly sensed that the secret of the nation's blessing was Jehovah's presence in the midst. He at once plans to put the ark of Jehovah at the center of His people's life. It pleased God to choose out of the race one nation – Israel, then out of that nation one tribe – Judah, then out of that tribe one family – the house of David, and to make with that house a wonderful covenant (17). David was not allowed to build it, but he amply prepared for it – materials (22), Levites (23), singers, porters and officers (25-27), and a final charge in anticipation of it to Solomon and the nation (28-29). The subject of these Chronicles is THE HOUSE OF JEHOVAH. In the larger sense that house is the whole nation Israel; in a more centralized sense it is the house of David; in the center-most sense it is the temple.

II CHRONICLES: THE TEMPLE VERSUS THE THRONE

I. SOLOMON'S FORTY YEARS' REIGN (1-9)

Solomon's Early Establishment (1)

Solomon Rears the Temple (2-7)

Solomon in all his Glory (8-9)
 Death of Solomon (9:29-31)
 II. JUDAH'S HISTORY TO THE EXILE (10-36)
 The Disruption of the Kingdom (10)
 The Twenty Kings of Judah (11-36)
 Deportation to Babylon (36:15-21)
 Edict of Cyrus (36:22-23)

This is a tragic book with a glorious opening and a terrible ending. The promises of God concerning ultimate issues never have an "if" in them, because they find their final goal in CHRIST; but promises concerning the intermediate processes toward those issues often do have an "if" in them. Thus Solomon was promised wisdom, wealth and power, and he received them. He was promised length of days "if" he persevered in his walk with God (I K.3:14). This latter gift he forfeited, and died at 59.

And what a story after Solomon's death – from Rehoboam and the "Disruption" to Zedekiah and the "Dispersion"! In the preceding chronicles there have risen up before us a THRONE founded in a Divine covenant, and a TEMPLE made glorious by a Divine descent into it. The throne and the temple are meant to uphold and glorify each other; but a condition of apostasy develops, and goes from bad to worse despite occasional checks, in which the throne becomes the worst enemy of the temple, until a point is reached where one of the two must go, and as it cannot be the temple it must be the throne. Hence the exile and the suspension of the Davidic throne. The

Prophets of Israel (North)	Prophets of Judah (South)	Prophets during/after exile
Jonah 862-830 B.C.	Obadiah 887 B.C.	Ezekiel 595-574 B.C.
Amos 787	Joel 800	Daniel 607-534
Hosea 785-725	Isaiah 760-698 Israel goes into Assyrian captivity	Haggai 520 the remnant returns to Jerusalem 536 B.C.
	Micah 750-710	Zechariah 520-518
	Nahum 713	Malachi 397
	Habakkuk 626	
	Zephaniah 630	
	Jeremiah 629-588	
	Lamentations - Judah goes into Babylonian captivity 587 B.C.	

temple too is allowed to be burnt, for it had already profaned far more by Jewish sinning than it now could be by Babylonish burning; and a new temple must be built in the throneless new period after the exile. Running right through the story of these kings, with its occasional reforms and ever- worsening relapses, is the solemn, vital, urgent truth that A NATION'S RESPONSE TO GOD IS THE REALLY DETERMINING FACTOR IN ITS HISTORY AND DESTINY. This was especially true of Israel. "As long as Uzziah sought the Lord, God made him to prosper" (26:5); "Jotham became mighty because he prepared his ways before the Lord" (27:6). When king and people honored God there was prosperity, whereas whenever they behaved unfaithfully to Him there came adversity. The place we give to God is that which determines our prosperity or

adversity, our history and our destiny. The abuse of high calling by low living always brings ruinous ending.

CHRONOLOGICAL GROUPING OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

THE PROPHETS IN RELATION TO THE KINGS

King	Prophet(s)
Saul, David, Solomon	Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Ahijah
Rehoboam, Abijam	Shemiah (J)
Jeroboam, Nadab	Ahijah (I)
Asa, Jehoshaphat	Azariah, Hanani (J)
Baasha, Ela, Zimri, Omri	Jehu (I)
Ahaziah	Obadiah? (J)
Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram	Elijah, Micaiah (I)
Jehu, Jehoahaz, Joash	Elisha, Jonah, Amos (I)
Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah	Isaiah, Micah (J)
Jeroboam - Hoshea	Hosea (I)
Manasseh	Nahum (J)
Josiah - Zedekiah	Habakkuk, Jeremiah (J)

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

EZRA: THE BOOK OF RESTORATION

THE RETURN UNDER ZERRUBABEL 1-6

The Decree of Cyrus 1:1-4

The Leader, Zerrubabel 1:8,2:1

Sacred Vessels and Gifts 1 & 2

The Coming to Jerusalem 3:1
Prophet Ministry: Haggai, Zech. 5
Main Outcome – Temple Rebuilt 6
THE RETURN UNDER EZRA 7-10
The Decree of Artaxerxes 7:1, 11-26
The Leader, Ezra the Scribe 7:1-10
Names and Number of Company 8:1-20
Sacred Vessels and Gifts 7 & 8
The coming to Jerusalem 8:32
Intercessory Ministry: Ezra 9:1-15
Main Outcome – People Separated 10

Ezra and Nehemiah deal with the “Remnant” which returned to Jerusalem and Judea, the book of Esther has to do with those who stayed on in the land of their captivity. The subject of the book of Ezra is THE RETURN OF THE REMNANT. The first half is about the rebuilding of the TEMPLE, and the second half the restoring of the WORSHIP. As to the size of the remnant it totaled approximately 50,000. Such a number out of the national total was merely a remnant. The Jews who had grown up in the Babylonian empire did not feel the same smarting sense of strangeness, humiliation, and resentment which their fathers had felt. Also the Jews fared much better under the more compassionate new government of the Persian rule. Thus when the providential opportunity came for repatriation, the bulk of the nation, to their shame, preferred their tolerable and perhaps even lucrative life under Persian rule, to which they had now become quite accommodated. The return came in two stages:

I. 1st year of Cyrus, Zerrubabel in 536 B.C. with 50,000

II. 7th year of Artaxerxes, Ezra the priest 456 B.C. with 2,000

Perhaps the central spiritual significance of the book may be best expressed in the words of Lamentations 3:32, “Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion.” God had not forgotten to be gracious, and there was a compassionate restoration made possible. The first six chapters of the book cover the first 20 years (approx.) after the return under Zerrubabel which leaves about 60 years gap between chapter 6 and 7. During the earlier years of this 60 year gap the critical events narrated in the book of Esther took place.

THE TWO LEADERS:

Zerrubabel, his personal name, means “descended from Babylon,” which indicates that he was actually a child of the exile, born in Babylonia, or probably in the city of Babylon itself. He was directly in the royal line of David, being the great-grandson of king Jeconiah. The 3-fold glory that immortalized him is that he: 1) captained the remnant back to Judea, 2) laid the foundation of the new temple and 3) completed the erection of the new temple (3:8; 6:15; Zech.4:9).

Jewish tradition, via the Talmud, has made Ezra one of the most celebrated personages in all the history of his people. Five great works are attributed to him: 1) The founding of the “Great Synagogue” of learned Jewish scholars, 2) the settlement of the sacred canon or recognized list of authoritative Hebrew Scriptures, and its 3-fold arrangement of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, 3) the change over of the Scriptures from the old Hebrew to the new, with its square Assyrian characters, 4) the compilation of the Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, 5) the institution of local synagogues. He was a priest of the line of Aaron, and “a ready scribe in the Law of Moses” which means that he was an expert instructor in the Scriptures.

DURATION OF THE EXILE:

The Exile in Babylonia lasted only 51 years, not 70. It began in 587 B.C. and ended with the decree of Cyrus, 536 B.C. In Jeremiah 29:10 it is correctly translated “FOR Babylon” rather than “AT Babylon.” God did not say His people would be at Babylon for 70 years, but that there would be a 70 years’ rule FOR Babylon. In this small book of Ezra no less than 7 different kings are mentioned, representing all three world empires. For instance, we must not think that the emperor Darius here is the king Darius of the book of Daniel, nor must we think that the Artaxerxes of chapter 4 is the Artaxerxes of chapter 7.

THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE:

This period began in 745 B.C. with the able and cruel usurper-general, Pul, who took the reigning name of Tiglath-Pileser III, and it continued till Nineveh was finally destroyed, about 612-608 B.C., when Babylon took the lead. In 625 B.C. Babylon regained independence under Nabopolassar (Nebuchadnezzar’s father) who reigned at Babylon till 606 B.C. Later the Medes and Babylonians made alliance and overthrew Nineveh about 608 B.C., which ended the Assyrian empire forever.

Tiglath-Pileser III (745-27) 2 K.15:19,29; 16:7,10; 2 Ch.5:26
Shalmaneser IV (727-22) 2 K.17:3; 18:9
Sargon (722-05) 2 K.18:11; Isa.20; 10:12,28-34
Sennacherib (705-681) 2 K.18-19; 2 Ch.32; Isa.36-37
Esar-haddon (681-68) 2 K.19:37; 2 Ch.33:11; Ezra4:2
Assur-bani-pal (668-26) Ezra 4:10 (“Asnapper”)?

THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE:

On the fall of Nineveh, the even more ancient city of Babylon laid her hands once more to the scepter of the nations. Her new lead began in 606 B.C. with the young and brilliant Nebuchadnezzar; yet it only lasted until 536 B.C., thus exactly fulfilling Jeremiah 29:10 During the latter 50 years of this time the Jews were captives in Babylonia.

Nebuchadnezzar (606-562)
Evil-Merodach, or Amil-Marduk (562-559) 2 K.25:27
Nergal-Sharezer, or Neriglissar (559-55) Jer.39:3,13
Labashi-Marduk, or Laborisoarchod (555)
Nabonidus, or Nabunahid (his viceroy was Belshazzar of Daniel 5

THE MEDIA-PERSIAN EMPIRE:

Then the Medes and the Persians became one empire, under Cyrus the Persian. Cyrus had a wonderful career of conquest. To quote the words of another, “In but 12 years, with his handful of Persians, he destroyed forever 3 great empires – Media, Lydia and Babylonia, conquered all of Asia, and secured to his race for two centuries the dominion of the world.” The Persian empire lasted from 536 B.C. (1st year of Cyrus) until 330 B.C., when it was overthrown by Alexander the Great, and gave place to the Greek empire.

Cyrus the Great (536-29) Ezra 1, etc.; Isa.45
Cambyses (529-21) Ahasuerus of Ezra 4:6
Gaumata (pseudo-Smerdis) (7 months) Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:7
Darius I (Hystaspis) (521-486) Re-allowed Temple Ezra 5 & 6
Xerxes I (485-64) Ahasuerus of Esther
Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) (465-24) Ezra 7:1; Neh.2:1; 5:14
Xerxes II (424)

Darius II (424-04) Nehemiah 12:22?
Artaxerxes II (Mnemon) (404-359)
Artaxerxes III (Ochus) (359-38)
Darius III (Codomanus) (336-30) Nehemiah 12:22?

THE DECREE OF CYRUS:

“Jehovah, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He has charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.” The historian Josephus tells us that after Cyrus’ conquest of Babylon, the new emperor was shown the remarkable prophecy of Isaiah 44:24-45:6, written two hundred years earlier, in which Cyrus is actually named in advance as the destined restorer of the Jews and rebuilder of the Temple. How wonderful is the Divine overruling! The Babylonian exile is overruled to the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian emperor, and Cyrus the Persian emperor; moreover it cured the covenant people of their idolatry once for all, and by spreading the knowledge of the one true God throughout the nations of the ancient world.

The edict of Cyrus was to ALL Israel. Understandably, the chiefs of Judah and Benjamin responded, seeing that it was to Jerusalem and Judah that the Remnant was to return; but with these were “ALL whose spirit God had stirred” (1:5). Also in chapter 2:2 and 7:7 there were 12 leaders signifying twelve leaders of twelve tribes – and so “ALL Israel dwelt in their cities” (2:1, 70). Again, at the dedication of the new Temple the number of offerings were 12 he-goats, and 12 bullocks for ALL Israel. Nothing can be clearer than that the return was participated in by all the tribes, even though, understandably, Judah and Benjamin took the lead.

Who were the Nethinim? The Hebrew word means “the given ones” and it appears 17x in Ezra and Nehemiah and once in Chronicles. Ezra 8:20 calls them “the Nethinim whom David appointed for the service of the Levites.” Maybe they were originally captive foreigners who had been given from time to time by the kings for the more menial work of the temple.

The Great Synagogue consisted of 120 members, the successors of the prophets, themselves in turn succeeded by the scribes prominent, individually, as teachers. Ezra was recognized as president. Their aim was to restore the crown, or glory of Israel. To this end they collected all the sacred writings and so completed the canon of the O.T. The canon of the Old Testament was largely settled by the men of the “Great Synagogue” which was called together in Nehemiah’s time and continued periodically for over 100 years, until it gave place to the Sanhedrin. The Hebrew Scriptures were in 3 parts – the Law (TORAH), the Prophets (NEVEEIM), and the Writings (KETHUVIM). They also instituted the feast of Purim.

In Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther the Jewish months are referred to 35x. We ought to familiarize ourselves with the Jewish calendar. There are two Jewish years – sacred and civil. Originally the new year began in autumn, but from the Exodus the seventh month was made the first. The 12 months are lunar, and therefore every 3 years or so a 13th intercalary month was added to readjust the year with the sun.

There are 6 steps to the restoration which correspond to that of a spiritual restoration in a believer’s life.

- 1) Return to the land – Back to a right basis, God’s grace (1-2).
- 2) Altar re-erected – Dedication renewed to God (3:1-6).
- 3) New Temple begun – Service and witness for God (3:8-13).

- 4) Adversaries obstruct – Faith under testing (4).
- 5) Prophets exhort – Need for God's Word (5:1-6,14).
- 6) Temple finished – Faith wins through (6:15-22).

THE GODWARD ASPECT: "Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, THAT THE WORD OF JEHOVAH BY THE MOUTH OF JEREMIAH MIGHT BE FULFILLED..." So the restoration of the Jews was in fulfillment of prophecy made 70 years earlier (Jer.25 & 29). Also Jer.28:1-6 says,

"This word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold, he did a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of Jehovah came to me saying: O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel."

God is the potter, Israel is the clay and history is the wheel. "The vessel was marred" – that is the Israel story right from the Exodus to the Exile. "He made it again" – that is the story in Ezra and Nehemiah. The time had come when God was shaping a new vessel, though out of the same clay. This is the ultimate end in the Divine sovereignty. The final fact is not that the vessel was marred, but that it was made again. Man's idea and exercise of sovereignty is that if you have had your chance, and have failed, sovereignty treads you down and rejects you. The last word in GOD'S sovereignty is "He made it again."

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

NEHEMIAH : THE BOOK OF RECONSTRUCTION

THE RECONSTRUCTING OF THE WALL (1-6)

Nehemiah's Intercession 1:1-11

Nehemiah's Expedition 2:1-16

Nehemiah's Exhortation 2:17-20

The Rebuilding Attempted 3:1-32

The Rebuilding Obstructed 4-6:14

The Rebuilding Completed 6:15-19

THE REINSTRUCTING OF THE PEOPLE (7-13)

Re-registration of the Remnant 7

Re-inculcation of the Law 8

Re-consecration of the People 9-10

Re-population of the City 11

Re-dedication of the Walls 12

Re-extirpation of Abuses 13

Nehemiah is certainly the actual composer of much of the book, and probably the compiler of the whole (Ch.8-12 possibly written by another). The date Nehemiah completed the work would be about 430 B.C. Nehemiah's first trip to Jerusalem (2:1) was in 445 B.C. and his second trip

(13:6) being in 432 B.C. Upon his first visit the restored Jewish remnant had then been back in Judea over ninety years. Princes, rulers, priests, Levites and people alike had largely intermarried with the surrounding idolatrous peoples, and although not themselves worshipping idols were thus conniving at idolatry and allowing its infiltration, to the jeopardizing of the rising generation. Unchecked, such a fusion of the remnant with the outnumbering Gentiles then in Palestine would have meant complete absorption and obliteration of them as a distinct people. And now, when Nehemiah came to Jerusalem 12 years after Ezra, circumstances were far from consoling. The walls and gates of Jerusalem were still in ruins. Some of the poorer were mortgaged off to their better-off fellow Jews (5:5). There had been laxity about Sabbath observance and other obligations.

The spiritual message comes home to us with great force – there is no winning without working and warring. There is no opportunity without opposition. There is no “open door” set before us without there being many “adversaries” to obstruct our entering in (I Co.16:9). Whenever the saints say, “Let us arise and build,” the enemy says, “Let us arise and oppose.” There is no triumph without trouble. There is no victory without vigilance. There is a cross in the way to every crown that is worth wearing. So let us look at Nehemiah in three capacities:

NEHEMIAH THE CUPBEARER (1:1-2:10):

He was of the tribe of Judah (2:3) and reared in the exile. In his early manhood he became attached to the Persian court, where he rose to the lucrative position of royal cupbearer before Artaxerxes Longimanus and queen Damaspia, in the royal residence of Shushan. This was an office which was one of the most honorable and confidential at the court, and one of great influence. Nehemiah was the more poignant when his brother Hanani reported the fact that the citizens of Jerusalem had at that very time been suffering from the deceitful and treacherous peoples surrounding them. But Nehemiah was not his own master, and however difficult it might be to get INTO the Persian palace, when one did secure a position there it was even more difficult to get OUT – so he prayed.

NEHEMIAH THE WALL-BUILDER (2:11-6:19):

His plan, so it turns out was to sectionize the rebuilding among different work parties, all acting simultaneously, and each responsible for its own section of the wall. The reconstructing of the wall took just over seven weeks (6:15). Here Nehemiah demonstrates the blending of PRACTICAL ORGANIZING WITH INTENSE SPIRITUAL-MINDEDNESS. He set each of the 42 different work groups to work on that part of the walls which was nearest to where they lived (3:10,23,29,30). This gave them a special interest in the work. Our first obligation for Christ is always our own neighborhood. We find this blending of the practical with the spiritual all the way through the book. For example, “We made our prayer unto God, and set a watch against them day and night” (4:9). Nehemiah never let presumption displace precaution. Very easily our organizing can crowd out agonizing. There can be too much working before men and too little waiting before God; more and more motion, less and less unction.

Opposition from Without

1. Scorn (4:1-6)
2. Force (4:7-23)
3. Craft (6:1-19)

Hindrances from Within

1. Debris (4:10)
2. Fear (4:11-14)

3. Greed (5:1-13)

Their first opposition was SCORN – “What do these feeble Jews?” Well how did Nehemiah meet the scorn of Sanballat and Tobiah? He just kept on praying and kept on building. “Hear, O our God,” he says; “for we are despised.” And after his prayer he adds, “So we built the wall... for the people had a mind to work.” That is the way to meet scorn – not by counter-scorn. When taunts and sneers failed it took a more menacing form. Scorn gave place to FORCE. The opposition had now developed into a formidable alliance – Sanballat, Tobiah, Arabians, Ammonites and Ashdodites! What did Nehemiah and his company do? They did as before, they kept on praying, and kept on working; only now they had to join WATCHING with praying, and WARRING with working. “Every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon” (4:17).

When scorn and force had failed, Sanballat and Tobiah and their confederates resorted to CRAFT. First they tried pretense, “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono” (6:1-4). Next they tried bluff (v.5-9). They said that a charge was being lodged with the emperor against Nehemiah and the Jews, to the effect that they were planning rebellion. Next, and worst of all, they managed to intrigue some of Nehemiah’s own kinsmen, and thus employed treachery against him (v.10-14). They sought continually to unnerve and discourage Nehemiah through cliques of compromised brethren (v.17-19). Tobiah became both a son-in-law and an uncle to Israelite people; and there had grown up a clique in Jerusalem who let social and family ties with Tobiah override moral and spiritual duty.

Meanwhile, from within there was the problem of DEBRIS. “And Judah said: The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall!” There had needed to be a reduction of workmen, owing to the appointing of a guard against attack from outside (v.9), so that the remaining laborers removing the rubbish seemed near to exhaustion.

Then also there was FEAR. Jews from outlying districts brought repeated warning that a surprise attack was being planned by Nehemiah’s enemies (v.11-12). This spread fear among the workers. It is instructive to see how Nehemiah turned the tables on this fear which had beset his men. First, they were to LOOK TO GOD instead of at circumstances. “Remember the Lord, great and terrible!” cries Nehemiah. Second, they were to REFLECT on the issues. “Fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses.” Everything was at stake. No mercy could be expected from the spiteful foe. Souls are at stake! Eternal destinies hang in the balance! And third, we must not forget our need of being ARMED TO FIGHT. Our weapons are: 1) the Bible, which is the sword of the Spirit; 2) prayer, which can avail to thwart error just as much as to save souls; 3) the continually-renewed infilling of the Holy Spirit. Alas, there was a third hindrance from within, a plague of GREED. This came nearer to wrecking Nehemiah’s project than all the stratagems of Sanballat and Tobiah, for it threatened inter-strife among Nehemiah’s own men. See now how he dealt with this trouble. First, he challenged the offenders by prompt, even drastic action (v.7). Second, he appealed to them by his own example (v.8-11). Third, the offending party admitted their blame and made restitution (v.12-13). In each case the difficulty becomes more acute and deadly, but in each case the victory becomes more telling, until stone by stone, and day by day, despite all opposition from without and all hindrance from within, THE WALL IS COMPLETED!

NEHEMIAH THE GOVERNOR (7-13):

He tackled the problem of too scant population in Jerusalem (7:4). The lack of population is rectified by the casting of lots, to bring one in every ten from the Judean population to live INSIDE the now rebuilt capital. Later, in chapter 11 the people applaud them, for the transfer in many cases would mean, the quitting of possessions, exchange of riches for poverty, leaving a comfortable house for one half in ruins, giving up the life of a small-landed proprietor for that of an artisan or hired laborer. The census of the 11th chapter is that of the augmented population. The treacherous high priest Eliashib, who consorts with Tobiah in chapter 13, is not mentioned in chapter 12 in the account of the dedication of the walls. Understandably he was in disfavor. The dedication of the wall was about 12 years after the completion of its rebuilding. As the dedication (12:27-47) really followed in point of time, the happenings recorded in chapter 13, it is really the climax of the book. There is a climax to each part of the book. The climax of part 1 "The rebuilding of the wall" is the COMPLETION of the wall, "So the wall was finished." The climax of part 2 "The reforming of the people" is the DEDICATION of the wall, at which "the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off." The signs of our times are that the return of Nehemiah's heavenly Antitype is rapidly nearing. Then will be the climax of all climaxes. The walls of Zion shall be built up forever, and "the joy of Jerusalem" shall again be "heard even afar off"!

Summary of Nehemiah as governor:

1. Augmentation of population of Jerusalem 11:1
2. Redemption of Jews sold into slavery among heathen 5:8
3. Abolition of borrowing on mortgage and of money-raising by selling children 5
4. Restoration of Sabbath and Sabbatical year observances 10:31; 13:15-22
5. Annual levy of 1/3 shekel instituted toward temple services and fabric 10:32
6. System of wood supply for temple sacrifices 10:34
7. Profaning of the temple rectified and interdicted 13:4-9
8. Re-enforcement of tithe payment 10:37; 13:10-13
9. Divorce of all foreign wives and re-effecting of national separation 13:1-3, 23-28
10. Various regulations regarding city gates, etc. 13:19-22

His clear seeing, plain speaking, brave dealing and his God – honoring motive throughout, are a challenge and an inspiration. For we cannot forget that all his efforts to effect the various reforms were resisted by an influential group among the priests and nobles who were bent on secularism, were addicted to inter-marriage with the surrounding Gentile peoples, and in fact were quite willing for fusion with those other peoples. Any other man might have quailed at opposing the will of such a strong party, upheld as it was by the high priest himself, and supported by the neighboring princes. Yet Nehemiah resolutely set himself to "contend with the rulers" (13:11) and the "nobles" (v.17) on these urgent and sensitive issues; and he adorns with an abiding luster the great truth that one consecrated man and God are more than a match for all the powers and subterfuges of evil.

Nehemiah's ejaculatory prayers are eight in number. Undoubtedly, in this habit of ejaculatory prayer we have a principle key to the fine temper and sanctified drive and God-glorifying exploits of one of Israel's greatest figures. His ejaculatory prayers presuppose 3 things: 1) that God is SOVEREIGN every minute, 2) that God is PRESENT in every place, 3) that God REALLY HEARS AND ANSWERS EACH SUDDEN CALL.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

ESTHER: THE BOOK OF PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION

CRISES ANTICIPATED 1 – 5

- 1 Queen Vashti Deposed
- 2 Esther Becomes Queen
- 3 Haman Plots Massacre
- 4 Mordecai Pleads Help
- 5 Esther Contrives Aid

CRISES OVERRULED 6 – 10

- 6 Mordecai is Honored
- 7 Haman is Executed
- 8 The Jews are Avenged
- 9 Purim is Instituted
- 10 Mordecai Made Premier

While Ezra and Nehemiah deal with the remnant of the people which returned to Judea, the book of Esther is concerned with those – the far greater number – who stayed on in the land of their captivity. Esther is a crisis book. It is a drama – not of fiction, but of genuine fact, and covers a period of some 12 years. The purpose of the book is to demonstrate the providential care of God over His people – PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION. “Providential” is distinct from what we call the “miraculous.” We are meant to see providential overruling as distinct from supernatural intervening. The root meaning of providence is “foresight” which gives it an acquired meaning of ACTIVITY ARISING FROM FORESIGHT. Providence then, in its one absolute sense, is the Divine foreknowledge and the Divine activity which arises from it; and such providence implies that God wields absolute power over all the works of His hands. While there is no miracle recorded, the mighty miracle whereby a sovereign Deity so manipulates all non-miraculous events as to bring about a predetermined outcome; and this miracle is all the more miraculous just because it achieves the predetermined outcome without the need for using miracles! Israel’s deliverance from Egypt was by miracles, but their deliverance from Babylonia was by providence.

It is this that explains why the name of God does not occur in the Book of Esther. Above all, we are meant to see, in the natural outworking of events, how, without violating human free will, and without interrupting the ordinary ongoing of human affairs, a hidden Power unsuspectedly but infallibly controls all things. The name “Jehovah” is secretly hidden four times in an acrostic form, and the name “Ehyeh” (I AM THAT I AM) once. In several ancient manuscripts the acrostic consonants which represent the name are written larger, to make them stand out (i.e., JeHoVaH). There five occurrences are 1:20; 5:4; 5:13; 7:7; 7:5.

In the four acrostics which form the name of Jehovah, the four words forming the J H V H are in each case consecutive. Each of the four is spoken by a different person. In the first two cases the acrostic is formed by the INITIAL letters of the words; in the other two it is formed by the FINAL letters of the words. In the first and third acrostics, the letters spell the name BACKWARDS and the speakers are GENTILES; in the second and fourth, the letters spell the name FORWARDS and the speakers are HEBREWS. Lest we should think that God is left out of consideration, see the recognition of Him in these five acrostics, which, being themselves secretly hidden in the writing, are symbolic of God’s secret working throughout the story. Yes, God is in the Book of Esther, not in so many syllables, but in events; not in miraculous

interventions, but as guiding the wheels of providence; not in open communication, but as the unseen Power overruling all.

WHO WAS AHASUERUS?:

He is known to us in history outside the Bible as Xerxes, which is the Greek form of his Persian name. He reigned over the Persian empire from 485 to 465 B.C. This is the king who ordered a bridge to be built over the Hellespont, which was destroyed by a tempest, and then became so blindly enraged that he commanded 300 strokes of the scourge be inflicted upon the sea, and had the unhappy builders of the bridge beheaded. This is the king that was so enraptured at the loyalty of Pythius, the Lydian that he returned his gift worth 5« million dollars; yet shortly after being requested by this same Pythius to spare one of his sons, he furiously ordered he be cut into two pieces. This is the king who drowned the humiliation of his inglorious defeat in such a plunge of sensuality that he publicly offered a prize for the invention of some new indulgence. This is the king whose vast resources, and gigantic notions and imperious temper made the name of Persia to awe the ancient world. Ahasuerus was the fairest of personal beauty and stately bearing. But morally he was a mixture of passionate extremes. He is just the despot to dethrone queen Vashti for refusing to expose herself before his tipsy guests. He is just the one to consign a people like the Jews to be massacred, and then to swing over to the opposite extreme of sanctioning Jewish vengeance on thousands of his other subjects. The light and careless way in which Ahasuerus handed away to Haman the lives of millions of his industrious and useful subjects is deservedly branded as 'perhaps the most shocking example of oriental despotism on record.'

TWO MAIN MOVEMENTS:

The crisis has been providentially anticipated, and is now overruled. The tables are turned. God's people are both saved and avenged. Threatened tragedy gives place to triumph, blessing, and a song of prosperity. This drama of providential preservation is in two movements. In chapters 1-5 we have CRISIS ANTICIPATED, while in chapters 6-10 we have CRISIS OVERRULED. Thus we see in this historic episode, that union of Divine PRE-vision and PRO-vision which constitutes providence. We see also, that this Book of Esther fills a unique and necessary place in the canon of the inspired Scriptures, as being distinctively THE BOOK OF PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION. We see still further, the central spiritual message of the book, namely, that amid the shadows God stands, keeping watch over His own. He may be out of sight; but they are never out of His sight. He may be invisible, but He is infallible. He may seem strangely silent, but He remains actively sovereign. The Lord was all along anticipating and preparing for the foreseen crisis: The feast of Ahasuerus and his indecent request, Vashti's valorous refusal and dethronement, the peril of the Jews headed up by Haman. Indeed the crisis had been anticipated years before ever Ahasuerus's feast ever took place, in the bestowment of an extraordinary feminine beauty upon Mordecai's cousin; and now, as a result of the vacancy created by Vashti's deposal, the matchless Esther is elected to be queen, so that she is in the place of influence when the critical moment comes, to avert the seemingly inescapable disaster, and to turn the tables on Israel's wicked enemies.

THE TURNING POINT:

With the opening of the 6th chapter comes the sudden new turn of events. The crisis which has been providentially anticipated is now amazingly overruled. With consummate skill, He that sitteth in the heavens turns the tables on the wicked, and delivers His own people. A few master strokes, and the whole situation is revolutionized. By such a banquet as she knew the king loved, Esther would make the more sure of his favor, and at the same time ensure the presence

of Haman himself when she exposed his wicked plot. Haman would thus be tongue-tied. He would not be able to deny the truth of the accusation, nor would he dare to contradict the queen in the very presence of the king, nor would he get any opportunity of misrepresenting the matter to the king in the queen's absence. And then the postponement of the request to a second feast was God's timing. This allows Haman to build the gallows. Also that night the king cannot sleep, the night drags. He calls for the chronicles to be read to him. He hears how a plot against his own life was foiled through the timely action of Mordecai, and is surprised to find that Mordecai has not been rewarded. He resolves that Mordecai shall be rewarded without delay. Haman then comes for the earliest possible interview with the king, to obtain sanction for the hanging of Mordecai. The king asks Haman, "What shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" Haman's proposal lays bare his unbounded conceit, his sickly thirst for the praise of men. Then he hears the king say, "Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as you have said, and even do so – to MORDECAI THE JEW"! What! – do this to Mordecai the Jew! Are Haman's ears mocking him? No; it is real enough; the king has spoken and must be obeyed! For a few age-long seconds he stands dumbfounded, before his royal master; then he slowly withdraws, with leaden footsteps, to exalt Mordecai in the very way which he, Haman himself, had so stupidly proposed. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh."

HAMAN'S DOOM:

Chapter 7 tells of Esther's 2nd banquet to the king and Haman. It is a much changed Haman who now sits uneasily at the royal board. His mind is the more disturbed because his wise men and his wife Zeresh have said to him, "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom you have begun to fall, you shall not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him." Yet Haman little guesses how suddenly he is now to be precipitated to his miserable end. The king again asks what her special request is, and is amazed to learn that it is a plea FOR HER LIFE TO BE SPARED. The astonished Ahasuerus exclaims, "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" To which Esther replies, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." Without delay, Haman is sent to his doom. Before another sunrise sheds its light over Shushan, the corpse of Haman dangles 50 cubits aloft, on the very gallows which he himself had caused to be made for Mordecai.

LATENTTYPE – TEACHING

THE PERSIAN JEWS:

First of all, the PERSIAN JEWS AS A WHOLE are here used as a type of THE WORLDLY AMONG THE LORD'S PEOPLE. By the resolute non-reference to God or to anything religious we the more remarkably and definitely see it to have been INTENTIONAL. Jeremiah's prophecy which had been made before ever the captivity of the Jews had begun. Isaiah had actually spoken of Cyrus by name, as the coming restorer of Jerusalem, before ever Cyrus was born. Here then, was the voice of Jehovah to His people throughout the Persian empire. Cyrus had made the proclamation which permitted and exhorted all Jews to return to Judea. Here was the Divine recall of the Jews. There could be no mistaking it. It bore a supernatural seal. First the release had been predicted, and now it had been effected. Not a Jew ought to have remained in Persia. The people, without exception, should have flocked to Zion with thanksgiving. Yet the unhappy truth is that only a remnant returned. The majority did not find it convenient at that time to break away from their Persian connections. In truth they were selfishly indisposed to leave the plenty of Persia for the leanness of desolated Judea, even though that was the place of covenant blessing. They believed in Jehovah, and acknowledged Him as the one true God; but their hearts were set on the things of this world. Like many, they want to be numbered with the

redeemed of the Lord; but they also want to enjoy the pleasures of the world for a season. God watched over those Persia-loving Jews, and remained faithful to them even though they had slighted Him. He had unmistakably demonstrated His providential care over them; YET HIS NAME MUST NOT BE ONCE MENTIONED IN THE ACCOUNT. Let the absence of God's name in this book burn this truth into our minds; God will not associate His name with the worldly among His professing people today, any more than He would associate it with those old time Jews in Persia.

These Persian Jews of Esther's time were also types in a dispensational and prophetic sense. They typically portrayed the history OF THE JEWISH RACE AS A WHOLE, right on to the end of the present dispensation, in which fact we see a still more meaningful reason why the name of God is omitted from the book of Esther. These Persian Jews are the types of their-countrymen who were afterwards to reject God's salvation in Christ, and who, scattered among the nations, were again and again to be threatened with destruction. God's name and theirs have not been bound together for 1900 years. He has watched over His rebellious people, and He watches over them still. Haman may plot their destruction, but he plots against his own life and all those with him.

HAMAN:

Haman is a type of THE MAN OF SIN in 6 ways.

- 1) Mark his NAME. Esther brands him as "Haman the wicked"; and it is a singular fact that the numerical value of the Hebrew letters which make up his title is 666, the number of the Antichrist (Rev.13:18).
- 2) See Haman's POWER. With meteoric rise he outranks all his fellows. The opening verses of chapter 3 tell us that his place was set up above all the princes of the realm, and a royal decree was issued that every knee should bow to him. Thus does he foreshadow the fearsome "beast" of Revelation 13.
- 3) Observe Haman's PRIDE. Hear him boast his glory and riches to Zeresh, and to his friends (5:11). See his conceited exasperation when Mordecai withholds obeisance (5:13). Hear him planning to ride the king's own horse, and being borne ostentatiously aloft amid the adulations of the people (6:7-9).
- 4) Mark Haman's HATE. Four times over he is designated as "the enemy of the Jews," and five times as the "Agagite" (Agag being the king of the Amalekites). The coming "man of sin" will be the latter-day Haman. He will be history's supreme Jew-hater.
- 5) Note Haman's PLOT. He makes Mordecai's conscientious resistance the occasion for a contemplated annihilation of the whole Jewish race. With specious guile he works toward this through his political power, so that the Jews are plunged into great sorrow and suffering (3-4). So yet will the coming Antichrist, the evil "prince" of Daniel 9, plunge the Jews into the "great tribulation" by a political betrayal (v.26-27).
- 6) See Haman's DOOM. While he is in power he is terrible; but he lasts only a few years; and his end is as sudden as it is ironic. One day he vaunts himself; the next he hangs by his own rope. Moreover, all his progeny perish with him. As Haman had ten sons who perished with him, so the final form of Gentile government, at the end of the present age, is to be that of "ten kings" who will reign for "one hour" through whom Antichrist works and who perish along with him (Dan.7; Rev.17).

ESTHER:

Esther may be taken as a type of the CHURCH.

First, she is so IN HER JEWISH ANTECEDENTS. She was the daughter of Jewish parents, but her parents were dead. Even so, the Church emerged from Jewish antecedents. The Savior Himself was a Jew. The Scriptures which prepared the way for the Church were Jewish. The first Christian community was Jewish. Yet, in its very emergence from Judaism, the Church carried with it the sign that its Jewish antecedents were now passed away. The Law was done away in Christ; the Mosaic economy was now dead.

Second, Esther typifies the Church in HER WOMANLY BEAUTY. God had given her a beauty which surpassed that of all others. The Church has the very beauty of Christ Himself. We become “the righteousness of God in Him,” yet to be presented to Christ as His bride “a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.”

Third, she typifies the Church in HER EXALTATION. She becomes married to one whose title was “King of kings” – and although Ahasuerus, in his personal character, is far from typifying Christ, yet, in his position he may fitly speak to us of the Church’s royal Bridegroom who, indeed is “THE King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

Fourth, Esther typifies the Church in HER INTERCESSION. Esther went in to the king on the third day which speaks symbolically of resurrection, and of interceding in resurrection power. It was against the Law for Esther to thus go in before the king. The Law excluded her, yet she was accepted on the ground of pure grace, for the king beheld her wearing her royal apparel which he himself had given her (5:1). It was through Esther’s intercession that deliverance came to the Jews. Will it not be through the intercession of the Church’s believer-priests that deliverance comes to the Jews in their FINAL tribulation? Are not “the golden vials full of incense” said to be “the prayers of the saints” (Rev.5:8).

MORDECAI:

He may fitly represent to us THE FAITHFUL JEWISH REMNANT which will be preserved through the great tribulation, to enter the millennial kingdom. We see this in four ways: First, IN HIS REFUSAL TO BOW TO HAMAN. His refusal was clearly because of his Jewish faith (3:4). He would not yield to man that which is due to God alone; even as the faithful Jewish remnant in the final tribulation will not bow to the beast nor receive his mark upon them. Second, IN HIS BITTER MOURNING, FASTING AND WEEPING forepictures that preparation of penitence which will finally lead the Jews to “look upon Him whom they pierced,” and own Him as their King.

Third, he typifies them IN HIS MARVELOUS DELIVERANCE. As he was delivered so will his brethren of the future be. The 7th chapter of Revelation shows us the sealing of the Jewish remnant before “the wrath of God” is poured upon the earth. They are sealed and saved. Finally, Mordecai typifies these IN HIS WONDERFUL EXALTATION. The closing chapter of Esther shows him exalted above all his fellows, made the grand vizier of Persia, and next to the king and queen! Even so, through the faithful remnant will the Jews and Jerusalem take the supreme place among the nations in the coming kingdom of David’s greater Son.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

JOB: BLESSING THROUGH SUFFERING

PROLOGUE 1-2

DIALOGUE 3-42:6

EPILOGUE 42:7-16

JOB: OPENING LAMENTATION 3

FIRST TRIAD

Job-His Piety in Eliphaz vs. Job 4-7 Job-His Proven Integrity

Prosperity 1:1-5 Bildad vs. Job 8-10 42:7

Satan-His Lie and Zophar vs. Job 11-14 Friends-Their Rebuked

Malignity 1:6-19 Perversity 42:8

SECOND TRIAD

Job-His Piety in Eliphaz vs. Job 15-17 Job-His Ended Captivity

Adversity 1:20-22 Bildad vs. Job 18-19 42:10

Satan-His Further Zophar vs. Job 20-21 Family-Their Restored

Malignity 2:1-8 Society 42:11

THIRD TRIAD

Job-His Piety in Eliphaz vs. Job 22-24 Job-His Final Prosperity

Extremity 2:9-13 Bildad vs. Job 25-31 42:12-17

Elihu vs. Job 32-37

GOD: CLOSING INTERVENTION 38-41

We cannot understand the meaning of many trials, God does not explain them. To explain a trial would be to destroy its object, which is that of calling forth simple faith and implicit obedience. If we knew why the Lord sent us this or that trial, it would thereby cease to be a trial either of faith or of patience. The subject here is that ever-present problem – the mystery of suffering, but especially as concerns the godly. The special object of the book is to show that there is a benevolent Divine purpose running through the sufferings of the godly, and that life's bitterest enigmas are reconcilable with this benevolent Divine purpose, did we but know all the facts. Job did NOT know. Between the prologue, which shows how Job's trial ORIGINATED in the counsels of heaven, and the epilogue, which shows how Job's trial EVENTUATED in enrichment and blessing, we have a group of patriarchal wiseacres theorizing and dogmatizing from incomplete premises and deficient data. They knew nothing about the counsels of heaven which had preceded Job's trial; and they knew nothing about the coming epilogue of compensation. We are meant to see that there WAS an explanation, even though Job and his friends did not know it, so that when baffling affliction comes to ourselves we may believe that the same holds good in our case. The fact is, Job was NOT MEANT to know the explanation of his trial. If Job HAD known, there would have been no place for faith; and the man could never have come forth as gold purified in the fire.

The Scriptures are as wise in their RESERVATIONS as they are in their REVELATIONS. Enough is revealed to make faith intelligent. Enough is reserved to give faith scope for development. The purpose of the book is to show that the final solution is as yet withheld, and that an interim solution is provided, namely, that suffering fulfills a Divine purpose and exercises a gracious ministry in the godly. Behind all the suffering of the godly is a high purpose of God, and beyond it all is an afterwards of glorious enrichment. Such suffering, as we learn from this Book of Job, is not judicial, but remedial; not retributive, but disciplinary; not a penalty, but a ministry.

The central message of Job, may be expressed as: “BLESSING THROUGH SUFFERING.” Through bitter calamity comes blessed discovery. “Self” is slain and God is known through trial. The book is a grand illustration of Paul’s words, “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil.3:8).

THE PROLOGUE:

There is an alternating movement in the prologue between Job and Satan. Is not Satan represented as having access to God, as “the accuser of the brethren,” in Revelation 12:10? And do we not see Satan standing in the Lord’s presence to accuse Joshua, in Zechariah 3:1-2? Also note our Lord’s word to Simon Peter in Luke 22:31, “Simon, Simon, behold, SATAN HAS OBTAINED YOU, by asking that he might sift you as wheat. But I HAVE PRAYED FOR YOU that your faith may not fail.” Both verbs – Satan’s having obtained, and Christ’s having prayed – are in the Greek tense which indicates an act already past, as though Christ Himself had taken part in some such transaction as those described in Job and Zechariah, and had prevailed against the Accuser and Tempter.

We see that SATAN IS ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD. These “sons of God” come to present themselves before Jehovah, not to participate in the governmental deliberations of the Divine mind, but to render account, as servants of the Crown, concerning their respective ministrations. Satan must also give account. The point here is not that Satan has the privilege of access, but that he is compelled to come. To be brought thus and exposed before the white fire of that awful throne, what intense torture to that naked, malignant spirit.

Second, we see that EVEN THE DARK MIND OF SATAN IS AN OPEN BOOK TO GOD. “Have you considered My servant Job...?” This was not a provocation or incitement to Satan. No, God knew what was already there in that evil-designing mind, just as He knew all Satan’s goings to and fro before ever He asked, “From where do you come?” The questions are asked, not because God does not know, but to compel confession on the part of Satan. More literally translated, God’s question is, “Have you set your heart on (or against) My servant Job because there is none like him...?” Satan’s reply immediately revealed that he had, and that he believed his lack of success was because God had hedged Job in too perfectly.

Third, we see from this passage that SATAN IS BEHIND THE EVILS THAT CURSE THE EARTH. In reply to the question, “From where do you come?” he says, “From going to and fro in the earth...” This indicates his restless and unintermittent activity. The ban of Cain is upon him, that of vagabond restlessness. This perpetual motion of unrest is ever the mark of the evil, banished from God. But besides restlessness, there is perpetual purpose of evil in Satan’s peregrinations.

Fourth, we see from Satan’s words and doings in this prologue that THE EVIL ONE IS NEITHER OMNIPRESENT NOR OMNISCIENT. He is a created and therefore local being. God can see into all our minds; but Satan cannot. He cannot read my mind, much less force access, unless I let him.

Fifth, we note that SATAN CAN DO NOTHING WITHOUT THE DIVINE PERMISSION.

Sixth, that IN EVERY SUCH PERMISSION THERE IS A DEFINITE LIMITATION (1:12, 2:6). See I Corinthians 10:13 for the classic New Testament pronouncement on this.

Finally, GOD’S EYES ARE EVER ON HIS OWN PEOPLE, AND ESPECIALLY IN TIMES OF TRIAL. In the very question, “Have you considered My servant Job?” indicates that God also

had Job in His thoughts. Note how the Lord particularizes Job by name, dilates on his godly character, commends his piety, and evinces special regard for him by calling him “My servant.”

AN ALTERNATIVE THEORY:

Some believe that the “sons of God” who come to “present themselves before Jehovah” in Job 1:6 and 2:1 were not angels, but the godly men of that time. It is argued that the coming of these “sons of God” before Jehovah was the gathering of godly patriarchs to the place of Divine manifestation, for the purpose of worship.

THE DIALOGUE:

The central problem is: Why does Job suffer? His three friends come from afar to comfort Job (2:11-13), but their condoling turns to condemning, and Job’s suffering is thereby aggravated to a point of almost unendurable poignancy. Eliphaz rests his philosophy of life on EXPERIENCE. His argument is that JOB SUFFERS BECAUSE HE HAS SINNED (5:17). In Bildad we have the voice of TRADITION, and he argues that JOB IS A HYPOCRITE (8:6). Job never claimed to be without sin, but only that his sins had not been such as to account for his trouble. Zophar is less courteous and more tenacious than the previous two. He is content with mere ASSUMPTION, without reason. He argues that Job is suffering the portion of “A WICKED MAN” (11:6). There is no semblance of Eliphaz’s “I have seen,” or of Bildad’s “Inquire, I pray thee, of the former age”; Zophar’s word is a dogmatic “Know thou.” Eliphaz is the religious MORALIST (APOLOGIST), Bildad the religious LEGALIST (LECTURER), and Zophar the religious DOGMATIST (BIGOT). In a rough sort of way, we have in Eliphaz the voice of philosophy, in Bildad the voice of history, and in Zophar the voice of orthodoxy. But none is able to give a satisfying answer to a problem like Job’s.

Take now the points of similarity. (1) All these men have the same fixed theory of life, that calamity is always the direct outcome of sin, and that the Divine favor or disfavor is seen in a man’s material prosperity or adversity. (2) They all have too narrow a view of Providence; yet are so sure they are right that they look on resistance to it as resistance to God. (3) They all want to prove that goodness and evil are always rewarded IN THIS PRESENT LIFE; they are silent concerning human destiny and Divine retribution in the life beyond. (4) They are all absolutely static, that is, there is no advance at all in their argument except in the expression of their views. (5) They all fail to give any convincing answer to Job. (6) They all condemn Job; for on their philosophy, they must either justify Job at God’s expense or justify God at Job’s; and understandably, they chose that latter. Thus the discussion exhausts itself in a sheer deadlock. The orthodox formula of the trio on the one hand, and Job’s experience on the other, were simply irreconcilable. Job knew that although he was a sinner, as all men are sinners, he had been conscientiously upright according to the light given to him, and that he was utterly sincere in his protestation to his friends. He felt no creed could be true or adequate if it contradicts that which is deepest and truest and most native in our human constitution.

A NEW VOICE – ELIHU:

The last verse of chapter 31 marks a major break – “The words of Job are ended.” Elihu’s is the most courteous speech of the debate, and undoubtedly surpasses all the preceding speeches in spiritual grasp. In relation to the problem under discussion he introduces a new APPROACH, a new ANSWER, and a new APPEAL. Elihu claims a special inspiration from God, yet can take Job’s part also as being part of the same clay. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar had wished to be JUDGES; whereas Elihu would be a BROTHER. He would seek to sit with Job in the fellowship of human sympathy, yet at the same time speak the real truth from God’s side. What Job had

lacked was an interpreter; and it seems clear that Elihu considers himself the required interpreter. Elihu sees a different and superior purpose in suffering from that of the other three have seen. Job's suffering is EDUCATIONAL. Suffering is not exclusively punitive, it is also CORRECTIVE; it is not only judicial, but REMEDIAL. It does not only come to requite a man, it comes to RESTORE a man. It is not only the Judge's rod, it is the shepherd's goad. Through suffering man is restrained and refined and restored. Elihu proposes that God is trying to teach Job something, and the suffering is being prolonged by Job's resentful unsubmitiveness (33:33). That is why, he argues, the Divine judgment still afflicts him (35:17). And Elihu warns Job that his affliction may even lead to death if there is no change of mind (35:18-21).

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar had kept harping on some supposed wicked behavior IN THE PAST. Elihu is concerned with the wrong attitude IN THE PRESENT. Job's suffering may not be for past sin at all. His suffering is more probably a chastening with some ultimately good purpose, but Job is thwarting his own good by his impossible attitude. Elihu's appeal is for a teachable HUMILITY on Job's part (35:12), and for submissive PATIENCE. All God's judgments proceed from his absolute understanding (34:21-23). He also appeals to Job to have FAITH IN GOD HIMSELF rather than some demanded explanation. He charges Job, not with suffering because of sinning (as the other three speakers have said), but with sinning because of his suffering!

THE VOICE FROM THE WHIRLWIND:

The 5 men are now struck dumb with awe at this voice. Yet there is not even the slightest move to explain Job's suffering or to dissolve the problem of providence provoked by it! The Divine purpose is to humble Job, not to mock him or even humiliate him. Job would both sense the underlying irony of the speech and see the general purpose of it, just as we ourselves do. By simply exposing Job's profound ignorance of God's NATURAL government it shows his utter incapacity to pass judgment on that which is far more incomprehensible and mysterious, God's MORAL government. Job was NOT MEANT to know the explanation of his sufferings. There would have been no real test of character. Nor would there have been any place for the genuine exercise and education of faith. By means of the prologue we ourselves are SHOWN the explanation of Job's sufferings before ever they began, so that when the explanation is WITHHELD from Job we may appreciate at once that an explanation could have been given, easily enough, if God had so willed.

It also indicates the Divine CONCERN in Job's affairs. Although that aerial voice from the cyclone did not vouchsafe an explanation, it evidenced that God had been watching, hearing, caring. What tumult of emotion and rush of regret that he had allowed Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar to aggravate him into saying rash things about the unconcern of God! The Divine purpose is to bring Job to the point where he rests in GOD HIMSELF, apart from explanations. If only Job can be brought there, where he trusts God as being absolutely righteous and benevolent over all unexplained adversities, then Satan's slanderous libel (in the prologue) is proved false, and the devil is defeated. Job DOES get there, as chapter 42 shows, and we are meant to get there too. This is not mere blind faith. We have the completed Scripture revelation, throwing much light on the mystery of human sin and suffering. Most wonderful of all, God has shown us, in Christ, how He Himself suffers WITH us. Clearly, the Divine purpose is to bring Job to THE END OF HIMSELF – to the end of his own self – righteousness, self-vindication, self-wisdom, self-everything, so that he may find his all in God. Job is coming to see God in a new way, and he is coming to see himself in a new way too.

EPILOGUE:

Job is vindicated and rewarded. It may not come in this present life-time, as Job's did, but come it surely will. The next thing that catches the eye is the Divine rebuke of Job's three "comforters." God's wrath is kindled against them. Why? Because they have more nearly wrecked Job's soul than even the devil himself. See how for the godly sufferer "Paradise Lost" becomes "Paradise Regained." See the 3 main features of the epilogue – transformation, vindication, restoration.

First, there is the transformation of Job as regards his own character, for he comes forth as "gold tried in the fire." Second, there is the vindication of Job before his friends, for God calls him "My servant" and makes him a priest to them. Third, there is the restoration to Job of all his former prosperity, and indeed far more. Yes the "end of the Lord" is very gracious (Js.5:11). Behind it all, there is a mystical parable of the human race as such. The Job of that prologue and the Satan of malicious design, do they speak of Eden and what man was at first? The suffering Job of the potsherd and the ashes, does he speak to us of humanity as it is at present? The purified and reinstated Job of the epilogue, does he speak of the humanity that is yet to be?

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

PSALMS: THE BOOK OF DEVOTION

BOOK I – MAINLY DAVIDIC; SUGGESTS GENESIS

BOOK II – MAINLY DAVIDIC; SUGGESTS EXODUS

BOOK III – MAINLY ASAPHIAN; SUGGESTS LEVITICUS

BOOK IV – MAINLY ANONYMOUS; SUGGESTS NUMBERS

BOOK V – DAVIDIC/ANONYMOUS; SUGGESTS DEUTERONOMY

This Book of Psalms is a limpid lake which reflects every mood of man's changeful sky. It is a river of consolation which, though swollen with many tears, never fails to gladden the fainting. It is a garden of flowers which never lose their fragrance, though some of the roses have sharp thorns. It is a stringed instrument which registers every note of praise and prayer, of triumph and trouble, of gladness and sadness, of hope and fear, and unites them all in the full multi-chord of human experience. The first great value of this Book of Psalms is that it provides for our emotions and feelings the same kind of guidance as the other Scriptures provide for our faith and actions. To all the godly these Psalms are an unmatched treasury of devotion, of comfort, of sympathy, and of gladdening reassurance. They are the sighings of men of like passions with ourselves; yet the very breath of heaven is in them. The word "psalm" means "a poem to be sung to a stringed instrument." Fifty-five of them are addressed to "the chief musician" that is the choir leader of the Hebrew worship. The usual Hebrew name for the book is "Tehillim," which means "Praises." Another Hebrew title is "Tephiloth," that is "Prayers."

The Book of Psalms is obviously a collection. The superscriptions in the Hebrew text ascribe 73 of them to David, 12 of them to Asaph, who was one of the heads of David's choir at Jerusalem (I & 2 Chr); 12 to the sons of Korah; 1 to Heman the Ezrahite; 1 to Ethan the Ezrahite; and 1 to Moses. This makes a total of exactly 100. The other 50 are left anonymous. They are in five groups, the end of each group being marked by a special ascription of praise to God. The first group, corresponds with Genesis and has much to say about MAN. The second group, like

Exodus has much to say about DELIVERANCE. The third, like Leviticus, has its emphasis in the Asaph psalms, upon the SANCTUARY. The fourth group, corresponding with Numbers, and beginning with Psalm 90, the prayer of Moses, stresses the time when unrest and wandering will cease in the coming worldwide kingdom when the nations shall bow to God's King. The fifth group, corresponding with Deuteronomy, has much of thanksgiving for the Divine faithfulness, and lays much emphasis upon the word of the Lord, as for instance, in the longest of all the psalms, which has for its theme the written word of the Lord.

The central spiritual message of this Book of Psalms may be said to be PRAISE THROUGH PRAYER. Again and again, in individual psalms, we see how sighing is turned into singing through prayer; while if we take the book as a whole, we see this idea moving forward ever more definitely until the whole book is wound up in the five "Hallelujah" psalms with which it closes, each of which begins and ends with the exclamation "PRAISE YE THE LORD!"

PSALM INSCRIPTIONS: Of the 150 psalms that make up the book, only 34 are without any title whatever.

Psalms without inscription 34
Psalms with author inscriptions 52
Psalms with historical inscriptions 14
Psalms with inscriptions denoting purpose . . 4
Psalms entitled "Songs of Degrees" 15
Psalms with special-word inscriptions 39
(less 8 which also have historical inscriptions)

The psalm inscriptions preceding many of the psalms have been a long-time puzzle. To resolve this one must notice that in most cases the inscription is really two. The first part of the title must be treated as the SUB-scription of the psalm which goes before; and the remaining words, such as "A Psalm of David," will remain as the SUPER-scription of the psalm which follows. This pattern is seen elsewhere in the Word (Is.38:9-20; Hab.3:1-19).

There are also special-word titles. Take the two words, SHOSHANNIM and GITTITH. The former means "lilies" and the latter means "wine-presses." The lilies speak of Springtime; and the wine-presses speak of Autumn; for the universal symbol for Spring is FLOWERS, and that of the Autumn is FRUIT. Now the first of the Jewish annual sacred feasts was the Passover which came in the Spring; while the last was the feast of Tabernacles, which came in the Autumn; and these psalms which bear the SHOSHANNIM and GITTITH sub-scripts are meant to be associated respectively with these two feasts. The Passover feast commemorated REDEMPTION and DELIVERANCE. The feast of Tabernacles commemorated the Divine PRESERVATION of Israel, when after the deliverance, God "made the children of Israel to dwell safely in booths."

Take the expression MUTH-LABBEN or MUTH-LABBEYN which means "death to the one coming between." Goliath is actually called the "man between the two hosts" (I Sam.17:4, 23). Read Psalm 8 again now in the light of this sub-script, and see in it the celebration of David's great victory over Goliath.

Words ... Meanings ... Where

Aieleth-Shahar The hind of the morning (the day dawn) Ps.21

Alamot The singing maidens (maidens choir) Ps.45
Al-Tashchith Destroy not 56-58,74
Gittith Winepresses 7,80,83
Jeduthun Praise-giver (a director of worship) 38,61,76
Jonath-Elem-Rec. The dove of the distant woods (David) Ps.55
M'choloth The great dancing Ps.52
Mahalath-Leannoth Dancings with shoutings Ps.87
Maschi Instruction, understanding Misc.(13)
Michtam Engraved (signifying permanence) 16,56-60
Muth-Labbeyn Death of the champion Ps.8
Neginoth Inheritances Ps.4
Sheminith 8th group in bringing back the Ark Ps.5,11
Shiggaion A crying aloud (grief or joy) Ps.7 title
Shoshannim Lilies 44,68
Shoshannim-Eduth Lilies of testimony 59,79

GROUPS OF PSALMS:

Let's first look at the group of 15 psalms known as the "Songs of Degrees" (Ps.120-134). It should more literally read "A Song of THE Degrees." This suggests that certain well-known degrees are alluded to. These were the degrees on the great sun-dial of King Ahaz, at Jerusalem. It was on this sun-dial, in the reign of Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, that the shadow went back "ten" degrees as a sign that fifteen years were to be added to Hezekiah's life (II K.20:8-11). Hezekiah makes reference to a set of songs in Isaiah 38:9, 20 which he calls "my songs". It seems almost certain that they were the "Songs of Degrees." Note that the number of the songs is FIFTEEN, the same number of years added to Hezekiah's life. The shadow went back TEN degrees on the sun-dial; and TEN of the "Songs of Degrees" are left anonymous, while the remaining five are attributed to David and Solomon. Quite possibly the "songs" were known quite well to be Hezekiah's, that the putting of his name with them was deemed to be unnecessary. He himself spoke of them as "MY songs" as though even then, they were already well known. They were carefully arranged into their present order. There are five groups of three psalms each. In each group two are by Hezekiah, and one by David or Solomon. In each trio the first psalm is one of TROUBLE; the second, one of TRUST; and third, one of TRIUMPH. And finally, notice the correspondence between their contents and the historical account.

THE MESSIANIC PSALMS:

Besides having a real reference to the time in which they were written, they have their ultimate explanation and fulfillment in Christ. Three themes are covered by these psalms (1) the humiliation and exaltation of the Messiah; (2) the sorrows and eventual deliverance of Israel; (3) the future blessing of all the nations through Israel's reigning Messiah. The principal Messianic psalms are 2, 8, 16, 22, 23, 24, 40, 41, 45, 68, 69, 72, 87, 89, 102, 110, 118.

Take psalm 22 for instance. It opens with the very words which our Lord used in the 4th of His 7 utterances from the cross – "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Through the human writer the pre-incarnate Christ speaks as though He were already on the cross. He speaks of Himself as "despised" and "scorned" and taunted by the words, "He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him." The psalm goes on, "The assembly of the wicked have enclosed Me; they pierced My hands and My feet. I may tell all My bones; they (the wicked) look and stare upon Me. They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture." When we remember that these words were written hundreds of years before our Lord's incarnation, and that death by crucifixion was then a thing

unknown (being introduced by the Romans), we cannot but wonder at the psalmist's language here, about the piercing of the hands and feet.

OTHER GROUPS:

There are the HALLELUJAH psalms, of which there are ten – 106, 111, 112, 113, 135, and 146-150. The special characteristic of these is that each of them begins with the expression "Hallelu-Jah," and all but two of them also END with "Hallelu-Jah."

Then there are the PENITENTIAL psalms. These are 7 in number – 6, 32, 38, 39, 51, 102, 143. There are other smaller groups which go together because of their COMPLIMENTARINESS. Take psalms 22, 23 and 24 – these make a trinity of unity. These 3 psalms correspond with the three outstanding New Testament references to our Lord's "shepherd" work. In John 10, He is the "Good" Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep – as in psalm 22. In Hebrews 13:20-21, He is the "Great" Shepherd, who being brought again from the dead, perfects that which concerns His flock – as in psalm 23. In I Peter 5:4, He is the "Chief" Shepherd, who is to appear in glory, bringing crowns of reward – going with psalm 24.

Take psalms 46, 47 and 48. These three psalms are a striking triple foreview of the Messianic reign which is yet to be. In psalm 46 we have the COMING of the kingdom – through great tribulation. In psalm 47 we have the RANGE of the kingdom – even all the earth. In psalm 48 we have the CENTER of the kingdom – even Zion, the city of our God.

THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS:

These are psalms which express vehement anger and imprecation against enemies and evil-doers – Ps.35, 58, 59, 69, 83, 109, 137. The lesser passages are: 5:10; 6:10; 28:4; 31:17-18; 40:14-15; 41:10; 55:9,15; 70:2-3; 71:13; 79:6,12; 129:5-8; 140:9-10; 141:10; 149:7-9.

These are not peculiar to the old dispensation. In psalm 5:10 David says, "Destroy them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels. Cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for they have rebelled against Thee." The imprecation here is against rebellious transgressors; and it is against them solely BECAUSE they are such. They are the words of a man who has identified himself with God against sin, and who hates sin because God hates it. It is the attitude crystallized in Ps.139 – "Do not I hate them. O Lord, that hate Thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them my enemies." The psalmist's motive has nothing to do with jealousy, spite or ambition. Another fact to note is that 16 out of the 21 instances of imprecation are from David, who was a theocratic king. Unlike Saul, he never set himself above the Law or tried to pervert it to his own use. As a theocratic king, he was anointed by God, he ruled FOR God, and that he was directly RESPONSIBLE TO God. These Davidic imprecations are uttered from the standpoint of public justice and not private vengeance. As for the 5 imprecatory passages which are not Davidic, these are in each case NATIONAL and not personal – Ps.83; 137; 79:6,12; 129:5-8; 149:7-9.

Why didn't the psalmist show a spirit of kindness to those who were maltreating him? The answer is that he ALREADY HAD, and it had been abused. Here and there in these psalms we come across such words as, "They rewarded me evil for good"; "I restored that which I took not away"; "They have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love."

The imprecatory psalms are sound in their MOTIVE, in their STANDPOINT, in their SPIRIT. They express a constitutional moral sense of human nature, and not an individual desire for revenge. There is also a supernatural predictive element in them which seals their genuine inspiration.

INDIVIDUAL PSALMS:

Notice the 23rd psalm. The opening words, "I shall not want" are the key to the whole.

He makes me lie down in green pastures – not lack PROVISION
He leads me beside the still waters – not lack PEACE
He restores my soul – not lack RESTORATION
He leads me in paths of righteousness – not lack GUIDANCE
Through the valley, I shall not fear – not lack COURAGE
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me – not lack COMFORT
Thou preparest a table for me ... – not lack PROTECTION

These correspond to the 7 Jehovistic titles in the Old Testament:

Jehovah-jireh = The Lord will provide
Jehovah-rapha = The Lord that healeth
Jehovah-shalom = The Lord our peace
Jehovah-tsidkenu = The Lord our righteousness
Jehovah-shammah = The Lord ever-present
Jehovah-nissi = The Lord our banner
Jehovah-raah = The Lord my shepherd

Notice psalm 45 "A Royal Marriage Hymn." Its title is "A Song of Loves" and is the Scripture key to the Song of Solomon.

v.1 A preface
v.2 The beauty of His person
v.3-5 The valor of His conquests
v.6 The stability of His kingdom
v.7-9 The gladness of His marriage
v.10-11 An appeal for complete devotion
v.12 A promise of high honor
v.13-15 A eulogy of the bride's charms
v.16-17 A pledge of unceasing Divine favor

Notice psalm 90 "The Prayer of Moses, the man of God."

1-6 The Divine Sovereignty and human history
7-11 The Divine Severity and human iniquity
12-17 The human appeal for compassion and favor

Take psalm 19; it is a psalm of Science and Religion. Here the two are shown to be fundamentally one. The first 14 lines are devoted to the revelation of God in the WORKS OF NATURE. The next 14 lines are devoted to the revelation of God in the WORDS OF SCRIPTURE. Then after these equally balanced parts, the psalm closes with a prayer:

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be
acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."

In part I the psalmist's name for God is EL, "The Mighty One." In part 2 he changes to the name JEHOVAH, which is distinctively the redemption name of Deity. This name Jehovah is used 7 times in the latter part of the psalm, but the name El not once. The name of God in science is El

or Elohim. The name of God in the realm of religion is Jehovah. The God of science and the God of religion are one and the same – the only true God, who is both the God of creation and the God of redemption.

There are 8 acrostic psalms – 9, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

PROVERBS: THE BOOK OF PRACTICAL WISDOM

BOOK I. SONNETS EXTOLLING WISDOM (1-9)

BOOK II. MAXIMS ENJOINING PRUDENCE (10-24)

BOOK III. MORE MAXIMS ON PRUDENCE (24-31)

BOOK I

15 SONNETS. Introduction (1:1-9); Enticements of Sinners (1:10-19)

Wisdom the Deliverer (2:1-22); The Reward of Piety (3:1-10);

Wisdom the Supreme Prize (3:11-20); Wisdom and Security (3:21-6)

Wisdom and Perversity (3:27-35); Tradition and Wisdom (4:1-9);

The Two Paths (4:10-19); Wisdom and Health (4:20-27);

The Strange Woman (5:1-23); Suretyship (6:1-5); The Sluggard

(6:6-11); The Discord Sower (6:12-19); Adultery (6:20-35);

House of Wisdom vs. that of Folly (9)

2 MONOLOGUES. Wisdom's Warning (1:20-33); Wisdom and the Strange Woman (7-8)

BOOK II

375 PROVERBS in the form of contrastive, completive or comparative couplets (10:1-22:16)

16 EPIGRAMS. Introduction (22:17-21); Mixed Epigrams (22:22-29);

Awe before Appetite (23:1-3); Fleetingness of Riches (23:4-5);

Evil Hospitality (23:6-8); Mixed Epigrams (23:9-18); Gluttony

(23:19-21); Three Sayings (23:22-25); Whoredom (23:26-28);

Wine and Woe (23:29-35); Mixed Epigrams (24:1-10); Duty of

Rescue (24:11-12); Wisdom and Honey (24:13-14); Four Epigrams

(24:15-22); Respect of Persons (24:23-25); Three Sayings

(24:26-29); The Field of the Slothful (24:30-34).

BOOK III

7 EPIGRAMS. The King (25:1-7); Various (25:8-26:2); On Fools

(26:3-12); The Sluggard (26:13-16); Social Pests (26:17-26);

Various (26:27-27:22); Good Husbandry (27:23-27).

55 PROVERBS (28-29)

The Thirteen Sayings of Agur (30)

The Oracle of Lemuel's Mother (31:1-9)

An Acrostic on the Virtuous Woman (31:10-31)

Our Bible is both a book and a library. It is a book inasmuch as it is a diversity in unity, all of its 66 parts combining to make one progressive whole. It is a library in the sense that it is a unity in diversity, with its different groups of books given up to the principal different branches of knowledge. In it we have history and politics and poetry and prophecy and devotional literature and philosophy. To struggle through hundreds of the profoundest and most erudite of other books, and yet remain ignorant of THIS book, is infinite deprivation; whereas to know no other volume but this is to be made wise unto salvation, and to be furnished with a knowledge of fundamental realities which comes to us stamped with Divine certainty.

We note right away that the Proverbs are meant to be to our PRACTICAL life what the psalms are to our devotional life. Here are pointed precepts for practical prudence. Here are laws from heaven for life on earth. Here are the words of the wise on the ways of the world. We may put it that the general message of this Book of Proverbs is PRUDENCE THROUGH PRECEPTS. The English word “proverb” means a brief saying in the place of many words. The Hebrew word “mishle” however has a much wider meaning, and is used of many discourses, sentences, and expressions which would not be classified as a proverb in the English sense. The genius of the proverb lies in its shrewd conception of a truth or of some sagacious counsel in a terse and striking way, so that it catches on, and becomes easier to remember than to forget.

Learn to appreciate the main features of proverb structure. Most common is the CONTRASTIVE proverb, which catches the mind and emphasizes a truth by the compact presentation of some striking contrast. Almost invariably “but” starts the second line.

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine;
But a broken spirit drieth the bones.

Then there are many proverbs of the COMPLETIVE type, in which the second line of the proverb agrees with the first and adds to it, or carries the thought of it to some further point. These may usually be known by the “and” which leads the second line.

Commit thy ways unto the Lord;
And thy thoughts shall be established.

Then again, there are those proverbs which are COMPARATIVE in their structure; and not infrequently they may be at once known by the “than” which leads the second line.

Better is a little with righteousness,
Than great revenues without right.

Running through the practical philosophy of the proverbs is a keen aliveness to the perpetual struggle which goes on between good and evil for the upper hand in men's lives. It is because of this that the proverbs retain a vivid up-to-dateness even though much of their language relates to a simple state of society far removed from our modern western world. These chapters of proverbs are not meant to be read in the way one reads narrative chapters. They are meant to be read lingeringly, ponderingly, and memorizingly.

Take the last chapter, with its acrostic on the “virtuous woman.” It consists of 22 couplets, each beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, so that the 22 run right through the alphabet in proper order.

MRS. "FAR ABOVE RUBIES"

SHE IS A GOOD WOMAN

She works diligently – She worketh willingly with her hands

She contrives prudently – She considereth ... and buyeth

She behaves uprightly – Strength and honor are her clothing

SHE IS A GOOD WIFE

She seeks husband's good – She will do him good all her days

She keeps his confidence – His heart safely trusts in her

She aids his prosperity – Her husband is known among the elders

SHE IS A GOOD MOTHER

She wisely clothes family – Her household...clothed with scarlet

She feeds them well – She riseth and giveth meat to her house

She shops sensibly – She bringeth her food from far

SHE IS A GOOD NEIGHBOR

She helps the poor – She stretcheth out her hand to the poor

She uplifts the needy – She reacheth forth her hands to needy

She speaks graciously – In her tongue is the law of kindness

Her value – "Her price is far above rubies"

Her praise – "Her children arise and call her blessed"

Her pre-eminence – "But thou excellest them all"

Her secret – "A woman that feareth the Lord"

Mrs. "Far-above-rubies" lives at "Godly House." The house is built on the Rock of Ages, over which the Way of Holiness runs, leading to the Celestial City. The house overlooks the boundless sea of the "riches of grace"; and as it is built foursquare on the Rock, the "Sun of Righteousness" is always shining in through one or more of the windows, which are "Pray without ceasing," "Rejoice evermore," "In everything give thanks," and "Quench not the Spirit." The house is built with the "exceeding great and precious promises" of the Scriptures, "Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone." The rooms are lighted with "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The house is furnished with "every good and perfect gift from above." The servants of the house are "goodness and mercy"; and they are such faithful servants that they follow Mrs. Far-above-rubies all the days of her life. The wholesome diet of the house is the Bread of Life and the Water of Life, and the grapes of Eshcol, and the milk and honey and corn and wine of Canaan; and truly their mouths are "satisfied with good things." In the garden of the house there grows "the fruit of the Spirit" – "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance"; and the fragrant aroma which is exhaled from these fruits and flowers of the garden pervades the whole atmosphere of the place. Yes, this is where Mrs. "Far-above-rubies" lives.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

ECCLESIASTES: THE QUEST FOR THE CHIEF GOOD

Introduction 1:1-11

I. THE QUEST BY PERSONAL EXPERIMENT (1-2)

The Search in Wisdom 1:12-18

The Search in Pleasure 2:1-11

Comparison of the Two 2:12-23

Ad Interim Conclusion 2:24-26
II. THE QUEST BY GENERAL OBSERVATION (3-5)
Forfixedness of the Natural Order 3
Ills and Enigmas of Human Society 4
Advise in View of the Foregoing 5:1-17
Second Ad Interim Conclusion 5:18-20
III. THE QUEST BY PRACTICAL MORALITY (6-8)
Material Things Can Not Satisfy the Soul 6
So Expedient Morality Advocated 7:1-8:8
But There Are Strange Anomalies 8:9-14
Third Ad Interim Conclusion 8:15-17
IV. THE QUEST REVIEWED AND CONCLUDED (9-12)
The Big Evil Remains-One Event to All 9:1-6
Mirth, Wisdom, Morals, All Fare Same 9:7-11:8
True Good-A Wise Enjoyment of Present 11:9-10
Going with Faith in God and Life Beyond 12:1-7
Conclusion 12:13-14

The Book of Ecclesiastes is a sermon. The theme is "What is the chief good?" The standpoint is that of natural reason. In the opening verse (and six times later) the author styles himself KOHELETH, which is translated as "The Preacher, Master of Assemblies, or Teacher." The preacher's text is: "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Ecclesiastes is the QUEST OF THE NATURAL MAN FOR THE CHIEF GOOD. In the first two chapters the "preacher" tells us how he sought the chief good by PERSONAL EXPERIMENT. His conclusion is, "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor" (2:14); and he perceives that this is from the hand of God.

In chapters 3-5 Koheleth pursues his quest by GENERAL OBSERVATION of the world and human affairs. He finds himself up against an impenetrable mystery of Divine providence, namely an apparently immutable forfixedness of all happenings which is as inexorable as it is inscrutable. On the other hand he finds human society disfigured by injustices, inequalities, enigmas and superficialities. He then comes to the same conclusion, "Behold, that which I have said holds good, that it is well for a man to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labors wherein he labors under the sun, through the brief day of his life which God hath given him; for this is his portion" (6:18).

In chapters 6-8 Koheleth renews his quest in the realm of PRACTICAL MORALITY. The secret he is after must surely lie in finding the true center of conduct, in achieving the even balance between things, the proper poise in behavior, the correct middle-course of expediency. More and more the preacher is being driven to see the necessity of God; yet once again he concludes, that "a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat and to drink, and to be merry; and that this should accompany him in his labor all the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun" (8:15).

Finally in chapters 9-12 we have the quest REVIEWED AND CONCLUDED. He reaffirms that the true good is not to be found in pleasure; nor in human wisdom; nor in expedient behavior because of the inevitable end. The highest good at present open to man is a wise, temperate, grateful use and enjoyment of the present life, combined with a steadfast faith in God and in the life to come (10:9-10; 12:1-7). It is the thought of that final judgment, and that life beyond, which

gives the grand significance to life; and the preacher therefore winds up to his solemn, weighty, wise, and inspired conclusion –

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil” (12:13-14).

After each recoil from things “under the sun,” God is recognized (2:24-26, 3:10-14, 5:19, 8:17, 9:1), until at last the author sees through present “vanity” to the final verity. He sees that since God has “set eternity” in men’s hearts, men can never be really satisfied by the things of this present life “under the sun”. Indeed he sees that God has actually allowed the enigmas of the present order to remain so that men might be exercised thereby, and caused to think on higher things. The writer gradually reaches his final conclusion, that if we obey and honor God we may enjoy the good things of this life with a thoroughly easy conscience, and look forward also to a time when the other things – the ills and wrongs – shall be put right. This is the very opposite of pessimism. The wise philosopher has discovered that although the Creator has subjected this present life to “vanity,” He has subjected it thus in hope.

When he declares the “vanity” of human wisdom and knowledge, he means that since human reason has such strict limits, and is utterly incapable of penetrating the present mysteries of providence, perfect intellectual satisfaction is impossible by that means. The wise thing is a hearty acquiescence, with trust in God; and this certainly is not skepticism. We must keep in mind THE STANDPOINT OF THE TREATISE AS A WHOLE. This is a book of man “under the sun.” It is written from the standpoint of human reason, so that we may be shown where the proper exercise of human reason and intuition will lead us, if we will honestly follow. If we are honest with all the data, it will show us the vanity of living merely for earthly things, and will conduct us to a reverent faith in God, a keeping of His commandments, and belief in a judgment beyond.

The central purpose and message of the book. Above all else Ecclesiastes would teach us THE EMPTINESS OF EVERYTHING APART FROM GOD. That word “vanity” which occurs throughout the book speaks of this emptiness, in its final result of all life lived for this world alone.

The preacher sees that life is full of “vanities” which MOCK men. Then he sees that these “vanities” are MEANT to mock men. Then he sees that these “vanities” are not just meant to mock men cruelly, but with a BENIGN PURPOSE, namely to lead men to seek their true happiness in God Himself. He sees that things are from the hand of God. And he sees that things are allowed because God “hath set eternity” in men’s hearts, and seeks to lead them to a true view of life in relation to material things. It is well to ponder the 10 “vanities” which Koheleth sees as occasioning the ironies and frustrations of human life, and which make so much of life “vexation or a striving after wind.”

2:15-16 The “vanity” of Wise and foolish alike have one end, death.
human wisdom,

2:19-21 The “vanity” of Worker is no better than shirker in the end.
human labor,

2:26 The “vanity” of Although man purposes it is God who disposes.

human purpose,
4:4 The “vanity” of Much success brings envy more than joy.
human rivalry,
4:7 The “vanity” of “Much” feeds lust for “more,” yet often eludes.
human avarice,
4:16 The “vanity” of Is brief, uncertain, and soon forgotten.
human fame,
5:10 The “vanity” of Money does not satisfy. Increase only feeds others.
human insatiety,
6:9 The “vanity” of Often gain cannot be enjoyed, despite desire.
human coveting,
7:6 The “vanity” of It only camouflages the inevitable sad end.
human frivolity,
8:10,14 The “vanity” of Bad often honored. Good and bad get wrong
human awards, desserts.

Yet again, this Book of Ecclesiastes should teach us the need of further Divine revelation. human reason can take us so far and no farther. Even the Mosaic Law, with its Ten Commandments and its high social ethics, cannot give us that which we most need to know and possess.

Oh, that the gifted Solomon who began so wisely should have had to write such a book as this! What intensity it gives to his doctrine of the vanity or emptiness of everything, apart from God. CAUSE AND CURE OF PESSIMISM: The book is not pessimistic, but it shows its cause and cure. First, he views life SELFISHLY RATHER THAN SOCIALLY. He has lived to get, instead of to give; and he has found what all such persons find, namely, that the more one lives for self, the less do earthly things satisfy. When one lives just to “get,” the more one gets the less one really has. It is a true paradox that the more one gives the more he gets. And those who do most for others do most for themselves. But second, Koheleth views life as APART FROM GOD RATHER THAN AS CONTROLLED BY HIM. God is scarcely mentioned, and even then only distantly. All seems in the hands of men. And third, Koheleth views human life as BOUNDED BY THE GRAVE RATHER THAN AS HAVING DESTINY BEYOND. Although the beasts can and do live simply in the present, man simply CANNOT do so, the reason being that God has set eternity in the human heart. Man simply cannot live merely in and for the present. He has a capacity for things intellectual and spiritual, and a consciousness that projects itself into the future.

Well, KOHELETH WAS WRONG. No man can have a true view of life who looks at it selfishly rather than socially, and apart from God, and as bounded by the grave. And when all the available data are considered, no man NEEDS to view it as Koheleth did. Nor did Koheleth himself so view it at the time when he wrote his treatise; for it must be remembered that he was describing how he had thought EARLIER (as his use of the past tense all through the book indicates).

We must turn on to the pages of the prophets and find there whole continents of further truth and wonderful new horizons spreading out before us. And most of all, we must turn on to the New Testament, to the crown of Divine revelation, even the incarnate Son of God Himself. Oh, what a different view of life we get when we see it through the eyes of the Lord Jesus! With Him there is no viewing of life selfishly. None was ever so social-minded as the Son of Man. There

was pure “otherism” and absolutely no egoism. He went about doing good. He was the best of all mixers. He was at home in every circle, for wherever He was, He was there to forget Himself in the good of others. And with Him there was no viewing of human life as apart from God. He saw the Father’s hand everywhere. And with Him there was no viewing of life as bounded by the grave. The very opposite! It is there, beyond the mortal present, that the vast issues of our life are. There is no “vanity of vanities” with Jesus. He comes to declare the reality of realities, that there is a Divine meaning and purpose running all through our human life. Even the cross, if it be the Father’s will, is the pathway to a throne. There is benevolent purpose everywhere in the universe. We may trust God. We may know His love and presence in our lives. Life is not a mockery. God is LOVE. Behind every frowning providence there is a smiling face. We need to pass on from its pages to the further and fuller unfoldings of Scripture revelation. Would that the people of our time had learned the central lesson of this small book, that a life lived for self and the world, and without God, is “vanity,” and that nothing “under the sun” can ever really satisfy the human heart!

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

THE SONG OF SOLOMON: A SUITE OF SEVEN IDYLLS

1. THE ROYAL WEDDING LIVED OVER AGAIN 1:1-2:7
2. THE BRIDE’S COURTSHIP REMINISCENCES 2:8-3:5
3. THE OCCASION OF THE BETROTHAL RECALLED 3:6-5:1
4. THE BRIDE’S TROUBLED DREAM RELATED 5:2-6:3
5. THE KING’S MEDITATION ON HIS BRIDE 6:4-7:10
6. THE BRIDE LONGS TO SEE HER OLD HOME 7:11-8:4
7. THE RENEWAL OF LOVE AT LEBANON 8:5-14

Nowhere in Scripture does the unscriptural mind tread upon ground so mysterious and incomprehensible as in this book, while the saintliest men and women of the ages have found it a source of pure and exquisite delight.

We believe that the key to the Song of Solomon is Psalm 45. When we look at this “Song of Loves” we find that it is a song of ROYAL love. In fact it is a royal MARRIAGE hymn; and it refers to SOLOMON. Thus, as Solomon is a type of Christ in his wisdom and riches and fame, so here, in this 45th psalm, he is a type in this marriage union. After the brief preface in verse 1, the psalm divides into two equal parts.

AN ADDRESS TO THE ROYAL BRIDEGROOM

- a. The beauty of his person v.2
- b. The valor of his conquests v.3-5
- c. The stability of his kingdom v.6
- d. The gladness of his marriage v.7-9

AN ADDRESS TO THE ROYAL BRIDE

- a. An appeal for complete devotion v.10-11
- b. A promise of high honor v.12
- c. A eulogy of the bride’s charms v.13-15

d. A pledge of unceasing Divine favor v.16-17

A comparison of this psalm with the Song of Solomon reveals striking correspondences such as that between the newly married queen's longing toward her now distant Lebanon home, and the exhortation to her, "Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house" (v.10). In light of Psalm 45, the love-suit in the Song of Songs is between Solomon and Shulamith, and that this exquisite love-suit is a most sacred type of the spiritual union between Christ and His Church. Of this relationship, the Church and the Heavenly Bridegroom, Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph.5:25-27).

This mystic presence of Christ and the Church in the Song of Songs gives it its deepest wonder and inmost meaning. It is from this that there comes to us its central message, namely: **SUCH IS THE UNION OF CHRIST WITH HIS REDEEMED PEOPLE.** Various figures are used in Scripture to express the various aspects of this wondrous union.

Christ is the Head and we are the body – A **LIVING** union
Christ is the Foundation and we the building – A **LASTING** union
Christ is the Vine and we are the branches -A **FRUITFUL** union
Christ is the Firstborn and we His brethren – **JOINT-HEIRSHIP**
Christ is the Bridegroom and we are His bride – A **LOVING** union

This union of love is the meaning which lies at the heart of Solomon's Song; and thus the Song of Solomon is the sheer opposite of Ecclesiastes; for in Ecclesiastes this present vain world is found too small ever to fill and satisfy the human heart, whereas in Solomon's Song the heart is filled and satisfied by Christ.

What then is the climax of this ideal espousal? It is the joy of mutual possession, as expressed in chapter 2:16 "My beloved is mine, and I am His." This is the quintessence of that holy joy which the Christian finds in his spiritual union with the adorable Son of God. It is the assurance of possessing and being possessed. On the one hand **HE IS BOUND TO US** by 1) the unbreakable cord of His own **PROMISE**, 2) the unseverable cord of an eternal **COVENANT**, 3) the golden cord of the Divine **LOVE**, 4) the proven cord of our own **EXPERIENCE**. On the other hand, **WE ARE BOUND TO HIM** by 1) the old cord of **CREATION**, 2) the red cord of **REDEMPTION**, 3) the strong cord of **ELECTION**, 4) the new cord of our own **CHOICE**. Seven out of these eight precious bands are those which our Lord Himself has tied; and even the eighth is really the work of His Holy Spirit within our hearts. These love cords will last forever. There is an inner circle of our Lord's disciples in which the love of God is so "shed abroad" that those that experience it must say with Bernard of Clairvaux, "The love of Jesus, what it is, none but His loved ones know," or as J.S. Pigott wrote, "Jesus! I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art; I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart."

The Song of Solomon is a poem, or more accurately several short poems combined into one. It's "A SUITE OF SEVEN IDYLLS." An idyll is a little picture. It is a short pictorial poem on some pastoral or homely subject; a short descriptive or narrative poem, especially one which gives a tinge of romance to familiar or everyday scenes. The Song of Solomon is not a consecutive

story. With this in mind these lyric idylls may with perfect propriety, pick on different parts of the story, passing from the later to the earlier, without restriction to the order of time.

King Solomon, with a courtly retinue visiting the royal vineyards upon Mount Lebanon, comes by surprise upon the fair Shulamite. She flies from them. Solomon then visits her in the disguise of a shepherd, and so wins her love. He later comes in all his royal state, and calls her to leave Lebanon and become his queen. They are in the act of being wedded in the royal palace when the poem opens.

IDYLL 1 – THE ROYAL WEDDING LIVED OVER AGAIN (1:1-2:7)

The bridal procession reaches the palace. The royal bridegroom lifts the bride over the threshold (v.4), whereupon the daughters of Jerusalem break into chorus, “We will be glad, and rejoice in thee. We will make mention of thy love more than of wine.” Inside the palace, the bride, whose marriage raises her from rustic obscurity to the throne of the land, gracefully excuses her country complexion to her more artificial city-bred wedding maidens (v.5-6). Although that for which she modestly apologizes is, in Solomon’s eyes, part of her superlative charm. The two lovers now exchange whispered reminiscences of their courtship, how she sought to penetrate his disguise and he answered mysteriously (v.7-8). After this comes the procession from the banqueting house to the bridal chamber. Here the bride and groom are heard exchanging affectionate appreciations of each other (1:9-2:6), until the poet’s refrain closes that happy day.

IDYLL 2 – THE BRIDE’S COURTSHIP REMINISCENCES (2:8-3:5)

Here she relives that unforgettable day in the fair springtime, when her princely lover first came to her mountain home, and when their love had its beginning (v.8-14). As she thinks upon her new-found lover’s ardent words at that time, she also recalls how the harsh voices of her brothers had interrupted with the cry that the foxes had gotten into the vineyard (v.15). After this there follows the reminiscences of a happy dream in which she found her lost lover (3:1-4).

IDYLL 3 – THE OCCASION OF THE BETROTHAL RECALLED (3:6-5:1)

The day of the betrothal is relived. Already king Solomon, in shepherd disguise, has wooed and won the fair heroine; but now he comes in state (3:6-11). Having arrived, he pours out his love to the Shulamite (4:1-5). The maiden’s modest embarrassment before such ardent praises is just before the actual proposal for marriage is given (4:6-15). Solomon invites her to leave Lebanon, for she has ravished his heart. Her rustic fragrance is better to him than all manner of ‘spices’ – the more artificial perfumery of the city maidens. Yet while she is away amid her country surroundings she is like “a garden shut up” and inaccessible. So under this metaphor of a garden shut up, marriage is proposed; and under the same metaphor the beautiful Shulamite accepts in the words of v.16 “Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.” Solomon’s joyous response is (5:1), “I am come into my garden, my sister, my bride.”

IDYLL 4 – THE BRIDE’S TROUBLED DREAM RELATED (5:2-6:3)

She dreams that her beloved comes to her in the night, seeking admission. She hesitates. There is a little delay while she quickly attends to her personal appearance, and dips her hand in the myrrh. In that pause her beloved withdraws himself; and when she opens the door he is gone. She wanders forth in the night, seeking her lost lover. The watchmen find her; they smite and wound and insult her. In her troubled dreaming she now fancies herself accosting the chorus of bridesmaids, to whom she pours out her grief. To them she gives a description of her beloved which is surely a masterpiece of language, unexcelled for choiceness (v.10-16). Her rapturous eulogy of his charms has the effect of lifting her dream out of its troubled darkness

and bringing it to a happy issue. She finds where her beloved has gone, and is relieved to awake with a song upon her lips.

IDYLL 5 – THE KING’S MEDITATION ON HIS BRIDE (6:4-7:10)

His meditation is both passionate and rapturous. In the first part (6:4-9), the king muses on her beauty. The language is richly expressive. At v.10 the meditation seems to become a reminiscence, and may well refer to the first meeting of Solomon and Shulamith. We seem to hear the words of surprise and praise from the royal party when they unexpectedly came upon the maiden.

Who is she that looketh forth as the morning,
Fair as the moon, pure as the sun,
Terrible as an army with banners?

The next 6 lines may well express the feelings of the maiden, sensitive under the admiring gaze of the royal party (v.11-12). The next verse may well fit the royal party as the maiden flees from them.

Return, return, O Shulamite;
Return, return, that we may look upon thee.
The next verse gives her response, either spoken or unspoken,
Why will you look upon the Shulamite,
As upon the dance at Mahanaim?

IDYLL 6 – THE BRIDE LONGS TO SEE HER OLD HOME (7:11-8:4)

There is but one voice in this, the shortest of these lyrics; it is that of the bride. Amid the palace splendors she yearns to see the country home on Mount Lebanon again. In these choice stanzas she makes tender appeal that she and her husband should visit it, and there renew their love.

IDYLL 7 – THE RENEWAL OF LOVE AT LEBANON (8:5-14)

In the opening verse the royal pair, unattended reach the spot where they had first met: “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?” Solomon speaks (v.5), and then his bride (v.6-7). The bride now recalls riddling remarks of her brothers which had puzzled her in younger years, and which she now understands (v.8-10). And now she renews her love vow to Solomon under the figure of a vineyard and its landlord; he shall be landlord of her heart and home. The voices of the escort are now heard approaching to conduct them back from Lebanon. There is just time for a final embrace and a last word of love; and the poem ends. A good translation in which to read the Song of Songs is Dr. Richard G. Moulton’s “Modern Reader’s Bible.”

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

ISAIAH: JEHOVAH, SUPREME RULER AND ONLY SAVIOR

ORACLES OF RETRIBUTION AND RESTITUTION 1-39

The Day of Jehovah, and Judah 1-6

The Day of Jehovah, and Israel 7-12

The 10 burdens of the Nations 13-23
The “Day” and the Whole World 24-27
The 6 “Woes” upon Jerusalem 28-33
The Final Wrath: Zion Restored 34-35
Historical Addendum to Part I
ORACLES OF REDEMPTION AND CONSUMMATION 40-66
Group 1. The Supremacy of Jehovah 40-48
Jehovah Supreme in Attributes 40-41
Jehovah Supreme in Redemption 42-45
Jehovah Supreme in Punishment 46-48
Group 2. The “Servant” of Jehovah 49-57
Firstly Israel: Finally Christ 49-53
Israel Restored: Christ Reigns 54-55
Thus, Present Urge and Promise 56-57
Group 3. The Challenge of Jehovah 58-66
In View of Present Wrong-Doing 58-59
In View of Future Great Events 60-65
Final Challenge, Promise, Warning 66

The social status of Isaiah seems to have been high. He had familiar interviews with kings Ahaz and Hezekiah. He was historiographer at the Judaeen court in Jotham's reign, and wrote accounts of the reigns of Uzziah and Hezekiah. His book bears the stamp of a well educated man. Isaiah was a married man with two children, SHEAR-JASHUB (a remnant shall return), and MAHER-SHALAL-HASH-BAZ (haste ye haste ye to the spoil). His wife also possessed the gift of prophecy (8:3). The usual title for God is “The Holy One” and there is a vivid sense of the majesty of God. When Isaiah came to the fore in Judah, the 10-tribed northern kingdom was nearing its destruction by Assyria. Isaiah would then be between 50-60 years old. Judah remained vassal to Assyria till the reign of Hezekiah who rebelled. This move would be supported by Isaiah who ever advocated reliance on Jehovah.

PART 1: The first part of the book ends in Exile, causing gloom to the faithful expecting redemption, so the second part tells of the Restoration and the triumphs of Messiah's kingdom, to remove the shadows. The first part is mainly upbraidings for sin, and warnings of coming judgment. In the second part the judgment is seen as having fallen, and Israel is felled to the ground. The message is now one of comfort and hope and healing.

As there are 66 books in the Bible, so there are 66 chapters in the Book of Isaiah; 39 of the Old Testament and 27 of the New Testament. So the first 39 chapters of Isaiah are mainly occupied with the thought of judgment on the covenant people because of their disobedience to the Law; and so the 27 chapters to follow are mainly occupied with the message of Divine grace, and the salvation which it brings.

In the first six chapters the subject is the day of Jehovah concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In the 6th chapter Isaiah receives a new vision – Jehovah as King of all nations. For him to go and prophesy, it was needful to see the sovereign grip and purpose of the universal Emperor, Jehovah. In the next six chapters the subject is the day of Jehovah concerning Israel. Assyria was to destroy Israel and also afflict Judah, and in the end Assyria would be destroyed. Then chapter 11 and 12 describe the coming reign of the Messiah, in which the “outcasts of Israel” and the “dispersed of Judah” should be reunited. Just as chapters 1-6 were mainly concerned with JUDAH, ending with a wonderful vision of Jehovah as the reigning King in HEAVEN, so

chapters 7-12 are mainly concerned with ISRAEL, ending with a glorious vision of Jehovah as the reigning King on EARTH, in the Messianic kingdom which is yet to be. First of all the message was to Judah, then to Israel, then to all the surrounding Gentile nations, and then to the whole world. Next it is Jerusalem which becomes the focus point of being the center of all Jehovah's dealings and controversy with our race. Finally, we are plunged into the "great tribulation" (ch.34) at the end of the present age, and then brought through to the lovely climax of the Millennium. Chapters 36-39 are an evidently designed transition from the first part of the book to the second. The first two of these chapters are about the invasion of Judah by Assyria. The remaining two are about Hezekiah's illness, recovery, and contact with Babylon-which new world-power now begins to fill the scene. The transition is from part 1 in which ASSYRIA is the dominant world-power, to part 2 in which BABYLON is the dominant world-power.

PART 2: The final 27 chapters are a poem, a Messianic poem. It's ever recurrent subject is the coming Christ, the redemption of Israel, and the ultimate consummation. This poem is arranged in three groups of nine chapters each. And is it not luminously significant that this immortal "Lamb" chapter is the middle chapter of the middle nine? At the very center of this tremendous Messianic poem God has put the LAMB. He is the crux, the focus, the center, the heart. Christ as the Lamb of God must be central in our faith and hope and love, in our preaching and teaching and witness-bearing, in our thought and prayer and Bible study. In part 1 the key chapter is the 6th, where we have the prophet's vision of Jehovah as King. In part 2 the key chapter is the 53rd, where we see the Lamb, first suffering and then triumphing. There is a noteworthy parallel between the two parts of Isaiah and Revelation 4 and 5. The whole movement in the first five chapters of Revelation is to put the Lamb on the throne. In chapter 4 we have an august unveiling of the THRONE. In chapter 5 we see the LAMB in the throne. So it is with the two parts of Isaiah. In the first 39 chapters we see the THRONE, with Jehovah as supreme Ruler. In the remaining 27 chapters we see the LAMB in the throne, expressing the truth that Jehovah is the only Savior.

THE SERVANT OF JEHOVAH:

Usually the prophet's message has a clear first reference to his own time. Thus, in the miracle of inspiration, it often occurs that a passage may have both a present and a future reference. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the "Servant" prophecies there should seem an alternation of reference between Israel and Christ; for the corporate Israel itself was a standing TYPE of Christ – Israel, that is, abstracted from its grievous failures, and viewed in the light of its Divine mission. His conception of the nation as "Servant" of Jehovah would inhere in the very fact of Israel's unique election in Jehovah's redemptive purpose for the human race. The "Servant" becomes then, not the actual, but the ideal Israel, represented by the godly remnant within the nation. Yet even here his mind does not find final rest. Peering ahead, as it were, and failing to glimpse even this ideal Israel collectively achieving the Divinely intended high destiny, his mind is lead on, both by human longing and Divine guiding, not only to idealize, but to INDIVIDUALIZE the true Israel, to draw its portrait in the features of a Person, a "Servant" of Jehovah who should be the perfect flower, the final embodiment, and the personal Head of the elect nation. Hence the seeming ambiguity in certain passages, and the clear transition from the nation to the Person in the "Servant" passages taken as a whole.

CHAPTER 53:

It has been truly said that “the prolonged description of chapter 53 suits only one figure in all human history – the Man of Calvary.” The following 12 points absolutely confirm this, for in their totality they cannot possibly be applied to any other.

1. He comes in utter lowliness – “a root out of dry ground”
2. He is “despised and rejected of men”
3. He suffered for the sins and in the place of others – “He was wounded for our transgressions”
4. It was God Himself who caused the suffering to be vicarious – “The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all”
5. There was an absolute resignation under the vicarious suffering “He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth”
6. He died as a felon – “He was taken from prison and from judgment”
7. He was cut off prematurely – “He was cut off out of the land of the living”
8. He was personally guiltless – “He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth”
9. He was to live on after His sufferings – “He shall see His seed; He shall prolong His days”
10. Jehovah’s pleasure was then to prosper in His hand v.10
11. He was to enter into mighty triumph after His suffering – “He shall divide the spoil with the strong”
12. By all this, and by “justifying many” through His death and living again, He was “to see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied.”

As trait after trait is contributed, can we possibly write any other name under the amazing portrait than JESUS OF NAZARETH? And can we fail to marvel at the miracle of inspiration in this prophetic anticipation of the Man of Sorrows, when we reflect that it was written probably 700 years B.C.

But look at this wonder-chapter again. Right at the heart of it we read: “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter”: and on each side of this central declaration there is a seven-fold setting forth of vicarious suffering. In the verses that go before, it is from the HUMAN standpoint. In the verses which follow, it is from the DIVINE standpoint.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

JEREMIAH: I WILL PUNISH AND I WILL RESTORE

INTRODUCTION – JEREMIAH COMMISSIONED 1

PROPHECIES, GENERAL AND UNDATED 2-20

1st Message (2:1-3:5); 2nd Message (3:6-6:30); 3rd Message – At Temple Gate (7-10); 4th Message – The Broken Covenant (11-12); 5th Message – Sign of Linen Girdle (13); 6th Message – The Drought (14-15); 7th Message – Sign of the Unmarried Prophet (16-17:18); 8th Message – At City Gates (17:19-27); 9th Message – The Potter’s Wheel (18); 10th Message – The Earthen Vessel (19); Result (20).

PROPHECIES, PARTICULAR AND DATED 21-39

1st – To Zedekiah (21-23); 2nd – After First Deportation (24);

3rd – Forth Year of Jehoiakim: The Coming Babylonian Captivity (25)

4th – Early Reign of Jehoiakim (26-28); 5th – To Captives of the

First Deportation (29-31); 6th – Tenth Year Zedekiah (32-33);

7th – During Babylonian Siege (34); 8th – Days of Jehoiakim (35);

9th – Forth Year Jehoiakim (36); 10th – Siege (37); Result (38-39)

PROPHECIES, AFTER FALL OF JERUSALEM 40-44

Babylonian Kindly Treatment of Jeremiah (40:1-6); Ill-Doings in

Land of Judea (40:7-41); Jeremiah's Message to Remnant in the Land

(42); Jeremiah Carried Down to Egypt (43:1-7); 1st Prophetic

Message in Egypt (43:8-13); 2nd Prophetic Message to Jewish

Refugees in Egypt (44); Result-Further Rejection of the Message by

the Jewish Refugees.

PROPHECIES UPON GENTILE NATIONS 45-51

Prefatory Note to Baruch the Faithful Scribe (45); 1st – Against

Egypt (46); 2nd – Against the Philistines (47); 3rd – Against Moab

(48); 4th – Against the Ammonites (49:1-6); 5th – Against Edom

(49:7-22); 6th – Against Damascus (49:23-27); 7th – Against Kedar

and Habor (49:28-33); 8th – Against Elam (49:34-39); 9th – Against

Babylon and Chaldea (50-51).

CONCLUSION – JERUSALEM OVERTHROWN 52

Jeremiah was the prophet of Judah's midnight hour. Here was such a true heart likeness to Jesus Himself, in his suffering sympathy both with God and men, in his unretaliating forbearance, his yearning concern for his fellows, his guileless motive, his humility, his willingness for self-sacrifice, and his utter faithfulness, even to the point of unsparing severity in denunciation. Jeremiah's nature was such that he simply could not be merely a transmitter, able to detach his own feelings from that which he was commissioned to declare. There was Divine design in Jeremiah being raised up for such a time as that in which he lived (1:5).

What first impresses us is HIS SUFFERING SYMPATHY. His sorest inward trial was the tearing of his heart between two rival sympathies – on one hand, a sympathy with God such as few men have entered into, and on the other hand a grieving, yearning, longing sympathy with his fellow-countrymen, which made him suffer with them. In all their afflictions he himself was afflicted. He did not merely speak FOR God; he felt WITH Him; and he did not merely speak to the people, he felt with them.

We cannot fail to be impressed by Jeremiah's PATIENT PERSEVERANCE. Only pure love and goodness persevere as graciously as this man did, through such a protracted and forlorn ministry. Most of the other prophets seem to have produced a measure of reform. But through 40 years Jeremiah never once saw any grateful response. He stood alone, as God's spokesman, unheeded, humiliated, yet bravely persistent. Love alone keeps a man thus persevering in face of such discouragements. "Love suffereth long, and is kind. . . beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." In the story of Jeremiah's shrinking and pain and tears we have a picture of a man in such perfect fellowship with God that through him God was able to reveal His own suffering in the presence of sin.

The chapters and messages in this Book of Jeremiah are not arranged in chronological order. Even so, chapters 1-39 are all BEFORE THE FALL OF JERUSALEM. In chapters 40-44 we have Jeremiah's ministry to the Jews AFTER THE FALL OF JERUSALEM, first in Judea (40-42), then in Egypt (43-44). The central thought of the book may be expressed by bringing

together the two recurrent expressions, “I will punish” and “I will restore.” While there is present failure through the sin of man, there shall be final triumph through the love of God. There is WRATH TO THE FULL, but there is LOVE TO THE END. The key to the whole book is found in chapters 30-31, especially 30:15-18; “Because thy sins are become immense I have done these things unto thee . . . Yet all they that devour thee shall be devoured . . . For I will restore health to thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord.”

BASIC AND VITAL LESSONS

To begin with, there is emphasized and tragically illustrated, that ALL NATIONAL DETERIORATION AND DISASTER IS DUE FUNDAMENTALLY TO THE DISREGARDING AND DISOBEYING OF GOD. The nation and people that dishonor God by denying Him usually degenerate into defying Him. The King himself burns God’s message in the fire (36:27); the princes put Jeremiah into the dungeon (38:4); and as for the nation as a whole there is a defiant deafness to all appeal (37:2). Corrupt leadership inoculates the whole nation with moral poison; and inward moral failure issues in outward national ruin. The country’s lamentable condition was due to the people’s apostasy from the true God.

This Book of Jeremiah reveals to us THE PROCESS OF THE DIVINE JUDGMENT IN NATIONAL LIFE. The judgment of the Almighty on the nation was operating through these things which, to sin warped little human minds were simply (as men call them) “misfortunes.” When sin has quenched the vision of God, it also renders the mind incapable of seeing the operations of Divine judgment in the things which are permitted to happen. GOD DOES NOT RECKON THE WORTH OF SERVICE FOR HIMSELF MERELY IN TERMS OF SUCCESS. Judged by that standard, where is Jeremiah? We must learn to be faithful even where we cannot be successful. We are almost – if not quite – at the point in the history of Christendom which corresponds to the time of Jeremiah in the history of Judah – the 11th hour, the hour leading to the midnight zero of the final apostasy under “the man of sin,” and the final outbreak of the Divine judgment at Armageddon.

MESSIANIC AND RESTORATION PASSAGES

Jeremiah’s mission was to a people who had shut their eyes and ears until they had become blind and deaf. In one sense they were past praying for, and three times it is said, “Pray not for this people.” And notice God’s awful word in chapter 15:1. The point is that the sentence of judgment was now irrevocable. As at Kadesh-Barnea of old (Num.14), so was it now again, in Jeremiah’s time – that generation was doomed. Because of this, Jeremiah’s message was largely one of coming judgment. But the sad ministry of this prophet carries a golden promise at heart. See the following passages again: 23:3-8; 30:1-10, 17-22; 31:1-14, 31:40; 32:37-44; 33:14-26; 3:16-18; 12:14-15; 16:14-15. Right at the heart of the book is the GOSPEL – good news of great days to come! “For, lo, the days come that I will bring again the captivity of My people . . . I will cause them to return to the land, and they shall possess it . . . and I will raise up unto them David, their King” (30). This is a scene of millennial blessedness. The PEOPLE are to be regathered. The LAND is to be repossessed. The MESSIAH-KING is to reign, and the glory of His reign shall never end! These promises look on to the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His coming reign on earth in a world-wide empire centered at Jerusalem.

THE BABYLON DOOM-SONG

The final prophecy of the book is on the doom of Babylon. It runs through 110 verses, the longest single prophecy in the book. This prophecy is carefully dated – the 4th year of Zedekiah, that is, 7 years before the fall of Jerusalem. There are parts of this prophecy which look far

beyond the end of the captivity in Babylon. See chapter 50:14-16, where the destruction of the walls and foundations of Babylon is foretold. This demolition, not to mention other items in the prediction, did not occur at the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus at the end of the predicted captivity; it happened over 500 years after that!

A PIVOTAL CHAPTER

Chapter 25 marks for us precisely the starting point of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry (v.3). Second, it definitely predicts the 70 years' servitude to Babylon, a full 20 years in advance (v.1,11). Third, it clearly shows that chapters 46-51 – Jeremiah's batch of prophecies of the Gentile nations – were already in "book" form (v.13,17-26), here in "the 4th year of Jehoiakim," 20 years before the Exile, even though they are now placed right at the end of "the Book of Jeremiah" as it has come down to us. This chapter also explains why that tiny 45th chapter, addressed to Baruch, comes where it does. It is in its proper place as a prefatory note to chapters 46-51.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

LAMENTATIONS: THE PROPHET OF THE BROKEN HEART

Lament 1 JERUSALEM'S PLIGHT

Lament 2 JEHOVAH'S ANGER

Lament 3 JEREMIAH'S GRIEF

Lament 4 JEHOVAH'S ANGER

Lament 5 JERUSALEM'S PRAYER

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Thou that killest the prophets,
and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would
I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen
gathereth her chicks under her wings, and ye would not!
Behold, your house is left unto desolate!"

Such was the tear-drenched plaint of the Man of Sorrows over the impenitent city which was soon to crucify its Messiah-King; but 600 years before then, those words were anticipated and adumbrated, in more elaborate form, by the brave but broken-hearted prophet, Jeremiah, in his 5-fold poem, the "Lamentations."

This pathetic little poem has been called "an elegy written in a graveyard." It is a memorial dirge written on the destruction and humiliation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. It is a cloudburst of grief, a river of tears, a sea of sobs. In the Jewish grouping of the Old Testament Scriptures it is one of the five Megilloth, or "Rolls" because each of them was written on a roll for reading at Jewish festivals – the Song of Songs at the Passover, Ruth at the Feast of Weeks or

Pentecost, Ecclesiastes at the Feast of Tabernacles, Esther at the Feast of Purim, and Lamentations at the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem.

But further, this 5-fold poem is built up in an ACROSTIC form. All the chapters have 22 verses, except the 3rd which has 66. This is because there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet; and the verses of these 5 elegies run successively through the 22-letter Hebrew alphabet. The third chapter has 66 verses instead of 22 because it runs in triplets of verses, each of the first three verses beginning with the first letter of the alphabet, and so on, thus taking 66 verses to run through the full 22 letters. The acrostic lettering is not continued in the 5th and shortest of these elegies although it has 22 verses.

The structure of this quintuple poem is remarkable. The two OUTER poemettes – the 1st and the 5th correspond. The two INNER ones – the 2nd and the 4th correspond. The MIDDLE one, the 3rd, which is the most elaborate in conception and the most finished in execution, is three times the size of the others, and stands at the center like a great throne draped with mourning. In the first the subject is JERUSALEM'S PLIGHT. Verses 1-11 are all in the third person – "she," "her," "the city," etc., because the prophet himself is speaking ABOUT the city. Verses 12-22 are all in the first person "my," "me," "I," because it is the city speaking OF ITSELF.

The subject of the second lament is JEHOVAH'S ANGER. The emphasis all the way through is on the fact that Jerusalem's humiliation has been brought about by Jehovah Himself. The expressions "The Lord hath" and "He hath" occur no less than 30 times, not to mention verbs like "He burned," "He slew," "He poured out," all emphasizing the fact that Jerusalem's discomfiture is THE LORD'S DOING. The first part is in the third person DESCRIBING HIS ANGER, the second part is in the second person EXHORTING THE CITY.

In the third and central elegy, at the heart of this 5-fold memorial, we have THE PROPHET'S OWN SORROW. So sensitively is his own spirit identified with his people, so afflicted is he in all their afflictions, that in some verses it could be either the prophet himself, or the personified nation speaking.

In the fourth poemette we have again the subject JEHOVAH'S ANGER, but with this difference, in the second acrostic the Lord's anger is DESCRIBED, in this fourth it is explained or DEFENDED. It is because of Jerusalem's sin. "For the iniquity of the daughter of My people is greater than the sin of Sodom" (v.6). "For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her. . ." (v.13). In verses 1-11 we have a series of contrasts between the Zion that was and the Zion that now is. In verses 12-22 we have the thoughts and actions of the onlooking Gentile nations about it.

The fifth elegy is throughout a PRAYER, and the speaker is Jerusalem. In the first 18 verses the plea springs from Jerusalem's pitiful plight. In the remaining 4 verses the appeal is to Jehovah's abiding sovereignty and faithfulness.

One very tender truth here is that GOD SUFFERS WITH THOSE WHOM HE CHASTISES. This is immortally objectified in Jeremiah, who had become so sympathetically one with God, and at the same time with his countrymen, that he suffered a double agony in his own heart. No truth is more affecting than that God still loves and suffers with those whom He is obliged in righteousness to smite.

The heart of the poem is the middle passage of the middle chapter. Five times that word “hope” occurs. Affliction does its humbling work (v.20). The sufferer grasps its meaning, and cries out, “I have HOPE” (v.21). The new hope is in God alone. This is emphasized again as the poem closes, “Thou, O Lord remainest” (v.19). The final prayer of the poem will yet be fulfilled – “Renew our days as of old”; and Zion will be supreme among the nations; for although God’s covenant people may suffer the fiercest fires of affliction and persecution, yet like the burning bush of Horeb, they are not consumed!

High calling, flaunted by low living, inevitably issues in deep suffering. Election is never indulgent favoritism, whether in relation to Israel or to the members of the Church today. Since the Divine Sinbearer bore all the sin of all believers, God never PUNISHES His born-again children when they sin. The relationship is now that of Father and child, rather than that of Judge and culprit. Yet the sins of Christian believers bring grievous CHASTISINGS upon them.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

EZEKIEL: “THEY SHALL KNOW THAT I AM JEHOVAH”

Opening Vision and Call of Ezekiel 1-3

1. THE PRESENT JUDGMENTS ON JERUSALEM 4-24

Similes and Prophecies of Imminent Doom 4-7

Vision of Temple and City: Glory Departs 8-11

Further Types and Messages of Judgment 12-24

2. THE FUTURE DESTINIES OF THE NATIONS 25-39

Prospective Judgments on Gentile Powers 25-32

After Present Judgments Israel Restored 33-37

Gog and Magog Destroyed: Israel Exalted 38-39

3. THE FINAL TEMPLE, WORSHIP AND CITY 40-48

The Reerected Temple, and New Glory 40-43:12

The Renewed Worship, and Holy River 43:13-47:12

The Redivided Land, and City of God 47:13-48

Ezekiel is the first of the five post-exilic prophets; Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. With the prophet Ezekiel, like that of Daniel which follows it, was written after the Babylonian exile of the Jews had set in. Both Ezekiel and Daniel were carried captive to Babylon some years before the final siege and sack of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, was a priest as well as a prophet (1:3). He was a married man (24:16-18), and his wife’s death came as a grievous blow to him, and that according to Jewish tradition he was eventually slain by a fellow-exile whose idolatries he had rebuked.

Ezekiel tells us that he commenced his prophesying in the 5th year of Jehoiachin, which was also his 5th year in captivity in Babylonia. Whenever Ezekiel gives the date of his visions or prophecies (13x) he reckons from that outstanding, tragic year of his life when his exile started in Babylonia. Ezekiel was 30 years of age when he commenced his prophetic ministry to the exiles; which means that he was carried to Babylon when he was 25. He exercised his ministry to the exiles for 6 years before Jerusalem fell. None of the first 24 chapters is dated later than the 9th year, whereas it was the 11th year Jerusalem fell. Ezekiel's ministry among the exiles was a difficult one. So senselessly had the people of Jerusalem misconstrued the meaning of the deportation as to flatter themselves, as though the remainder in the city, were heaven's favorites, to whom the land was given as a possession (11:15; 33:24). Other than dreading an imminent expulsion from the land, they persuaded themselves that the Babylonian armies would not return, and that Jehovah's city was inviolate. These exiles were also permeated by the delusive idea that their captivity would soon be ended, because of the many false prophets among them. It was certainly clear that there was need for such a prophet as Ezekiel among the exiles. His first task was to disabuse them of their false hope, which required much courage. He was also to interpret to his exiled people the stern logic of their past history. But the rainbow is again seen in the cloud; for Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, had a glorious picture to paint of the after-days, and a consummating vision in which he saw a reunited people, a re-erected temple, a reorganized worship, and a regenerated Israel.

The key idea and focal message of Ezekiel confronts us on almost every page, "They shall know that I am Jehovah." This occurs no less than 70x.

29x – Jehovah's punishment of Jerusalem

24x – Jehovah's governmental judgments on the Gentile nations

17x – Coming restoration and final blessing of the elect nation

The elect people, and all other peoples, are to know by indubitable demonstration that Jehovah is the one true God, the sovereign Ruler of nations and history; and they are to know it by 3 revelations of His sovereign power – first, by the punishment of Jerusalem and the captivity of the chosen people, which came true exactly as foretold; second, by the judgments prophesied on the Gentile nations of Ezekiel's day, which also have come true exactly as foretold; and third, by the preservation and ultimate restoration of the covenant people, which had a partial fulfillment in the return of the Remnant, and which is still being fulfilled in the marvelous preservation of Israel, and which is even now hastening to its millennial consummation. This then is Ezekiel – "THEY SHALL KNOW THAT I AM JEHOVAH."

1ST MOVEMENT: Chapter 24, which brings us exactly half way through the book, coincides with the very day on which Nebuchadnezzar's armies commenced the fatal siege of the Jewish capital (2K.25:1; Ez.24:1-2). On the very day that Jerusalem was invested, God revealed the fact of it to Ezekiel, away in Babylonia. In this 24th chapter, also, Ezekiel's wife dies, and she is to be unmourned, as a tragic type of Jerusalem.

2ND MOVEMENT: Here we have Jehovah's purposes with the nations. Here national destinies are written in advance. But at chapter 33 Ezekiel turns again to his own nation, "Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying `Son of man, speak to THE CHILDREN OF THY PEOPLE . . .'" From here to the end of chapter 39 we are dealing with the future destiny of Israel. Jerusalem has now fallen. Chapter 35, the judgment on Mount Seir may seem to cut across this high theme; but in reality it is certainly meant to fit in here by way of sharp contrast.

Mount Seir is the substitute name for EDOM, the twin nation to Israel. The Edomites had descended from Esau, Jacob's twin brother, yet they had been from the very start Israel's bitterest foe, with a strange, fierce, implacable, spiteful, gloating hatred. The 39th chapter ends with ALL THE NATIONS RECOGNIZING JEHOVAH AS THE TRUE GOD, THROUGH HIS MARVELOUS DOINGS WITH ISRAEL.

3RD MOVEMENT: This vision of the ideal temple, worship, land and city stands by itself. It is carefully dated – the 14th year after the fall of Jerusalem (40:1). In Ezekiel there are three modes of prophetic activity before us – visions, sign-sermons, and direct predictions.

THE OPENING VISION (1-3)

This vision is one of the most remarkable in the Bible; described mainly in chapter 1. Its contents are 3-fold and so is its purpose.

THE BACKGROUND OF EZEKIEL'S VISION:

The prophet sees a "whirlwind" and a "great cloud" and a "fire infolding itself," coming "out of the north." The picture is that of some terrific, whirling thundercloud, enclosed in a lurid surround of flashing fire.

What is the significance of this tempest and storm-cloud and fire? These are the symbols of JUDGMENT. This is corroborated by the fact that they came "out of the north," for it was from Babylon, via the north, that judgment was coming on Jerusalem (Jer.1:14-15; 4:6; 6:1). This is further corroborated by the fact that at the end of the vision a "hand" gave Ezekiel a "roll of a book" which was found to contain "lamentations and mourning and woe."

THE CENTER-GROUP OF EZEKIEL'S VISION:

Out of the fiery heart of this whirling storm-cloud Ezekiel sees "four living creatures," each with four faces and four wings and four hands. They are the living beings who appear in Genesis, guarding the gate of Eden, and who reappear in the Apocalypse as the mysterious guardians of the ineffable throne in heaven.

First, each had four faces – the face of a lion, of an ox, of a man, of an eagle. The 4-fold meaning here is obvious – strength, service, intelligence, heavenliness. Here in symbol is strength at its greatest, service at its meekest, intelligence at its fullest, and spirituality the most soaring. These beings also had four wings and four hands each – a wing and a hand on each side, these together symbolizing fullness of capacity for service.

Next, "they went every one straight forward, whither the Spirit was to go, they went. Here is symbolized the undeviating prosecution of the Divine will. Their appearance was "like burning coals of fire, like lightnings" – a symbolic expression of their utter holiness. And again, they "ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning, which expresses their utter swiftness of action.

But now (v.15) four awesome wheels appear "beside" these four living beings. The size and sweep of these wheels was vast. They reached down to the earth, yet they reached up to heaven. These four wheels connect these heavenly beings with the earth. Each wheel was two in one. "They turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward." It was because, having four faces, they each faced north, south, east, west, simultaneously, and therefore did

not need to turn in any direction. Nor did they need to turn when they flew, for each had four wings, they simply needed to use the appropriate pair of wings for any of the four directions, without any necessity to turn. And similarly, the wheels needed not to turn, for they were two wheels in one, the one being through the other, that is crosswise to each other, the one revolving north-south and the other east-west, so that there was no need to turn for any direction. These wheels, which thus whirled with lightning-like rapidity in every direction, without need of turning, had their vast rims "full of eyes." These countless eyes looked simultaneously in every direction from the crosswise rims. They saw everything, nothing could be hid from them. This undoubtedly, is the symbol of OMNISCIENCE. Finally, these awesome wheels were filled with the life of the living beings themselves.

In these cherubim and their wheels Ezekiel was meant to learn that the judgments which were about to happen on earth were but the expression of what was happening in the invisible realm. The purpose then, in this center-group of Ezekiel's vision is to show that BEHIND THE EVENTS WHICH TAKE PLACE ON EARTH ARE THE OPERATIONS OF SUPERNATURAL POWERS IN HEAVEN.

See how significantly the wheels show this. They rest down on earth, yet they reach up to heaven. They run to and fro down here, yet they move by a power from above, for "the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels!" Those vast awesome wheels are the WHEELS OF DIVINE GOVERNMENT, the wheels of so-called "Providence." Those wheels of Divine government run with resistless, lightning-like swiftness in all directions over all the earth and simultaneously see everything, everywhere, every minute. Not only did the myriad eyes of the four double wheels look in every direction, but the 16 faces of the living beings, in four fours, also looked in every direction; and as the four awesome wheels expressed the omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence of God, so the faces of the living beings expressed the moral and intellectual nature of God.

Both Ezekiel and John make it clear that these four living ones somehow live nearest of all God's creatures to the throne of God Himself, and most nearly express His life. It is not surprising therefore, that when the very Son of God became incarnate there should be seen a correspondence between Him and these 4 symbol-clad figures of Ezekiel's vision. It is seen in the distinctive emphasis of the four Gospel writers. In Matthew it is the lion; in Mark, the ox; in Luke, the man; in John, the eagle.

THE SUPER-CLIMAX OF EZEKIEL'S VISION:

Ezekiel now sees above the cherubim a superstructure of almost blinding glory. He suddenly hears a voice from the firmament, and on looking up he sees "the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone." On the throne is a fire-enveloped Figure having "the LIKENESS as the APPEARANCE of a man." It is not the Divine Being Himself whom Ezekiel sees, but certain appearances to make vivid to him the character and attributes of Him whom "no man hath seen nor can see."

The Figure is wreathed in fire. There is a center-glow as of luminous or molten metal, and a brightness round about. The symbols are expressive of awful holiness and unapproachable glory. Ezekiel at once recognizes in it "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah," and falls in prostrate adoration. This super-climax of the throne expresses the fact that BOTH BEHIND ALL EVENTS ON EARTH AND ABOVE ALL SUPERNATURAL POWERS IN HEAVEN

IS THE SOVEREIGN THRONE AND WILL AND PURPOSE OF THE INFINITE JEHOVAH HIMSELF.

He had caught sight of something he would never forget. He had seen a RAINBOW round about the throne, which crowns all the awful glory with a gentle beauty. It is the token of a Divine covenant. It is the symbol of the Divine faithfulness. It is the pledge of a final clear shining after the dark thunder-clouds of judgment have passed away. It says that amid wrath to the full there is love to the end. When the tragedy of Jerusalem's ruin came, Ezekiel was not to let his faith go to pieces, thinking that Jehovah, after all, had proved unable to preserve His own chosen city, that the reins had been snatched from his grasp, and that the gods of the heathen were mighty. He was to know that before ever the judgment fell it was foreknown and actually predetermined, that behind it was the operation of supernatural power, and that beyond it there would be an outcome of final blessing.

THE SECOND VISION (8-11)

This second vision came in the 6th year, that is 5 years before the overthrow of Jerusalem. In it Ezekiel was transported to Jerusalem. In chapter 8 we see Judah's profaning of the temple; in chapter 9 we see Jehovah's judgment on the people; in chapter 10 the "glory" of Jehovah leaves the temple and in 11 it leaves the city. Ezekiel sees the general idol-worship of the PEOPLE, the secret animal-worship of the ELDERS, the sex-corruption of the WOMEN, and the shameless apostasy of the PRIESTHOOD. All classes are involved in the debasing infidelity. Chapter 9 follows with a symbolic picture of JUDGMENT on the wicked populace. Seven men are dispatched, one to spare the godly minority, six to slay the rest (which is by the command of Jehovah). Then comes chapters 10 – 11 with its significant ceremony of the departure of the Divine presence from the temple. The doom of the now God-forsaken city is sealed.

If the first vision means to show that the power behind the coming judgment is that of God Himself, the purpose of this second vision is to show that the reason for the coming judgment is the guilt of Judah. The first vision says the judgment is FROM GOD; the second vision says that the judgment is FOR SIN. The first vision explains the FACT of the judgment; the second explains the CAUSE of it.

THE THIRD VISION (40-48)

Here he sees a temple and city of the future in which the glory of God shall abide forever. With this final vision of Ezekiel there is a core of real fact, surrounded and expressed by symbols. The millennial temple and city will be concrete realities. The symbols used of them in this vision are meant to express figuratively their principal features.

The main meanings of the striking symbols are clear. The vastness of the dimensions in the vision indicate the TRANSCENDENT GREATNESS of the final temple and city. The various cube measurements symbolize their DIVINE PERFECTION. In the description of the sacrificial ritual we see the ABSOLUTE PURITY of the final worship. The marvelous waters gushing from the sanctuary foretell FULLNESS OF LIFE, and WORLDWIDE BLESSING. The returning of the Divine "glory," never to depart again, tells of SIN FOREVER REMOVED and of RIGHTEOUSNESS FINALLY TRIUMPHANT; while the putting of Jehovah's throne "in the midst forever" expresses the EVER-ENDURING GLORY of the consummation.

The three visions together were all necessary to give Ezekiel the full view of things. The central idea of the first is that of God OVERRULING.

The central idea of the second is that of God INTERVENING.
The central idea of the third is that of God CONSUMMATING.

In the first God overrules in sovereign GOVERNMENT. In the second God intervenes in righteous JUDGMENT. In the third God consummates in gracious RESTORATION. In the first we see glory TRANSCENDING. In the second we see glory DEPARTING. In the third we see glory RETURNING. In the first vision Ezekiel must see the throne of Jehovah high over the wheels of government. In the second he must see the activity of Jehovah behind the stroke of judgment. In the third he must see the victory of Jehovah in the ultimate realization of the ideal. In other words, Ezekiel was to see, in these three visions, the purpose of Jehovah ABOVE all, and BEHIND all, and BEYOND all.

EZEKIEL'S SIGN-SERMONS

As Jehovah's witness among a "most rebellious" people, Ezekiel was directed to perform various symbolic or typical actions before them, at different times, all portraying in one aspect or another, the impending judgment on Judah. There are no less than 10 of these sign – actions between chapters 4-24, whereas there is only one in the remaining chapters (37:16). Ezekiel was to be in a certain sense DUMB until the fall of Jerusalem (note v.3:26-27; 24:27; 33:21-22). To a people whose ears were largely closed God was largely dumb. God will not have even the most "stiffhearted" and "rebellious" laid low by final judgment without a witness and a warning being uttered to them right up to the midnight knell.

So deaf to the spoken word of God, had these old-time Jews become, through their disobedience, that even the warning of judgment must be conveyed to them in the form of these SIGN-ACTIONS, with the purpose of at least arousing curiosity and causing inquiry. The Lord was also indicating His withdrawal from any further reasoning or pleading with them. Such was their obduracy that a point had now been reached where God would not speak to them directly any more (14:3). Ezekiel is a last tragic witness for God, to a "crooked and perverse generation." Up to chapter 24:16 the dumbness was only PARTIAL, after this the dumbness was TOTAL, for in the intervening chapters Ezekiel has not one word for his own people, but addresses the Gentile nations only in the period before the fall of Jerusalem. Ezekiel's last sign-sermon to his own people, before his total dumbness for about 1½ years, was the culminating tragic sign of his own wife's death (24:15-27).

So Jerusalem has failed, and lies weeping in the dust; but Jerusalem's God drives on through the ages to the predestined consummation. He will not rest until the NEW Jerusalem becomes the queen city of a new order, inscribed with JEHOVAH SHAMMAH – "The Lord is There."

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

DANIEL: THAT THE LIVING MAY KNOW THAT THE MOST HIGH RULETH

1. HISTORICAL PART 1-6
2. PROPHETICAL PART 7-12

There is a special reason why the supernatural is so prominent in Daniel. Israel was now in captivity, Jerusalem was ruined. Even the temple, that last hope, was gone. Jehovah, after all, had proved unequal to the gods of the Babylonians! Bel-Merodach had conquered Jehovah!

That is what the Babylonians exultantly supposed. That is what the Jews were tempted to believe. There seemed no possibility now of national restoration. What though Jeremiah had given it as Jehovah's word that there should be a return after 70 years? Had not Jehovah's promises to David and Solomon now proved false?

Now the miracles in this book of Daniel were a SIGN FROM GOD, both to Israel and the Gentiles. When the earthly sovereignty was transferred from Israel to Nebuchadnezzar, God raised up this notable man, Daniel, to represent Him at the Babylonian courts, so that through his lips, and by these supernatural attestations, He might teach Nebuchadnezzar, and impress upon the Gentile world-empires, through Nebuchadnezzar their head, the delegated nature of their authority, and their accountability to the one true God, even the God of Israel. And the chosen people were to know that Jehovah's eye was watching, and His hand still guiding the course of things on earth, that He was as near to His people in exile as He had been to them in their own land, and just as able to deliver them from Babylon as when He had brought their fathers out of Egypt.

The Jews went into that exile helpless addicts to idolatry. Yet they emerged from that brief interval of the Exile what they have remained to this day – the most rigidly monotheistic people in the world. It certainly cannot be attributed to Babylonian influence, for Babylon was a hotbed of idolatry. Certainly Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation to the whole empire (Ch.4), in acknowledgment of Israel's God, must have had a simply indescribable effect on the Jews. How they would now turn again to Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the duration of their exile, and to the earlier prophecy of Isaiah's in which the very name of their coming deliverer was foretold (Is.45). How could it be otherwise than that Jewish doubt should now be utterly silenced, and adoration of the one true God cure them forever of their idolatry?

Daniel was carried to Babylon 8 years before Ezekiel, about 19 years before the destruction of Jerusalem. He began there in 606 B.C. and was there at least until 534 B.C. (3rd year of Cyrus; Dan.12:2); Daniel must have lived there for at least 72 years.

Daniel lived RIGHT THROUGH THE 70 YEARS SERVITUDE. Daniel outlived the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (34 years), his son Evil-Merodach (2yrs.), his son Neriglissar (4 years), his son Labishi-Marduk (4 months), a usurper Nabonidus, who put his son Belshazzar in command of the city of Babylon. Belshazzar makes his great feast, and the handwriting appears on the wall. That night Belshazzar is slain. Babylon is taken by the Persians, under Cyrus. The Babylonian empire is no more, that of Media-Persia takes its place. Cyrus makes his great proclamation for the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. Daniel stays in Babylon. Thus Daniel links the pre-exile and post-exile periods together.

Notice Daniel's unwavering godliness. We admire Daniel the youth, refusing to defile himself with the king's meat and the wine. And also Daniel the aged, going into the lion's den rather than forgo his lifelong practice of daily prayer (approx. 70 years old). He is one of the few men about whom God says only good. He is 3x called "greatly beloved." What John, the beloved disciple, was among the apostles in the New Testament, that was Daniel among the prophets of the Old Testament. They had a like close place to the Divine heart. To both were great visions given. They were admitted, we may say, into the very arcana of the Deity. Daniel held a high administrative office with both the Babylonians and the Persians, yet his faith remains simple, his heart humble, his character unblemished, and his godliness supreme.

The key thought and central purpose is expressed in chapter 4, three times for emphasis, “That the living may know that the most high ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomever he will.” It is significant that this key utterance is made to come to us through the lips of the humbled Nebuchadnezzar, who was the “golden head” and first world ruler of “the times of the Gentiles.” Also noteworthy is the fact that this central theme parallels that of Ezekiel’s. In Ezekiel it is “They (ISRAEL) shall know that I am Jehovah.” In Daniel it is “That the living (ALL NATIONS) may know that the Most High ruleth.”

A striking feature of this Book of Daniel is that it is written in two languages. From chapter 2:4 through chapter 7 the language is Aramaic. Elsewhere it is Hebrew. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream-image in chapter 2 and Daniel’s first vision in chapter 7, both give in general outline the whole course of the “times of the Gentiles”; whereas the later visions foretell the future especially in relation to the covenant people. Accordingly, chapters 2-7 are in Aramaic, which was at the time, the Gentile language of commerce and diplomacy over the whole known world. This also, is one more proof that the book was written when it says it was. Before that time the Jews did not understand Aramaic (2K.18:26), and after that time they ceased to understand Hebrew (Neh.8:8). but in the time of Daniel they knew both languages.

In the Book of Daniel there are two prophecies which are basal to the others – that of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream-image in chapter 2 (concerning the Gentile nations), and that of the “70 weeks” in chapter 9 (concerning Israel).

NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S DREAM-IMAGE:

It was just as necessary that Nebuchadnezzar should forget it as that he should dream it. That it should become a sheer blank and then be recalled by the inspired Daniel was proof beyond question that both the dream and its interpretation were from the Most High. With Daniel’s words before us and the record of history behind us, we surely see that the head of gold is BABYLON, the breast and arms of silver MEDIA-PERSIA, the lower trunk of brass GREECE, the legs of iron ROME.

In chapter 8 the two empires, Media-Persia and Greece, are each mentioned by name. Daniel is shown “a ram which had two horns, but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last.” The heavenly interpreter says, “The ram which thou sawest that had the two horns, they are the kings of Media and Persia.” So the one figure, the ram, represents Medes and Persians as one kingdom, while yet the two-fold character of that kingdom is preserved in the two horns. This corresponds with the silver breast and arms of the image, in each case the dual nature of Media-Persia, while yet the unity of that empire is preserved in the one ram and the one metal. Equally clearly we are told the identity of the “he-goat” which destroys Media-Persia. “The rough goat is the king of Greece, and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king.” In the vision however, “the great horn (Alexander the Great) was broken, and from it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven. . . That (the great horn) being broken, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not with his power.” While the later divisions of the Greek empire are clearly anticipated, Alexander and his successors are represented as forming one empire, under this figure of the he-goat.

In chapter 7 the four kingdoms represented by the four metals are seen again, as four beasts of prey. Special attention is focused on the FOURTH beast, like that of the fourth metal – it was “strong exceedingly, and it had great IRON teeth.” This fearsome beast has 10 horns (the symbol of ruling power), and among these a new horn arises which uproots three of the others,

and has a “mouth speaking great things.” Daniel says, “I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them, UNTIL the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given unto the saints of the Most High, and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom.” The 4th kingdom therefore, in its parts – the legs, the iron-clay feet, and the 10 toes – is to continue “UNTIL” the coming of the Messiah’s world-wide kingdom. This can only be Rome. Now there are two big facts revealed through that dream-image which relate momentously to ourselves in the 20th century. First, the end of the present age is not to come by gradual betterment until some high point of excellence is reached, but BY A CRISIS, A CRASH, A SUDDEN CATASTROPHE; for in the days represented by the 10 toes a “Stone cut out without hands” (Christ in His Messianic kingdom) smites the image and crushes it to powder. The world will be saying, “Peace and prosperity” when “sudden destruction” smites the whole present system of things. Second, THE END OF THE PRESENT AGE IS NOW NEAR. The two legs representing Rome are true to historical fact; for as is well known, the Roman empire split into two great halves – the eastern and the western empires. The division took place in 395 A.D.

THE “SEVENTY WEEKS”:

In chapter 9:24-27 Daniel is told that “seventy weeks (or sevens of years) are determined” on his people. From the going forth of the “command to restore and to build Jerusalem” down to the time when the Messiah should be “cut off” would be 7 + 62, which is 69 weeks (or sevens); that is 483 years. The 70th week is treated as distinct. In it an evil ruler violates covenant with the Jews, and desecrates Jerusalem.

That one edict in history for the rebuilding of the city itself is that which was issued by Artaxerxes at the appeal of Nehemiah – “That thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers’ sepulchers, THAT I MAY BUILD IT” (Neh.2:5). Nehemiah himself gives the date, “the month Nisan, in the 20th year of Artaxerxes.” This then is the starting point: Nisan, 445 B.C. Nisan is the first month of the Jewish year. As Nehemiah names no other day, the prophetic period must be reckoned, according to common Jewish custom, from the New Year’s Day (March 14, 445 B.C.). The prophetic year is a lunisolar year of 360 days (Dan.7:25; 9:27; Rev.11:2-3; 12:6,14; 13:5).

So then, from the edict to rebuild Jerusalem, down to the cutting off of Messiah, was to be 483 years of 360 days each. Once only did our Lord offer Himself publicly and officially as Israel’s Messiah. Previously He had avoided all public recognition of those claims. But now His testimony had been fully given, and the purpose of His entry into the capital was to proclaim openly His Messiahship, and to receive His doom. Even His apostles themselves had been charged again and again that they should not make Him known; but now He accepted the acclamations of “the whole multitude” of the disciples. It was on this day that our Lord looked on Jerusalem and exclaimed, “If THOU also hadst known, even on THIS DAY, the things that belong to thy peace . . . !” And we are expressly told that this day was the fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9 (Mat.21:4-5). This was the predicted day of His public offer to the nation; and which directly occasioned His being “cut off.” Here then we find the TERMINUS of the 483 years, emphasized too clearly to be misunderstood. The Julian date of that 10th of Nisan was Sunday the 6th of April, 32 A.D. What was the length of time between the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and this climactic public advent of Christ? Sir Robert Anderson tells us that it was EXACTLY 173,880 DAYS, THAT IS 483 PROPHETIC YEARS OF 360 DAYS!

What about the 70th week? It is yet to be. Between the Messiah’s being “cut off” and the 70th week, the whole of the present “Church” age intervenes. The Church of the present

dispensation is nowhere the subject of direct prediction in the Old Testament. It was the “secret” kept “hidden” during preceding ages (Eph.3). Again and again in the Old Testament we find both advents of Christ foretold in the same verse or passage, but with no light given as to the intervening of the present age between them (Ge.49:10; Is.53:11-12; Mic.5:3; Is.61:1-2; Lk.4:17-19; Zec.9:9-10; Mal.3:1; 1P:1-10-11).

In chapter 11:1-39 we have the period of Antiochus’ persecution; the actual facts are described with surpassing distinctness. At v.40 and on we leap over centuries to “the time of the end”; and we know that this means “the time” which is yet to be. So this Antiochus casts a shadow which reaches right to the final crisis of the present age because of a latent and further meaning in the words.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

HOSEA: THE PROPHET OF PERSEVERING LOVE

PROLOGUE: THE WHOLE STORY IN SYMBOL 1-3

ISRAEL’S SIN INTOLERABLE: GOD IS HOLY 4-7

The Fivefold Indictment 4-5

Israel’s Unreal “Return” 6

Healing Made Impossible 7

ISRAEL SHALL BE PUNISHED: GOD IS JUST 8-10

The Trumpet of Judgment –

These Chapter Throughout are

Expressions of Wrath to Come.

ISRAEL SHALL BE RESTORED: GOD IS LOVE 11-14

Divine Yearning 11

Yet Israel Must Suffer 12

The Final Victory of Love 14

Hosea is the prophet of Israel’s zero hour. The nation had sunk to a point of such corruption that a major stroke of Divine judgment could no longer be stayed off. What the weeping Jeremiah was to Judah, the southern kingdom, nearly 1« centuries later, that was the sob-choked Hosea to Israel, the northern kingdom. The opening verse of the book tells us that he prophesied from the times of Uzziah to that of Hezekiah. Hosea lived on through the 50 years or more in Israel between the death of Jeroboam II and the Assyrian invasion. Now this period, from Jeroboam II on to the captivity, was the awful “last lap” of iniquity in Israel’s downward drive. Jeroboam is the last king who reigns in Israel with any semblance of Divine appointment. The kings who follow seize the throne by murdering its occupant at the time. Shallum slays Zechariah, Manahem slays Shallum, Pekah kills Pekahiah, and Hoshea the last of them kills Pekah. Israel’s self-reliance is gone. She is as fluttered as a startled bird; “They call to Egypt; they go to Assyria.” But everything is hopeless, kings cannot save, for Ephraim (Israel) is seized by the pangs of a fatal crisis.

Things were even worse morally and spiritually than they were politically. The alliances which Israel’s kings made with foreign powers brought in the immoral idolatries of Syria and Phoenicia – cruel nature-worship associated with the names of Baal and Ashtaroth, with all the attendant abominations of child-sacrifices and revolting licentiousness.

THE STORY IN SYMBOL:

These first three chapters are symbolical narrative. The prophet's wife, Gomer, and the three children, Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi, and the tragedy of the prophet's married life, of which these chapters speak, are all symbolic of the relationship between Jehovah and Israel. Here we have the faithless wife and her faithful husband, and the remaining 11 chapters, where we have faithless Israel and her faithful God.

What then is the special relevance of this prologue? It is this: THE PROPHET, THROUGH THE HEARTBREAK OF HIS OWN MARRIAGE TRAGEDY, HAD COME TO SEE ISRAEL'S SIN AGAINST GOD IN ITS DEEPEST AND MOST AWFUL SIGNIFICANCE. Hosea had loved, with a pure, deep, tender, sensitive love. He had honorably taken to himself the woman of his choice, and entered into what he anticipated would be a union of life-long happiness. After the birth of the first child, however, painful suspicions were aroused in his mind as to Gomer's loyalty; and these were confirmed later by the discovery of adultery. The first child Jezreel is definitely said to be born to Hosea (1:3), but the others are not. The 2nd child he does not own. He names the little girl Lo-ruhamah, which means "Unloved," or "she that never knew a father's love." The 3rd child he disowns outright, calling it Lo-ammi, which means "Not my people" or "No kin of mine."

We can imagine the conflict of emotion in Hosea's heart, the sense of shame in his desecrated home. He had forgiven his beloved but weak and disloyal Gomer once . . . twice . . . He had pleaded and warned. But things had at length reached the point where separation was necessary. After this, so it would appear, Gomer had sold herself for money, and later drifted into slavery, from which however, she was redeemed by the still compassionate Hosea (3:2), though there could be no thought of reunion without a process of discipline and chastening. This story is told consecutively, and at each point the symbolism is explained and applied. Gomer is the nation, Israel. The children are the people of that nation. Hosea's sorrow, patience, compassion, and his final act of redeeming, chastening and restoring Gomer are, in adumbration, the sorrow, patience, compassion, and love of God toward sinning Israel. The whole tragic story of Israel is here, in these first 3 chapters, and the ultimate triumph of that day yet to be when God shall say, "I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies...I will say to them which were not My people: Thou art My people; and they shall say: Thou art my God."

Chapter 2 is the application of chapter 1. And chapter 3 looks right on to the end of the present age, for its last words are, "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness IN THE LATTER DAYS." Yes, the whole story of Israel, past, present, and future, is here, in this symbolic prologue. But the deepest and most awesome thing of all in these chapters is that through his own cruelly desecrated relationship with Gomer, Hosea came to understand the true meaning of Israel's sin: it was SPIRITUAL ADULTERY, and even HARLOTRY! The sin of adultery has been defined as that of "seeking satisfaction in unlawful relations." That is what Israel had done. Harlotry is even worse. It is the sin of "prostituting high possessions for the sake of hire and gain." That too, Israel had done. As Hosea tells them, God had taken them to Himself in a special relationship, had loved them, carried them in His arms, taught them to walk, been Husband and home to them; and they had gone after other gods – and had prostrated their high privileges to the lascivious indulgence of idolatry! Such sin is spiritual adultery! To see it in this light is to see it in its ugliest enormity, and at the same time to realize with a cutting keenness THE SUFFERING

WHICH IT CAUSES TO THE HEART OF GOD. The sin of a people with such high privilege and sacred relationship as Israel is the most heinous sin thinkable; that of WILLFUL INFIDELITY TO LOVE.

God sustains four principal relationships to mankind (1) Creator, (2) King, (3) Judge, (4) Father. Which of these four demonstrates the fundamental motive and purpose in the bringing of the human race into being? Did God create merely to possess? to reign? to judge? No, it is the fatherhood of God which is ultimate. God created us for FELLOWSHIP with Himself. This means that human sin hurts the great, loving heart of God. In its deeper aspect, sin does not merely break God's law, it breaks His heart. Calvary says so. Whether it be under Hosea's metaphor of the grieved and wounded husband, or our Lord's picture of the sorrowing and compassionate father, the truth is there: HUMAN SIN HURTS GOD! "Lost souls" are a loss to the heart of God!

ISRAEL'S INTOLERABLE SIN:

In chapter 5 the Lord speaks twice of withdrawing Himself from Israel. The knowledge of God was destroyed in the land (4:1,6); and this was the tap-root of all manner of evils. Because of Israel's impenitent persistence in these evils Jehovah purposes to exact retribution and to withdraw Himself from them (5:6,15). Whereupon Israel superficially "returns" to "know" Jehovah, taking it presumptuously for granted that "after a couple of days" there will be a reviving (6:1-3). But their professed return is merely ritualistic, and Jehovah protests, "I desire real love, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." Jehovah, however, still longs to spare and restore Israel, but when He would do so the determined wickedness of the nation prevents Him. The upshot of these chapters is that ISRAEL'S SIN HAS REACHED THE POINT WHERE IT IS INTOLERABLE.

ISRAEL SHALL BE PUNISHED:

In the first part of the book we have the exposure of Israel's awful SIN, in these 3 chapters that follow we notice the utterance of the awful JUDGMENT which is swiftly coming upon it.

ISRAEL SHALL BE RESTORED:

Finally, in this last part of the book we find "The Yearning of God." The yearning is that of LOVE. See the opening words, "When Israel was a child I LOVED him . . . I drew them with cords of a man, with the bands of LOVE..." "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? . . . Mine heart is turned within Me, My repentings are kindled together..." Although the inevitability of judgment is reiterated, yet the note is now that of sorrowing regret that it must be so.

But most of all here is the final triumph of love, culminating in the last chapter. It is a grand and beautiful climax. Judgment is finished. Sin is forsaken. Backsliding is healed. Love reigns. In the closing verse Ephraim says, "What have I to do any more with idols?" Jehovah responds, "I have answered and will regard him." Ephraim again says, "I am like a green fir tree"; and again Jehovah responds, "From Me is thy fruit found."

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

JOEL: THE DAY OF JEHOVAH COMETH!

AN ALARM – INVASION BY PLAGUE 1:1-2:11

The Present Desolation 1:1-20

The Yet Further Threat 2:1-11

AN APPEAL – ELEVENTH-HOUR HOPE 2:12-27

Appeal: “Turn Ye to Me” 2:12-17

Promise: “I Will Restore” 2:18-27

AN ANNEX – ON THE AFTER-DAYS 2:28-3:21

Epochs of the End Time 2:28-3:16

Ultimate Glory of Zion 3:17-21

Joel whose name means “Jehovah is God,” calls himself the son of Pethuel. Beyond this we are told nothing about him. His book makes it tolerably certain, however, that he exercised his prophetic ministry in or near Jerusalem. It is the inhabitants of that city whom he addresses. It is Jerusalem which he sees in danger, it is in Zion that the “alarm” is to be sounded (2:1,9,15). The 10-tribed northern kingdom is not once mentioned.

INVASION BY PLAGUE:

Chapter 1 is a moving description of the desolation in the land, resulting from successive locust ravages. The prophet was here using the graphic present to depict, as though it were already there, a calamity yet to break on the nation. As so often used in the prophetic writings, the prophecy is so worded that while there is a primary reference to a historical happening with which the prophet’s contemporaries were familiar, there is a further and larger fulfillment envisioned away in the future.

In the first 11 verses of chapter 2 we find a most gripping and awesome picture of this still further and greater trouble which was about to break upon the nation. This visitation, whatever its nature, was to be so grave and extraordinary that it could be described by no less an expression than “the Day of Jehovah is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?”

ELEVENTH-HOUR HOPE:

At verse 12 there is an imploring appeal to the nation to repent before the dread stroke falls. In the mercy of God there is always this 11th hour chance before a major stroke of judgment falls. At v.18 there is a gracious promise – a promise of salvation if the 11th hour appeal is heeded. It is in the past tense, for it visualizes the Divine response, if the people repent, as though it had already happened.

THE AFTER DAYS:

This section plainly stands by itself, for it is all PREDICTIVE of what will happen in the after days. The apostle Peter, in his discourse on the day of Pentecost, definitely relates Joel 2:28, and what follows it, to the last days (Acts 2:15-21). Whatever latent significances (Armageddon) may lie in Joel’s words, the genuine first sense has to do with Joel’s own time (Locust plague); and we do not serve the best interests of our Bible when, with zeal for seeing prophetic meanings, we exalt the apocalyptic at the expense of the historical integrity of Scripture.

INVASION BY LOCUSTS:

The ground over which their devastating hordes have passed at once assumes an appearance of sterility and dearth. Well did the Romans call them “the burners of the land,” which is the literal meaning of our word “locust.” All is as nothing to the myriads of insects that blot out the

sun above and cover the ground beneath and fill the air whichever way one looks. The breeze carries them swiftly past, but they come on in fresh clouds, a host of which there is no end, each of them a harmless creature which you can catch and crush in your hand, but appalling in their power of collective devastation. Nothing in their habits is more striking than the pertinacity with which they all pursue the same line of march, like a disciplined army. W.M. Thomson tells us that when the millions upon millions of locust eggs hatch, the very dust seems to waken to life, and the earth itself seems to tremble with them; and later, when the vast new breed have acquired wings, the very heavens seem tremulous with them.

THE DAY OF JEHOVAH:

The term “the day of Jehovah appears 5x (1:15, 2:1,11,31; 3:14). Joel uses this term in three ways. He uses it of THE THREATENED LOCUST PLAGUE (2:11,25). He uses it of a “great and terrible” day which is even yet to come, at THE END OF THE PRESENT AGE (Acts 2:14-21). He uses it of a day of Divine judgment which was even then “near” upon THE PALESTINIAN NATIONS which had afflicted Israel (3:2-14). The three uses of this phrase then, are a LOCAL sense, a FINAL sense, and a in a DOUBLE sense – examples are as follows (Is.2:12, 13:6,9, 14:3, Jer.30:7-8, 46:10, Lam.2:16, Ez.7:19, 13:5, 30:3,9, Amos 5:18-20, Obad.15, Zeph.1:7, Zech.14, Mal.4:5).

But even when this “day of Jehovah” does not look right on to the end of our own age, it is reserved to denote only the most extraordinary visitations of Divine judgments. Here in Joel, for instance, where it is used of the threatened locust-plague, the plague is such that “there has not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations (2:2).

What the day of Jehovah at the end of the present age will be passes the power of imagination to anticipate. We only need to look up the references to it in both Testaments to realize that all the events of past history will be dwarfed by this magnitudinous culmination. It will suddenly burst into occurrence with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in supernatural splendor. This will precipitate Armageddon, when the “beast” and the “false prophet” and the anti-christ’s “kings of the earth with their armies” shall be utterly overwhelmed, the present world system smashed, Satan flung into the bottomless abyss, and all powers of evil crushed to the dust. And this will inaugurate the world-wide empire of Christ, with a restored Israel in Palestine, and all the peoples of the earth forming the one kingdom of “our God and of His Christ.” This “day of Jehovah” will be heralded by cosmic disturbances and other preternatural signs; it will continue for 1000 years; it will end with a Divinely permitted final insurrection of evil inspired by Satan; then the final abolition of evil from the earth, the general judgment of the human race at the Great White Throne, and a cataclysm of fire, followed by a “new heaven and a new earth.”

ADDENDUM TO JOEL:

It is usually held that the inauguration of the Christian church dates back to Pentecost. Acts 2:16, however, explains Pentecost as, “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel . . .” And Joel 2:28-3:21 refers not to the church, but to the even yet future “great and terrible day of Jehovah,” the final regathering of Israel, and the Messianic kingdom. But if that Joel prophecy is yet unfulfilled, how could Peter say at Pentecost, “This is THAT”?

In fulfillment of promise, our Lord proclaimed the kingdom of the Jews, and offered Himself as Messiah. The Jews who had doted on the material aspects of the promised kingdom, to the

neglect of its spiritual requirements, rejected and even crucified Christ – which, however, was foreknown and overruled of God to effect a world-wide Gospel of individual salvation. On the cross our Lord prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” In answer, the Jews were given a further opportunity in the period covered by the Acts, when the new offer was accompanied by the additional message (and proofs) of the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal miracles were God-given SIGNS that the kingdom was truly drawing near again in offer. Therefore Peter’s “This is THAT...” But Israel again rejected; and as the further rejection crystallized, the Pentecostal signs were withdrawn, as also was the kingdom. The Joel passage now awaits the second coming of Christ, when the church age ends, and the kingdom age begins.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

AMOS : JUDGMENT FOR ABUSED PRIVILEGE

1. EIGHT “BURDENS” 1-2

Damascus Gaza Tyre Edom

Ammon Moab Judah Israel

Note: “For three transgressions and for four.”

2. THREE “SERMONS” 3-6

Judgment Deserved (3:1-10); Decreed (11-15)

Judgment Deserved (4:1-11); Decreed (12-13)

Judgment Deserved (5:1-15); Decreed (16-6:14)

3. FIVE “VISIONS” 7-9

Grasshoppers Fire Plumbline

Summer Fruit God over the Altar

Note the final promise to Israel

Amos, the herdsman-prophet, is a singular figure among the Old Testament prophets. His writing too is distinguished by a peculiar forcefulness and rural freshness. In chapter 1 he speaks of himself as “Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa.” It was there he was called of God to be a prophet to the northern kingdom, Israel. He says, “I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was a herdsman and a cultivator (of Sycamore figs); and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, “Go, prophesy unto My people Israel” (7:14-15). He had not been trained in any of the “schools of the prophets.” He was what we would today call a “layman.” His vocabulary, his figures of speech, his illustrations, are all redolent of the country life from which he came. There was an unconventional bluntness about him which must have been pretty disconcerting to the college trained professional prophets of Bethel calf-worship, with their polished ambiguities and evasions. They would certainly feel a cold shiver down their spines to hear Amos address the upper-class ladies of Samaria as “cows” (4:1).

EIGHT BURDENS:

Here we see coming retribution on 8 Palestinian nations – Syria, which is addressed through Damascus its capital, Philistia, which is represented by its fortress-city of Gaza; Phoenicia, which is represented by its great seaport, Tyre; Edom; Ammon; Moab; Judah and Israel.

Each address is prefaced by the formula, “For three transgressions and for four. . .”

Idiomatically, this means that the measure was full, and more than full; the sin of these people

had overreached itself; or, to put it in an allowable bit of modern slang, they had “gone one too many,” and “tipped the scale.” The first time they had done the evil, God had rebuked. The second time He had threatened. The third time He had menaced with uplifted hand. Now, at the 4th time He smites! Let the nations know that though God may bear long with the wicked, they can sin once too often! God is not mocked; there cannot be cumulative sin without a culminative stroke of retribution.

Second, in each of these burdens the symbol of judgment is FIRE – the most destructive of all the elements. Extreme guilt brings extreme doom.

Third, in each case (except Judah and Israel) the sins to be punished are CRUELITIES AGAINST OTHER PEOPLES. See the recurrence of “Because they . . .” God hates inhumanity. Yet never in all history have nations shown such coldly calculated inhumanity to other nations as have certain nations of today.

THREE SERMONS:

Each of the three sermons is divided by an emphatic “THEREFORE,” so that in each we have in the 1st part judgment DESERVED, and in the remainder judgment DECREED (3:11, 4:12, 5:16). These three addresses grow in intensity, and the third is made longer than the others by two culminating “woes” which are appended to it. The 1st sermon declares the fact of Israel’s guilt in the PRESENT. The 2nd stresses Israel’s sin in the PAST. The 3rd stresses the punishment of Israel’s sin in the FUTURE. Note the vehemence and intensity at the end. Yet notice also the 11th hour warning in the thrice-uttered appeal of Jehovah, “Seek ye Me, and ye shall live.” Note further about these 3 addresses that in the 1st we have the PRINCIPLE underlying Divine judgment – “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; THEREFORE WILL I PUNISH YOU for all your iniquities (3:2). This is the key verse of the book. Amos is the prophet of JUDGMENT FOR ABUSED PRIVILEGE. Judgment is always determined according to privilege. Increased privilege is increased responsibility. Israel had been supremely favored, and therefore was supremely responsible.

In the 2nd address we see the FORBEARANCE behind Divine judgment. Before the stroke of a final major judgment is allowed to fall on the nation, there comes a succession of minor judgments to warn. It is when these are ignored and the Divine patience is outraged that the culminative judgment falls (4:12).

In the 3rd sermon we see the uncompromising SEVERITY of Divine judgment on the impenitent, where sin has been obdurately persisted in.

FIVE VISIONS:

In chapter 7:1-3 is the vision of the GRASSHOPPERS, or locusts, eating up the product of the soil. But in answer to the prophet’s entreaty to “forgive,” the plague is AVERTED. Next in v.4-6 we have the vision of the devouring FIRE. This is definitely the symbol of judgment; yet in response to the prophet’s entreaty to “cease,” the fire is stayed; so that the judgment is RESTRAINED.

Next in v.7-9, there is the vision of the plumbline (fitting symbol of judgment according to a righteous, Divine standard). Here God says, “I will not again pass by them”; and there is no intercession of Amos. Here, then, is judgment DETERMINED. Following this there is the

parenthetical episode of Amaziah's rebuke to Amos v.10-17, making it clear that the nation, at least officially, was certainly set against the appeals of Jehovah.

Then in chapter 8 we find the vision of the basket of SUMMER FRUIT. The fruit was dead ripe, and once fruit has reached that point, especially in hot lands, it is on the point of quickly perishing. Here then, we see judgment IMMINENT.

Lastly in chapter 9, in one of the most awe inspiring visions of the Bible, we are shown Jehovah Himself "standing upon the altar" – that is upon the false altar at Bethel. No symbol is here used, as in the visions preceding. It is the Lord Himself, and He says, "Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake, and cut them in the head, all of them. . ." Here is judgment EXECUTED. There is an increasing intensity in the five visions, as there is in the three sermons. Yet even amid the execution of the culminative judgment, not one grain of the pure wheat was to be allowed to perish (9:9)! Even in wrath God remembers mercy!

Note: Amos 5:26-27 – The word rendered as "tabernacle" in v.26 is the Hebrew "SUCCOTH," and research has now shown that it is the name of a heathen god, not just the Hebrew word for a tabernacle. The more correct rendering is, "Succoth your king." Schrader translates the verse: "Thus shall you then take Succoth your king and Kewan your star-god, your images which you have made for yourselves, and I will carry you off into captivity..." It was the forewarning of expulsion to a people who had forsaken Jehovah and made idols their gods.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

OBADIAH : THE PROPHET OF POETIC JUSTICE

1. THE DESTRUCTION OF EDOM 1-16

The Certainty of It 1-9

The Reason for It 10-16

2. THE SALVATION OF ISRAEL 17-21

The Promise of It 17-18

The Fullness of It 19-21

This remarkable fragment from the pen of Obadiah is the shortest and perhaps the earliest of the writings which have come down to us from these Hebrew prophets. It has one subject only, JUDGMENT on Edom, though this is offset in the closing verses by a contrastive reference to the final salvation of Israel.

Of Obadiah himself nothing is known. Not even his father's name is given in the title of the book. The name "Obadiah" was common enough among the Hebrews, and means a "worshipper" or "servant of Jehovah"; but he cannot be identified with any of the persons so named in the

Scriptures. The contents of his prophecy, however, indicate that he belonged to Judah, the southern kingdom.

CONCERNING EDOM

The name “Edom” means RED. It is the name that was given to Jacob’s brother, Esau, because he sold his birthright for Jacob’s red pottage. The Edomites were Esau’s descendants, and their country was Mount Seir.

“Esau said to Jacob, ‘Feed me I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint. Therefore was his name called Edom’.”
Genesis 25:30

“Esau dwelt in Mount Seir: Esau is Edom. . . the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir.” Genesis 36:8-9

Esau means rough or hairy. It may be for this reason and his love for the field and the hunt and the wild life of the open, that Esau was first drawn to Mount Seir and the Horites, or rock-dwellers. At any rate, this was the identity and background of the Edomites who are addressed by the prophet Obadiah. Their father was Esau, and their country was Seir.

The area occupied by the Edomites, although mountainous and craggy, had no lack of fertile valleys and fruitful soil. The ancient capital was Bozrah, a few miles south of the Dead Sea; but in Obadiah’s days the capital was Sela, or Petra, the rock city, which because of its peculiar position, its difficult access, its rock-hewn dwellings, and its precipitous natural defenses, was considered impregnable, and had fostered a spirit of fierce independence and security in the Edomites, which defied attack and scorned all attempts to subjugate them.

EDOMITE ANTI-JACOBISM

Now the Edomites were like both their father and their country. Their nature was marked by a hard earthiness. They were profane, proud, fierce, cruel; and these tempers found concentrated vent in a strangely persistent, implacable, bitter, gloating spite against Israel, the nation which had descended from the twin brother of their own national father, Esau. This violent nastiness had expressed itself again and again in the history of the two peoples. See Num.20:14-22.

In Obadiah’s times, this undying Edomite anti-Jacobism had flamed out more wickedly than ever, in unprovoked treachery. In the days of Jerusalem’s disaster, instead of befriending or at least sympathizing, the people had indulged the passive cruelty of looking on with gloating satisfaction, and had egged on the plunderers. It was the Edomite venom that the Judean captives in Babylon recalled in the words of psalm 87:7, “Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem, who said, ‘Raze it, raze it, even to the foundation thereof.’”

But passive callousness had given place to active alliance with Jerusalem’s destroyers. The Edomites had “entered the gate”; they had robbed and despoiled Jacob; they had barred the escape of the refugees, and had delivered up the remnant to the spoilers (v.13-14).

POETIC JUSTICE

It was this long-accumulating guilt that Divine retribution was now determined against Edom. The key verse is 15 – “As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee.” In this prophecy about Edom, we are meant to learn emphatically that there is a principle of “poetic justice” operative in the Divine government of the earth’s peoples. This is the distinctive contribution of this Edom prophecy. Obadiah, let us remember, is the prophet of poetic justice.

See how this key truth is amplified by the context. Edom had indulged in treachery against Judah (v.11-12), therefore Edom should perish through the treachery of confederates (v.7). Edom had seized the chance to rob Judah (v.13); therefore Edom should be robbed even till his hidden things, or treasures, were searched out (v.5-6). Edom had lifted the sword and shown violence against Judah (v.10); Edom should perish by slaughter (v.9). Edom had sought the utter destruction of Judah (v.12-14); therefore Edom should be utterly destroyed (v.10,18). Edom had even sought to hand over and dispossess the remnant of the invaded Jerusalem (v.14); therefore, in the end, the remnant of Jacob should possess the land of Edom (v.19). Yes, poetic justice! – the penalty corresponding to the iniquity as one line of poetry corresponds to another! And have we not seen in our own day the operation of poetic justice in the anti-Axis war? Never was there a war with such strange anomalies. To mention only one – was it altogether without significance that Britain was forced off the European mainland, first in the north, at Dunkirk, and then in the south, from Greece, and made to stand aside for the time, while Germany and Russia, the two nations which, officially and more blatantly than all others, had blasphemed God, slaughtered each other, despite their recently-signed pact of friendship? Were not the shocking brutalities of both these nations to the Jews paid back to them in identical terms? Yes, if we believe the Hebrew prophets, and Obadiah in particular, then we believe in poetic justice!

Obadiah predicts even the EXTINCTION of Edom. “Thou shalt be cut off forever” (v.10), “There shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau” (v.18). At the time when the prophet wrote, Edom might have seemed far more likely to survive than Judah; yet history has strikingly endorsed the prophecy. Edom has perished, Judah persists.

LATENT TYPE-TEACHING

There is a strangely fascinating, symbolic interest about the successive PAIRS OF SONS way back in Genesis – Cain & Abel, Ishmael & Isaac, Esau & Jacob. Cain, Ishmael and Esau are the “natural” men, who are “of the earth, earthy,” and they represent different aspects of the self-life or “flesh.” Cain is the natural heart in its antipathy to REDEMPTION. He is all for religion and culture. In Ishmael we see the self-life in its antagonism to that which is of FAITH, as Paul tells us in Galatians 4:29. In Esau we see the self-life in its disappreciation of that which is SPIRITUAL. He is the man “who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright” (He.12:16). From Genesis 25:25 we learn that two characteristics distinguished him from his birth; he was “ruddy,” and he was “hairy,” which two things speak of beauty and strength. Yes, there is no doubt that in Esau the “flesh” is attractive. But wait, see how soon the beauty corrupts. Esau the “ruddy” becomes Edom, “the red one”; and his hue, like that of the red horse and the red dragon and the scarlet beast in Revelation 6, 12, and 17, betokens the fierce life within. The hair which at first bespeaks strength soon comes to indicate animal coarseness. Esau the strong becomes Edom the wild, the hunter, the slayer. After all, in Hebrew, the word “Edom” is actually a form of the word “Adam.” Edom is Adam, and Esau is the flesh again – outwardly fair but inwardly fierce. When he really expresses himself, see the value he puts on spiritual things; for a dish of lentils he scorns his birthright, even though he knows that the birthright from his grandfather Abraham downwards carries the Divine promises of great spiritual and future blessing. This is the “flesh” in every age. For a momentary gratification it will despise the hope of a heavenly glory, and esteem an earthly morsel in the present far more than a Divine promise for the future.

Edom pictures the “flesh” or Adamic-nature. See first its pride – “The pride of thine heart” (v.3); then see how strong its hold is – “Thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock”; then its defiance – “Who shall bring me down?”; then see its ambition – “though thou set thy nest among the stars”

(v.4); then its hatred of the spiritual – “thy violence against thy brother Jacob” (v.10); then see its real cruelty – (v.11-14). But on the other hand, see its self-deceivedness (v.3); its detestableness to God (v.2); its eventual defeat by the sons of faith (v.17-21); and its final destruction by God (v.10,18).

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

JONAH: SALVATION IS OF JEHOVAH

1. JONAH AND THE STORM

Disobedience – Fleeing from God

2. JONAH AND THE FISH

Preservation – Praying to God

3. JONAH AND THE CITY

Proclamation – Speaking for God

4. JONAH AND THE LORD

Correction – Learning of God

We also see “Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet which was of Gath-hepher” with king Jeroboam II in 2K.14:25. If this Jeroboam, who fulfilled Jonah’s prophecy, was a real enough person, so was this Jonah himself who uttered it. Second Kings fixes the time of Jonah’s ministry. It was during the later years of Joash, and (presumably) the earlier years of Jeroboam II.

Also, tradition strongly attests to the historicity of the narrative. Its early and unquestioned place in the Hebrew Scriptures at once argues the original belief of the Hebrews in its historicity.

Third, the word of Christ Himself conclusively confirms it. In Matthew 12:39-40 He says, “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonah, for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” He also states, “The men of Nineveh shall rise in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here” (Mat.12).

And the PHYSICAL miracle of the “whale” is not nearly so wonderful as the MORAL miracle of Nineveh’s repentance, or as the SPIRITUAL miracle of the Divine Self-revelation at the end of the book.

WHY DID JONAH FLEE?

In chapter 4:2 Jonah says to God, “Therefore I fled to Tarshish, because I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil.” Nothing could be franker than that! JONAH DID NOT WANT GOD TO SPARE NINEVEH. Moreover, Jonah had shown himself prepared to forfeit his prophetic office, prepared to flee into exile, prepared even to resign life itself, rather than that Nineveh should be spared! Now such deliberate self-abandonment, followed by such frankness to the One who, as Jonah well realized, could read his inmost motive, surely will persuade us that Jonah must have had some

far greater reason than any thought of personal safety, prejudice, prestige, or wishing to leave Nineveh to its doom.

There are two awesome facts about Assyria which gave Jonah a vehement dread of its wicked capital, Nineveh. First, ASSYRIA WAS THE RISING WORLD-POWER DESTINED TO DESTROY ISRAEL; and Jonah knew this. Second, THE NOTORIOUS BRUTALITY OF THE ASSYRIANS was such as to make the surrounding peoples shudder with a sickly terror of ever falling prey to them. They reveled in hideous cruelty on those whom they vanquished.

Jonah knew that Assyria was the nation which was predicted to destroy his own beloved land and people (Nah.2:12; 3:1-4,19). The Hebrew prophets were made aware of what was to happen consequent upon Assyria's rise to the mastery. Twenty, thirty or more years before the event, Isaiah foretold how Assyria would despoil Israel (7:17); and Hosea (9:3, 10:6-7, 11:5).

Yes, Jonah knew the bitter role that Assyria was intended to play; and when the almost unbelievable Divine announcement came to him, that Nineveh was to be destroyed within 40 days, his heart must have leapt with a sudden sense of relief. Gladder news had never come to him! Besides being a prophet, he was a man of Israel, and an ardent patriot, who loved his native land, and yearned as a shepherd over his beloved but wayward countrymen. What would he have done or given for their salvation? With what emotion he would cogitate on the Divine command – “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me”! So Nineveh's cup was full! The great Judge had passed sentence; and if Nineveh perished, then – oh, the gladness of the thought – Israel was saved! There was but one thing that Jonah feared; Jehovah was a merciful God; and if Nineveh cried to Him, even at the 11th hour, Assyria might be spared, and then Israel would perish. Oh that he might be quite sure that Nineveh would not be spared! But how could that be? Well, there was a way – he could leave Nineveh without the warning! Thus she would be left to reap the deserved harvest of her wickedness.

Jonah must now make the most costly choice of his life. He must choose between suffering the Divine vengeance upon himself for awful disobedience, and thus save Israel; or else he must go to Nineveh, and possibly cause the salvation of Nineveh, which would result in Israel's ruin. His mental agony resolves itself into the determination to flee rather than risk delivering the message. He would sacrifice himself that Israel might be saved; for if it came to a choice as to which should not be spared, Nineveh or Israel? – then let it be wicked Nineveh!

Jonah knew well enough the omnipresence of God. He knew that he would not escape Him, but he was willing to suffer the inescapable vengeance of Heaven if only Israel might be saved. Yes if only Israel might be saved – that was why Jonah fled.

Jonah and the Storm

The storm came because of him – because of his fleeing from the presence of Jehovah. Three times in the first 10 verses we have it that Jonah's flight was from “the presence of Jehovah.” These words were never meant to suggest that Jonah thought he could sail to a place where God was not! When Jonah “rose up to flee to Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord,” he was voluntarily forfeiting his prophetic office and his prophetic standing before Jehovah (2Chr.29:11). When the sailors realize the greatness of Jehovah from Jonah's own words, they are filled with consternation at having one of His prophets – a disobedient one – on board with them.

Understanding fully, now, Jonah's identity, they try their very utmost to spare him. But without success, they reluctantly cast him overboard into the foaming fury beneath, and lo, the storm at once dies away into dead calm! We are not surprised that these amazed men "feared Jehovah exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows."

One wonders what the next move of these sailors was after their scaring experience. They certainly could not have proceeded with their intended voyage, for all their cargo had been jettisoned, and probably their boat had been damaged. Presumably they would return to Joppa, to report on the happening, and to make new preparations. One wonders if they had actually seen the fish appear, and Jonah pass into its great wide mouth. Nor can one help wondering how soon and how far the story got around – possibly even as far as Nineveh, before Jonah himself ever got there!

Jonah and the Fish

The swallowing of Jonah by the "sea-monster" was not an act of punishment but of preservation. That, perhaps more than anything else, confirms the belief that Jonah's motive in fleeing was, the high motive of Israel's salvation.

Jonah's prayer from inside the great fish is not a cry for deliverance. Jonah knew that he was already being delivered. His prayer is really a psalm of praise. There is not one word of petition in Jonah's prayer. It consists of thanksgiving (2-6), contrition (7-8), and rededication (9). Inside that fish Jonah realized in a new way the wonderful love and care of his God. He learned as never before, that underneath and round about him were the "everlasting arms" of Jehovah. It was there too, that he came to understand with vividness the folly and futility of disobedience to God, for he said, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy" (rebuking himself for his own self-willed subterfuge). Still more, in that fish, Jonah recovenanted with God, saying, "I will pay that which I have vowed"; while his final word is "Salvation is of Jehovah." Thereupon, the fish discharged its unusual cargo, safe and sound at an unnamed port of call.

Jonah and the City

Most remarkable of all, perhaps, is that of Nineveh's repentance. How great this moral miracle was may be judged from the size of the city. Three times God speaks of Nineveh as "the great city." Its circumference was about 60 miles, containing about 350 square miles. The walls were 100 feet high, and so broad that three chariots could be driven abreast on them. They were fortified with 1500 towers, each of these being 200 feet in height. On the basis of the Scripture reference to the great number of young infants in Nineveh, namely the "120,000 persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand," the population is estimated about one million. The whole of this vast and populous metropolis repented, with an immediate and genuine repentance, at the preaching of this lone prophet from Israel?

Now a most significant clue to the reason why Jonah's appearance and proclamation at Nineveh created such an immediate stir is found in the New Testament, in our Lord's words – "This is an evil generation; they seek a SIGN; and there shall no SIGN be given unto it, but the SIGN of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was a SIGN unto the Ninevites, so shall the Son of Man be to this generation" (Lk.11:29-30). Jonah was a sign unto the old-time Ninevites, by this miraculous experience in the great fish; but the question at once presents itself, "How could Jonah have been a sign to them if the Ninevites DID NOT KNOW of Jonah's experience? How could it be otherwise than that this phenomenal story should reach Nineveh before ever Jonah got there? Also, Jonah's experience in the "whale" had perhaps left a bleached appearance

about him, we can well imagine what a startling and solemn “sign” he would be to the astonished Ninevites.

Still further, many revolts had shaken Assyria’s hold on its subjects, and contracted her boundaries. It began to look as though Assyria’s hour was coming. Jonah’s sudden cry came just at the most telling moment. It was like a spark on dried wood, or a thrusting in of the sickle when the harvest was dead ripe. The hearts of Nineveh’s thousands were bowed as the heart of one man.

Jonah and the Lord

Chapter 4 is a dialogue between Jonah and the Lord, and it gives us the supreme message of the book. Jonah is not only displeased and angry, but is dismayed at Israel’s dark future, now that Nineveh is to be spared. The Lord tenderly reproves him with the question, “Doest thou well to be angry?” Thereupon, Jonah, thinking that possibly there was still a gleam of hope, “went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, TILL HE MIGHT SEE WHAT WOULD BECOME OF THE CITY.” Here the Lord tenderly and patiently reasoned with His overwrought servant, by three “prepared” things – a gourd, a worm, and a wind.

First, God “prepared a GOURD, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to deliver him from his grief.” It has been truly observed that “the tenderness in the heart of God is manifested not only in His compassion for repenting sinners, but also in His patience with repining saints.” But with the next sunrise God also “prepared” a WORM, which “smote the gourd that it withered. Thus Jonah was now left exposed to the sun again.

Still further, however, God “prepared” a SULTRY EAST WIND. Poor Jonah, dispirited at the thought of Israel’s dark future now that Nineveh is to be spared, inadequately screened from the glare of the merciless sun, and reduced to utter lassitude by the sweltering heat, sinks down and yearns that he might die. He is roused by a voice, however. It is God speaking. “Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?” Jonah’s reply is, “I do well to be angry, even unto death.” This occasions the wonderful Divine utterance with which the book closes.

“Then said Jehovah: Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than 120,000 persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?”

This is the revelation of the heart of God to which the whole book has been moving, and for which indeed it was written. We are left in the presence of God, face to face with this moving revelation of the Divine compassion. We are told the story of this man and Nineveh because of what it reveals to us of GOD.

Ponder then this revelation of God. It is perhaps the most tender anticipation of John 3:16, the parable of the prodigal son, and the world-embracing message of the Gospel, to be found anywhere in the Old Testament. God’s tender patience with the resentful prophet, and His tender concern for the Ninevites, despite their wickedness, together give us a unique expression of the Divine compassion. See here the compassion of God toward penitent wicked-doers, and

toward innocent little children, and even toward dumb animals. He is as slow to punish as He is quick to pardon when there is penitence.

Jonah needed to learn that God's special favor toward Israel did not mean a lessened love for other peoples. He must learn that the Divine election is not arbitrary, but for the fulfilling of high purpose. Israel had not been chosen simply for Israel's own sake, but to fulfill a Divine purpose, the end of which was the blessing of ALL peoples. The election of the nation did not mean the rejection of others! The omnipresent Jehovah had an omnipresent care and concern and compassion toward ALL men and women, boys and girls, and even the lower animals.

Jonah's pity for the gourd was not only because a thing of beauty and fragrance had been ruined, but because the loss of the plant meant much to HIMSELF. Even so, God's pity toward the Ninevites is not only because of their instinctive preciousness as human souls, but because they mean much TO HIS OWN HEART. How that comparison must have set Jonah thinking! And how precious to ourselves is this thought that each one of us means much to the heart of the Eternal! And how it pulls at our heart-strings to know that each man and woman and boy and girl, of whatever race or clime or color, means something very tender in the mind of God! Surely this is the deepest inspiration of all overseas missionary activity – and this revelation was given to the first foreign missionary sent out from Israel! Even a modern critic like Dr. Arthur Peake is obliged to say, "That out of the stony heart of Judaism such a book should come, is nothing less than a marvel of Divine grace."

Jonah as a Type

First, Jonah typically foreshadows THE HISTORY OF HIS OWN NATION, ISRAEL. See the whole nation of Israel moving with him, just as a man's shadow on a wall behind him moves with him. See here the people of Israel – disobedient to the heavenly commission, as Jonah was; out of their own land as Jonah was; finding precarious refuge with the Gentiles as Jonah did; everywhere a trouble to the Gentiles, as Jonah was on that ship; yet witnessing to the true God, among the Gentiles, as Jonah did to those sailors; cast out by the Gentiles, as Jonah was cast out by the troubled seamen; yet miraculously preserved amid their calamities, as Jonah was miraculously preserved in the deep; calling on Jehovah, at last, in repentance and rededication, as Jonah did from inside the great fish; finding salvation and deliverance in Jehovah-Jesus, as Jonah found salvation in a new way in the deep, concluding his prayer with the words, "Salvation is of Jehovah"; and in the end becoming missionaries to the Gentile nations (Zec.8:13,20,23), as Jonah in the end, became God's missionary to Gentile Nineveh.

Second, Jonah typically anticipates the DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST. Jonah was inside the great fish for "three days and three nights." Why? So long as the fish had served the purpose of preventing drowning, might not the prophet been discharged from the fish without further delay? The Lord Jesus tells us why, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the sea-monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Hundreds of years before our Lord's incarnation, Jonah's entombment in the great fish should be sovereignly overruled to become a type in this way. For the inside of the fish is likened in Jonah's prayer, to Sheol (the Hades in the New Testament), into which our Lord went between the death and resurrection of His body, and where He "preached unto the spirits in prison" (1Pe.3:19). See note on the triple type of Christ's resurrection of Elijah, Elisha and Jonah in notes on II Kings. Following is a summary in type.

Jonah – Dies, goes down to Sheol, does not see corruption

Elisha – Dies and in his death gives life to others
Elijah – Ascends to heaven and Pentecostal Spirit is sent

Third, Jonah is a type of CHRIST HIMSELF AS GOD'S "SIGN" MESSENGER. Our Lord Jesus said, "As Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation." The late John Urquhart wrote, "Look back over those nearly 20 centuries and you will see the answer. When Jonah, having become a curse for his people, came back as it were from the dead, whither did he carry the word of the Lord? To Israel? No, to the Gentile city of Nineveh. And there he beheld what he had in vain longed and prayed to see among his own people – the turning of a whole city to God – the leaders for once leading in the right direction, and the entire people following and seeking God with purpose of heart. When Christ came back from the grave, and the word of the Lord was once more to be proclaimed, whither was it carried? It was borne to the Gentiles. And how fared it with the message there? The Word of Life, which Israel had rejected, these received. Age after age the Jew has been confronted with that sign. Out of the grave of the Crucified has come this power that has tamed the barbarian, changed the savage, cleansed and raised the hopelessly debased, brought back the outcast races into the brotherhood of man, and given to all who have received the message, the nobility, the spiritual insight, the compassions and the purity of the children of God. He who said that the Jew should have that sign read the future. He gave a promise, and, rising from the grave He has kept it. He has proved His claim to be the Son of God and the world's Savior. He has attested the Book of Jonah, He has attested the entire Scripture; and for us that attestation is final."

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

MICAH: PRESENT JUDGMENT, BUT FUTURE BLESSING

1. IMMINENT JUDGMENT DECLARED 1-3
2. ULTIMATE BLESSING PROMISED 4-5
3. PRESENT REPENTANCE PLEADED 6-7

It is good to know that in the Judean capital, the great prophet Isaiah had such a trusty comrade and fellow companion of truth as "Micah the Morashtite." Although Isaiah was a man of the schools and Micah a man of the fields, these two giants of faith would no doubt have their heart to heart consultations on the stirring doings of those eventful days. Probably Isaiah's ministry was more to the upper classes, and Micah's more to the lower. Our prophet calls himself a "Morashtite," which means that he was from Moresheth, a little place in Judea, near Gath on the Philistine border. He was a prophet of Judah, with Jerusalem as the center-point of his prophetic ministry and message, though he often also includes Samaria.

The central thought is: PRESENT JUDGMENT BUT FUTURE BLESSING. The present judgment is because of Israel's unfaithfulness to the Covenant. The future blessing is because of Jehovah's UNCHANGING FAITHFULNESS to it.

IMMINENT JUDGMENT

The "wound" in v.1:9 is the stroke of retribution. There had been earlier chastisements, but this coming one was to be "incurable," that is, they would not be recovery from it. Jehovah's rod to inflict the stroke would be Assyria; and after the Assyrians had laid low the northern kingdom

they also invaded the southern kingdom, even to Jerusalem itself (2K.18:9-19:37). "It (the stroke) is come unto Judah; it is come unto the gate of MY people, even to Jerusalem."

ULTIMATE BLESSING

In chapter 4 we have the future KINGDOM, in chapter 5 the future KING. To Micah and the Hebrew prophets it was given by the Spirit of inspiration to foresee a golden day-break of restoration beyond the grim nightfall of retribution. They were not given to see all the intervening historical processes; they did not discern the long period between the Messiah's first coming, as the suffering Servant to bear the curse of the Law, and His second coming, as King of kings, to administer the blessings of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants; but they DID see the eventual consummation. In 1 Peter 1:11 we learn that they actually studied their own writings to ascertain "what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." The present age of grace and of the Church was a secret of God and not divulged until apostolic times (Ef.3).

There is something rather thrilling in the fact that these Hebrew preachers of 25 centuries ago should be telling us even today of things which are still to happen. An unbiased consideration of such predictions as we have in Micah 4 and 5 will convince any honest mind that there has not yet been a fulfillment which satisfies all their intent. They await the Millennial age era for their full realization. They will burst into consummating occurrence at the reappearing of Israel's great Deliverer, the now rejected Christ.

And now in this 4th chapter, note the opening phrase, "In the last days." It clearly lifts the passage from any application merely to the prophet's own time, and points to the far future. Also note v.2. Nations other than Israel are to be in the Messianic kingdom and are to walk in the ways of Jehovah. And v.5 should read, "All the peoples now walk in the name of their god, but shall walk in the name of Jehovah our God forever."

Note also the sharp contrast Micah makes between the restoration promised for the LAST days, and the judgment imminent in HIS OWN. In v.1-8 he speaks of "in the last days" and "in that day." But see v.9-11, "NOW doest thou cry" and "NOW shalt thou go...to Babylon" and "NOW also many nations are gathered against thee"; and 5:1 "NOW...he hath laid siege against us"; and 5:3 says, "UNTIL" the coming of Christ.

This brings us to the remarkable prediction of the place of Christ's birth (5:2). Micah and Isaiah give the two clearest predictions concerning our Lord's incarnation. Isaiah foretells His birth of the VIRGIN. Micah tells the PLACE of His birth so plainly that when the Magi long after inquired of Herod where the King of the Jews should be born, the scribes answered without hesitation, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written of the prophet." Note that between the first half of Micah 5:3 and the second, the present age with its further scattering of the Jews intervenes, which Micah was not given to see. The rest of the 5th chapter looks on to the kingdom age yet to be. Note Israel's double aspect in v.7-8 – fresh as the dew, strong as the lion! Mark the regeneration of Israel in v.10-14. And in v.15 see the coming wrath on the earth's penitent peoples. This verse should read, "I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the nations which do not hearken."

REPENTANCE PLEADED

The last two chapters of Micah are in the form of a colloquy; and when read as such they light up with new interest. In chapter 6:1-2, the MOUNTAINS are exhorted to listen, like stately referees, to Jehovah's "controversy." Then in v.3-5, JEHOVAH pleads. In v.6-7 MICAH speaks, representing those in the nation who would fitly respond. In v.8 the overhearing mountains break in – "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Next, in v.9-16 JEHOVAH speaks to "the man of wisdom," wherever he is, in the city, exposing the nation's sin, and showing why the nation suffered. Then in 7:1-6, the unhappy NATION is impersonated as confessing its baneful state. In v.7-10 the "man of wisdom" speaks again. In v.11-13 it is Jehovah. In v.14 the man of wisdom. In v.15 Jehovah. Finally, from v.16 to the end it is the man of wisdom. These two chapters are Jehovah's pleading for REPENTANCE. They are the "application" of the great sermon preached in the foregoing chapters.

GREAT TRUTHS

Note first, THE PROFOUND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DIVINE DEALINGS WITH THE HEBREW NATION. Micah addresses a small people in a strip of land merely the size of Florida yet in 1:2 and 6:1-2, he commands the whole earth, the mountains, the hills to attend (frequently in Scripture mountains and hills symbolize kingdoms). Micah realized that the covenant people were brought into their unique relationship with Jehovah so that through them the sovereignty of the true God, in its governmental administration among the nations, might be objectified to all peoples and for all time. Had Israel remained faithful she would have displayed the munificence of the Divine government. Alas, Israel exhibits a tragically different yet vastly significant aspect of the Divine government.

Note too, the contrast which Micah strikes by THE UNMASKING OF FALSE RULERSHIP VERSUS THE UNVEILING OF TRUE RULERSHIP IN CHRIST. God delegates authority to human rulers. Micah recognizes this fact in the Divine economy, and addresses the princes, priests, and prophets as the ordained representatives of the Divine administration. Their responsibility is commensurately great. See Micah's scathing indictment of false rulership in chapter 3 vs. the arresting description of the TRUE "RULER," in chapter 5, who was yet to come. Christ is God's ideal of rulership. Micah traces the perversion and adversity of the people to the misrule of those over them, and all who abuse such authority incur equal penalty.

Finally, we revert to Micah's AUGUST DECLARATION AS TO THE TRUE ESSENCE OF RELIGION. Note that God "REQUIRES" for He is God. And God also REVEALS, for "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good..."(Dt.10:12).And when we turn to the New Testament, and learn there that God REDEEMS. He "requires" because He is God. He "reveals" because He is good. He "redeems" because He is love. The Christ of God has come already to redeem. He will come again to restore. Meanwhile let us view all our life in the light of the Divine purposes and the future reappearance of the great "Ruler" whose goings forth have been "from of old, even from everlasting."

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

NAHUM: THE DOOM OF NINEVEH

1. NINEVEH'S DOOM DECLARED
2. NINEVEH'S DOOM DESCRIBED

3. NINEVEH'S DOOM DESERVED

Of this prophet who tolls the knell over Nineveh practically nothing is known. He comes to us simply as "Nahum the Elkoshite"; that is, he was of Elkosh, a place which cannot now be located with certainty. It is surmised that he was of Galilee. His name is thought to be preserved in the Galilean city of Capernaum, the name of which (Kaphar-Nahum) means Village-of-Nahum. This much is certain, Nahum addresses Judah; and the impression left on the reader's mind is that he also wrote from Judah. He follows Isaiah, in the reign of Judah's most wicked king, Manasseh.

Jehovah and Nineveh

Nahum's oracle is given to one subject alone – the doom of Nineveh, capital of Assyria, and when Nahum wrote the world's greatest city. It is noteworthy that two books of the Minor Prophets are devoted wholly to Nineveh. Over a century before Nahum, Jonah had lifted up his voice for Jehovah in the great thoroughfares of Nineveh; and the Ninevites had learned through him that "Jehovah is slow to anger." Jonah would preach this to the Ninevites, and it would strike a sharp contrast between Jehovah and the fierce-tempered deities of the Assyrians. To this strangely welcome compassion of Jehovah, they responded; but soon afterward they had presumed upon it, going to greater lengths of wickedness than ever before. They must now learn through Nahum, that "Jehovah is a jealous God"; jealous of His rights over His creatures. They must now learn that wrath restrained (as in Jonah's time) is wrath RESERVED, if there is willful return to wickedness. Nahum takes up where Jonah left off. Like Jonah he says, "Jehovah is slow to anger" (1:3), but he adds the other side of the truth – "and great in power, AND WILL NOT AT ALL ACQUIT THE WICKED." These words are the key to this doom song of Nahum. The fact that two of the Minor Prophets are devoted to Nineveh emphasize its significance. This mighty metropolis of a bygone empire was meant to objectify for all peoples and for all time the governmental method of God with the Gentile nations. Though God will forgive sin repented of, He will not condone sin persisted in. Compassion can never be exercised at the expense of righteousness. Nineveh was the proudest and the fiercest, as well as the vilest of cities. The surrounding peoples cringed at her feet. She swelled with pride in the imagination of her seeming invulnerability. But now, besides rebuking Nineveh's pride, oppression, idolatry, and defiance of the sovereign Jehovah, Nahum publishes the irreversible decree that she shall be forever destroyed.

Practically throughout, it is poetic in form, and it is poetry unsurpassed for power of description. It opens with a description of the attributes and operations of God, and runs in three strophes. Chapter 1 asserts the CERTAINTY of Nineveh's overthrow. Chapter 2 depicts the SIEGE AND CAPTURE of the city. Chapter 3 tells of the WICKEDNESS which provoked the retribution. Nineveh's vastness was eclipsed by its VILENESS. The surrounding peoples shuddered with a sickly horror at the thought of ever being prey to them. Their mania for blood and savagery was gruesome and foul. The word of God to her is, "I will make thy grave, for thou art vile" (1:14).

NAHUM'S PROPHECY FULFILLED

One of the unanswerable arguments for the superhuman origin of the Bible is its amplitude of fulfilled prediction. Nahum's oracle on Nineveh is an impressive instance. His reference to "the gates of the rivers" being opened, and the palace "dissolved" (2:6), is striking in view of what actually happened. The Pulpit Commentary says, "This prophecy, so precise and assured, was the result of no human prevision. When Nahum prophesied, Assyria was at the height of its prosperity. No enemy in its neighborhood was left unsubdued; the distant Egypt had submitted

to its arms; Phoenicia and Cyprus owned its sway; Judah paid annual tribute; commercial enterprise had drawn unto it the riches of all nations. No one at this epoch could have seen the speedy end of this prosperity. In 50 years the end came. Nabopolassar made alliance with all the enemies of Assyria, and became the ruling spirit of a strong confederacy which comprised Medes and Persians, Egyptians, Armenians, and other nations, all animated with the fierce desire of revenging themselves on Assyria. About 612 B.C. the allied forces attacked Nineveh, but were repulsed with loss. Victory some time hovered over the Assyrians; but the enemy, reinforced from Bactria, proved irresistible. The Ninevites, fearing for their final safety, attempted to escape from the city. They were overtaken, and again shut up within their walls. Here they defended themselves for more than 2 years, when a circumstance against which no remedy availed laid them at the mercies of the besiegers. An unusual heavy flood of the Tigris carried away a large section of the huge rampart that surrounded the city. Through the gap thus formed the enemy forced their way within the walls and captured the place. The town was sacked, and a great number of the inhabitants were massacred. Thus fell Nineveh in 608 B.C., according to the prophecy of Nahum." So completely was Nineveh destroyed, we may add, that in the 2nd century A.D. even the site of it had become uncertain.

PARTING REFLECTIONS

The name of the prophet Nahum means Comfort; and frankly Nahum's dirge is real comfort for the godly. It is the comfort of knowing that in the righteous government of God, the outrages of impenitent evil-doers against their fellow-humans are Divinely required. Note the fact that Nahum scarcely mentions his own nation. He does not exult in Nineveh's downfall merely for Judah's sake, or for his own. Nineveh had sold whole peoples for her whoredoms and witchcrafts. Nahum voices the outraged conscience of mankind. Other than merely indulging revenge, he identifies himself with God's government in its guarantee that such wrongs shall not go without redress.

Again, Nineveh figures to us "this present evil world," in its outward display, its seeming security, its superficial response to God's message, its false religion, its inward corruption, its cruelty to the souls of men, and its eventual overthrow by Divine judgment. But there is another significant correspondence. In chapter 1:11 Nahum says to Nineveh, "there is one come out of thee that imagineth evil against Jehovah, a wicked counselor." Possibly Nahum here harks back to Rabshakeh, who a few years earlier, had come from Assyria to terrify Jerusalem (2K.18 & 19; Is.36). Rabshakeh certainly was a "man of sin" with a foul mouth speaking insolent things, and exalting the Assyrian sovereign above all gods, even above Jehovah Himself. He certainly adumbrated, if he did not actually typify the "man of sin" who is to appear toward the end of the present age. Again and again, in the course of history, the world spirit, the spirit of anti-christ, has expressed itself with blatant concentration through some outstanding personality. But there is yet to appear the Rabshakeh whose number is 666, through whom the forces of evil will vent their culminating defiance of the true God and His Christ. It will then be as it was with Rabshakeh and the suddenly death-smitten Assyrian host (Is.37:36); for it is written, "Then shall the lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the breath of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming" (2Thes.2:8). Yes, Nineveh is fallen. Jehovah will not acquit! His government is righteous. He is the stronghold of the godly. Christ is His supreme pledge. Lo, He comes, and every eye shall see Him! Wrongs shall be righted. The valleys shall be exalted, and the mountains brought low. The dark shall be made light, and the crooked straight; and the kingdoms of this world shall yet become the kingdom of our God and His Christ.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

HABAKKUK: THE QUESTIONINGS OF FAITH

CH.1 “BURDEN”: FAITH GRAPPLING WITH PROBLEM.

CH.2 “VISION”: FAITH GRASPING THE SOLUTION.

CH.3 “PRAYER”: FAITH GLORYING IN ASSURANCE.

Habakkuk, like any individual, is unique. Unlike the other prophets, he does not address either his own countrymen or a foreign people; his speech is to God alone. Again, unlike the other prophets, he is not concerned so much with delivering a message as with solving a PROBLEM – a problem which vexed his own sensitive soul relating to Jehovah’s government of the nations. The first part of this prophecy (1 & 2) is a COLLOQUY between Habakkuk and Jehovah. The remainder (3) is an exquisitely beautiful ode describing a majestic THEOPHANY, or visible coming of God to the earth. Both in the colloquy which it relates and in the theophany which it describes, this book of Habakkuk is unique.

The focus of Habakkuk’s problem and prophecy is BABYLON. Of the enemies which afflicted the covenant people long ago, three were outstanding – the Edomites, the Assyrians, and the Chaldeans (Babylonians). It was given to three of the Hebrew prophets to pronounce the doom of these three powers. The prophecy of Obadiah sealed the fate of Edom. The prophecy of Nahum tolled the knell over Assyria. The prophecy of Habakkuk dug the grave of Babylon. Now it was not until Nineveh had been destroyed that Babylon rose above the nations as the new dominating world power, which suggests that Habakkuk wrote either a little while BEFORE, or more probably, soon AFTER the fall of Nineveh, in 608 B.C. It was probably in Jehoiakim’s reign that Habakkuk wrote, somewhere about 600 B.C., and we are confirmed in this by II Kings 24, which gives the reign of this Jehoiakim as the time when the Babylonians began their harassing of Judah when eventually culminated in Judah’s seventy years’ Babylonian servitude.

Thus Habakkuk, contemporary of Jeremiah, was a prophet of fateful days in Judah. The dark storm-clouds were massing over Jerusalem. This prophecy of Habakkuk puts into words a struggle and triumph of faith which took place in the soul of the prophet himself. It begins with a sob, and ends with a song.

Chapter 1 – A “Burden”

The prophet here is in an agony of perplexity. He is beset by a double enigma of the Divine providence, or at any rate, what seems to be so. He sighs –

“O Lord, how long shall I cry, and Thou wilt not hear? I cry
out unto Thee of violence, and Thou wilt not save! Why does
Thou show me iniquity, and look upon perverseness? (v.2-4)

Habakkuk’s problem was the silence, inactivity, and apparent unconcern of God. Violence abounded; lawlessness was rife; blatant evils defied all protest from God’s prophets; and God

seemed to be doing nothing. But Habakkuk's problem on this score was cleared up by a special word from God-

"Behold ye among the nations, and regard, and wonder marvelously; for I work a work in your days which ye will not believe though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation; which march through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling-places that are not theirs."

This, however, to the distraught Habakkuk, only solved the one problem by raising a still bigger one. Certainly the crushing requital coming to Judah was deserved; but why should God punish Judah by means of a people far more wicked and ruthless than the Jews themselves? The thought of this was a painful shock to Habakkuk. It seemed hard to reconcile with his belief in the righteousness of Jehovah's government over the nations of the earth.

Habakkuk's plaintive further appeal to God is given in v.12-17, which should be read again in a revised version. What can Habakkuk do about it? After all, God is sovereign. It is no use beating one's head against the wall. Will God be gracious and give His servant some understanding of this matter? Habakkuk resolves to await God's word. He says, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and I will look forth to see what He will speak with me (2:1).

Chapter 2 – A "Vision"

In this chapter we have the wonderful "vision" which God gave to Habakkuk; and here faith finds a solution, though not a solution in the logical sense, but a spiritual solution which is thoroughly intelligible to faith. The chapter should be read again with special regard to two great pledges which God gives in v.4 and 14. Verse 4 says, "Behold his soul (the Babylonian's) is puffed up, it is not upright in him; BUT THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." And v.14 says, "FOR THE EARTH SHALL BE FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF THE LORD." If then, in chapter 1 we have a double problem, in chapter 2 we have a double pledge.

What is the meaning of these two assurances? Take the first – "The just shall live by his faith." The words might almost seem to occur in a merely incidental way; yet in reality they are so significant that they are quoted no less than three times in the New Testament as a decisive factor in evangelical argument (Ro.1:17, Ga.3:11, He.10:38). It should be understood at once that the words look beyond the body to the SOUL. This is indicated by the earlier half of the sentence, in which God says to the proud Chaldean, "Behold his SOUL is puffed up; it is not upright in him." That word "soul" betokens the deeper sense in which we are to read the remaining words of the sentence, namely, "the just shall live by his faith." The words look beyond the outward to the INWARD, beyond the merely physical to the SPIRITUAL, beyond the present to the FUTURE, beyond the intermediate and episodal to the ULTIMATE and the ETERNAL. It is as though God said to Habakkuk, "Yes, your estimate of the Chaldean is quite right; his soul is all wrong; but though I use him to chastise My people, he himself shall be brought to woe in the end; and although in the present painful process the righteous suffer with (and by) the wicked, yet the righteous shall never perish in the end like the wicked, but shall live because of his faith, as will yet be seen, for the earth shall yet be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord." The fact is that this word to Habakkuk is one of those prolific words of the Old Testament which must be read in the light of New Testament revelation if we are to grasp the full meaning. Those who by faith in the God of the Lord Jesus are justified, or made righteous, in

Christ, DO “live” by their faith, in the sense that they RECEIVE new spiritual life here and now, and SHALL live forever with Christ beyond the short years of mortality on earth.

As for the second pledge – “For the earth shall (yet) be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord”, that also must be read anew in New Testament light. Not yet have the words had fulfillment. They await the return of Christ. They look on to the Millennium. THEN the meek shall inherit the earth, and the controversy of history be resolved in the final vindication of the right and true. God’s word to Habakkuk is, “Though it tarry, WAIT for it; because it will surely come” (2:3). God has given supreme pledge in Christ that He is indeed working out great and gracious purposes for mankind. Habakkuk himself grasped something of this, and said, “Jehovah is in His holy temple; LET ALL THE EARTH KEEP SILENCE BEFORE HIM” (2:20).

Chapter 3 – A “Prayer”

This “prayer” of Habakkuk is really a sublime rhapsody of faith. It begins, with an appeal to God, to grant a gracious revival “in the midst of the years,” before ever his ultimate purpose for history has worked out to its final fulfillment (3:2). Then, from v.3-15 there is a glorying in Jehovah’s mighty deeds of the past, His coming forth for the emancipation of Israel, His marvels from the time of the Exodus onwards. There can be no doubt that Habakkuk here refers to these things; yet significantly enough he puts his verbs in the FUTURE tense, so that from the imagery of the Exodus and the journeying to Canaan there is a solemn picturing of a far greater coming of God to judgment which is yet to be. Thus v.3 should really read, “God SHALL COME from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran”; similarly the future tense in most of the verses. “Teman” and “Paran” are the land of Edom, and the land between Edom and Egypt.

Finally, in v.16-19, we have a postlude, in which faith soars on wings above all doubts and fears. It does the heart good to read such exulting words of assurance in days like these. Although the prophet had “trembled” at the coming judgment upon his own people (v.16), he now speaks of himself as “I who shall REST in the day of tribulation.” That is the more literal translation. Though he should be brought to utmost destitution, yet he says, “I will rejoice in Jehovah; I will joy in the God of my salvation.” The literal is, “I will jump for joy in the Lord; I will spin round for delight in God.” Here is the hilarity of faith! – joy at its best with circumstances at their worst! What a victory! May it be ours!

Such then is the book of Habakkuk. In chapter 1 we have a twofold PROBLEM; in chapter 2 a twofold PROMISE; in chapter 3 a twofold PRODUCT – praise for the past and confidence for the future. In chapter 1 we have faith SIGHING; in chapter 2 faith SEEING; in chapter 3 faith SINGING.

The key verse to Habakkuk is 2:4 – “The just shall live by his faith”; and around this truth precious lessons for faith are written. The living message of the little book is clear, “Faith has still its problems.” If Habakkuk’s days seemed draped with dark enigmas, even more do our own. But this book tells us not to judge merely by the appearances of the hour. God has given us great promises, and is working out great purposes. He cannot tell us the whole in so many words; but He has revealed enough to make faith intelligent, and to give it scope for development.

There is also truth of high value for us in the process by which Habakkuk passed from his sob of doubt to his song of trust. First, he told his honest doubt to GOD, and not to any mere human “brain trust.” If we would only do that instead of sighing abroad our doubts on human ears, what

unrest we would escape! But second, Habakkuk resolved to WAIT on God. He said, “I will get to my watchtower. I will wait to see what it all means.” Nor did God mock him. Nor does God ever mock such a man. We do not know how long Habakkuk waited; but we do know God answered him. Oh, if we would only give God time, so that He might prepare our minds for what He has to say! People say that God does not speak to men today as He did long ago. The truer statement is that men do not listen today as they did of old. To the man who waits, God does not remain silent. Thus thirdly, Habakkuk broke through to joyous certitude and song. He had seen a vision. All was changed. When he had looked at circumstances he was in despair. When he waited and heard God speak he began to sing.

Finally, let us keep Habakkuk’s golden hope before us, that the earth shall yet be filled with the glory of the Lord. The age is far spent. The final epoch hastens to us. The vision has tarried; but now it speeds to its full realization. Christ is coming soon; the big events of our time are the solemn heralds of His return. God help us to wait with the patience of a true hope, to watch with the eye of a true faith, to work with the zeal of a true love – until He come!

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

ZEPHANIAH: THROUGH JUDGMENT TO BLESSING

LOOK WITHIN! – WRATH COMING ON JUDAH (1:1-2:3)

The purpose of Jehovah to judge 1-6

The “Day” of Jehovah “at hand” 7-18

And so – plea to Jerusalem 2:1-3

LOOK AROUND! – WRATH ON ALL NATIONS (2:4-3:8)

West, East – Philistia, Moab, Ammon 4-11

South, North – Ethiopia and Assyria 12-15

And so – “Woe” to Jerusalem 3:1-8

LOOK BEYOND! – AFTER WRATH, HEALING (3:9-3:20)

Conversion of Gentile peoples 9

Restoring of Covenant people 10-15

And so – the NEW JERUSALEM 16-20

In introducing himself to us, Zephaniah gives his pedigree more fully than any other of the prophets. We can understand how a prophet like Zephaniah would be grateful to show his near descent from a king like Hezekiah. So, Zephaniah is by distinction the prophet of royal descent. He is a prince of the house of David, and the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah. He also tells us when he prophesied. It was “in the days of Josiah.” We can well appreciate that king Josiah, in his noble religious reforms, would have the ardent backing of his prophet – cousin. It may be that much of the urge toward these reforms came from Zephaniah, who would have the intimate influence of a relative in the royal house. There is something pathetic however, about the religious reforms in the days of King Josiah. Outwardly it was impressive perhaps, but inwardly it was far from what was needed. Noting particularly the words of prophetess Hulda to Josiah (2K.22:15-20). In effect the prophetess said, “Yes, King Josiah, do all that is in your mind; it is good, but the heart of this people is become gross; there will not be a real heart turning to God such as would avert judgment.”

We are not greatly surprised, therefore, that our prophet Zehaniah does not make mention of these outward reforms. His perceiving eye left him in no doubt as to the real state of the nation's life. He exposes the transgressions and pollutions of his days, and with a stern vehemence warns his people that the "Day of Jehovah" hastens toward them, with its tornado of Divine wrath. The two prophets Joel and Zephaniah are in an emphatic way the prophets of judgment against Judah; yet both of them, having delivered their message of judgment, foretell a glorious aftermath. The final passage from Zephaniah's pen is one of the most beautiful in the Scriptures. It looks on to that promised age which is yet to be, when Israel's Messiah, the Church's Divine Husband, shall hold empire over all the earth.

Zephaniah's Threefold Message

PART 1 – In all this run of verses there is no mention of the outside nations. The theme is the sin and coming judgment of JUDAH. Note the one grimly significant "BECAUSE" in 1:17. "Because they have sinned against Jehovah." And note also, that this part of the book ends with an appeal for repentance, and an encouraging word to the little company of upright ones among the degraded populace (2:1-3).

PART 2 – Here the prophet looks away from Jerusalem and Judah to THE SURROUNDING NATIONS. Note that this part concludes with a sudden turning round on Jerusalem again, the point being that if God so smites the surrounding nations with judgment, how certainly will He smite the people of Judah who have had privileges above all others! "I have cut off the nations; their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by; their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. I said, surely (in view of all this) thou (Jerusalem) wilt fear Me, thou wilt receive instruction ... but they rose early and corrupted all their doings ... Therefore ... I rise to the prey" (3:6-8).

PART 3 – Blessings shall come to Israel and to all peoples alike, after the days of judgment have served their purpose. The passage begins, "For then will I turn to the PEOPLES (not singular as in the authorized version) a pure language, that they may ALL call upon the name of Jehovah, to serve Him with one consent." In this the vision of Zephaniah is like that of other prophets. The coming Messianic kingdom is to embrace all the nations. Yet the covenant people are to be the center of that kingdom; and therefore Zephaniah concludes by picturing the exalted blessings of Israel in that golden age. There is to be a regathering of the dispersed (v.10). There is to be a changed temper and behavior of the people (v.11-13). There is to be banishment of evil, and an exulting joyousness (v.14-15). God Himself is going to find utter pleasure in the Holy City and her people; it shall be said to Zion, "Jehovah, thy God, is in the midst of thee, the Mighty One who will save; He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love; He will joy over thee with singing" (v.16-17). All afflictions are to be forever over, and Israel is to be made "a praise among all the peoples of the earth" v.20. It is a delectable picture indeed, and sets our longing hearts praying the more fervently, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

The key thought is not expressed so much in any one verse as in the CONTRAST between the very first and last verses. After the superscription, the first word is, "I WILL UTTERLY CONSUME." This is the fierce fire of judgment. But the last word of the book is, "I WILL MAKE YOU A NAME AND A PRAISE." This is the final fullness and blessing.

God has a glorious end and purpose in view; but even that golden goal must not be gained at the expense of absolute justice and righteousness in the present; and therefore present sin must be equated by present judgment. Yet even so, the ultimate purpose shall be realized, for

the sovereign Jehovah so overrules, that, however grievously His people sin, and however grievously He must punish, the present process of judgment shall eventually issue in the final blessing. There must be the smiting with retribution before there can be the smiling of restoration. Thus we may say that the key thought of Zephaniah is, "THROUGH JUDGMENT TO BLESSING." Closely allied with this is the thought that, "Jehovah is in the midst." He is in the midst of Jerusalem to JUDGE (3:5); and He is in the midst of Jerusalem to SAVE (3:15-17). Well may we sing –

"And though His arm is strong to smite
'Tis also strong to save."

Big Meanings

Here was a man who had the mind of God on the national and international situation when few others, if any, had taken the measure of it or sensed the gravity of it; and he declared it even though it was severely unpopular. This is ever the mark of the true prophet. This man saw beneath the sudden new burst of religious activity, and judged it for what it was really worth. He looked out on the larger crowd of the populace, the irreligious lot, who simply nodded an artificial respect for the new stir of Jehovah-worship because the king was chief patron, but who had said among themselves that these religious ideas were now played out, that "Jehovah will not do good, neither will He do evil" (1:12), or in other words, that Jehovah just didn't bother and didn't matter – Zephaniah looked out on these and saw the tragic farce of their unconcern. He had heard the sickening thud and rumble of a coming judgment which would crush the nations to pieces; he knew that soon there would be upon them the biggest calamity since Israel had become a nation. Zephaniah knew and cried to his countrymen, "The Day of Jehovah is at hand!" (1:7). This is his great theme, especially in the first part of his prophecy (1:1-2:3).

And now the time is once more here when we must lift up our cry that "The Day of the Lord is at hand!" Zephaniah's fervid depicting of "The Day of Jehovah" – the awful judgment which was determined on his own generation, is really an adumbration of that all eclipsing "Day of the Lord" which is to be at the end of the present age. And unless we are strangely deceived, the words of the Book, together with the signs of the times, point to its near approach. The religious and social conditions are morally similar to those of Zephaniah's days. Despite the new bursts of religious activity of different groups, and the strong passion for conferences on denominational reunion, the spiritual condition of the churches and the people is worse than at any time since just before the Methodist revival.

That day will be joy superlative for Christ's own, the blood-bought, Spirit-born members of the true Church; but it is well that we should cry aloud the TERROR of that day to many others. This is the aspect of it which grips and excites Zephaniah. Mark his phrases as he struggles to impress his lethargic fellow countrymen with the dread of it: "That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of waste and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities and against the high towers" (1:15-16).

The popular attitude today is exactly that of Zephaniah's time – "The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil," that is, God doesn't act in human affairs, He neither blesses or punishes; the world is governed by "natural laws," and God doesn't interfere with these laws to give supposed answers to prayers. God's existence is remotely admitted, but His interest and activity in human affairs is denied.

Finally, let us learn the threefold truth that God permits, but punishes, and in the end perfects. Men are free agents. God allows enough freedom to the human will for any man to know at any time that he is thinking and speaking and choosing and acting of his own volition. Thus God PERMITS sin – and suffering. If God were to intervene everytime the innocent are made to suffer by the wicked there would be no history at all. But God PUNISHES the wicked – usually by overruling natural processes, and not by miracles. Thus, He allows Israel to be punished through the agency of wicked nations; but in turn He punishes these nations for their own wrongs. In this process the innocent often suffer; but God has pledged a final restitution; and He has pointed us to a time when the present darkness shall give way before a sorrowless daybreak, and the present travail shall be forgotten in the tender triumph of love and virtue. Smiting will give place to smiling. The peoples shall serve the Lord “with one consent.” God will PERFECT His purpose, and fulfill all His promises. Christ shall reign. The curse shall be gone. God will rejoice over His redeemed sons and daughters. He will rest in His love. He will “joy over them with singing.”

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

HAGGAI: “FROM THIS DAY ON I WILL BLESS YOU”

FIRST MESSAGE – TO AROUSE 1:1-15

Date – Sixth month, first day.

Crux – “Build the House” v.8

SECOND MESSAGE – TO SUPPORT 2:1-9

Date – Seventh month, 21st day.

Crux – “I am with you” v.4

THIRD MESSAGE – TO CONFIRM 2:10-19

Date – Ninth month, 24th day.

Crux – “From THIS day will I bless you”

FOURTH MESSAGE – TO ASSURE 2:20-23

Date – Ninth month, 24th day.

Crux – “In THAT day I will make thee...”

This book covers a period of merely four months and it puts on record one of the crucial turning points of the Divine dealings with Jerusalem and the covenant people. It has to do with the Jewish “remnant” who returned to Judea and the rebuilding of the temple.

In 520 B.C. this otherwise unknown prophet Haggai stood forth and voiced his message to the leaders of the returned Jews. This was 16 years after the decree of Cyrus for the rebuilding of Jehovah’s temple, 14 years after the foundation had been laid and the work halted. Adversaries from the mongrel race of the Samaritans had opposed them, and now with Artaxerxes, Cyrus’ successor in power.

The repatriated Jews seemed to have accepted the situation with an almost fatalistic resignation. This was the result of a wrong reaction to prophecy. Jeremiah had predicted a seventy year period of “desolations” on Jerusalem. The Jews of the returned “Remnant” seemed to have mistakenly inferred (despite God’s sign to them by the edict of Cyrus) that even the temple could not be rebuilt until the period of the “desolations” had run their course. It is this

which the prophet Haggai has in mind in his very first words, "This people say, The time is not come, the time that Jehovah's house should be built" v.1:2. They were paralyzed by a wrong attitude to prophecy.

Now the pivotal significance of Haggai lies in the fact that this very year in which he uttered his fourfold prophecy, 520 B.C., was THE YEAR WHICH ENDED THE PERIOD OF THE "DESOLATIONS" AND INTRODUCED A NEW PERIOD OF DIVINE BLESSING. Through the lips of the inspired Haggai, the Spirit of God had marked and emphasized the point of transition, to the very month, and even to the very day.

"Consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord ... consider now from this day and upward, from the 24th day of the 9th month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it ... from this day will I bless you."

The last deep shadow of that night slinks away, a new sun has risen. Here is a word of new hope, heralding good things to come. This is Jehovah's announcement – "FROM THIS DAY WILL I BLESS YOU." This is the crux of Haggai's message. Four times within four months in that notable "second year of Darius," 520 B.C. the "word of Jehovah" came through the lips of this prophet. Each of the four communications is carefully dated, and each has its own clear focus-point.

The Four-Fold Message

In his first address his purpose is to reprove the people for their neglect, and to arouse them to immediate action. They were presuming on prophecy, and saying, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." Whatever their original reason might have been it had degenerated to a mere excuse for negligence of religious duty and for the pursuance of selfish interests. "Consider your ways!" cries the prophet. "Is it time for YOU to dwell in YOUR ceiled houses (expensive and embellished), while this House (of Jehovah) lies waste?"

There are those among us today who presume upon prophecy, and say, "The time has not come." They mislead or excuse themselves into inactivity on this plea, when they ought to be spending themselves in the effort to win our present generation for Christ. The mistake of the returned Jewish exiles is a case in point. They had given way to a feeling that there was a hopeless inevitability in things. Present effort was of no use; they must just wait until the clock of prophecy struck the predestined hour. The result was indifference, and the cause of God suffered. The people were getting used to being without a temple; and this would have proved fatal.

Who says that there cannot or will not be another great ingathering of souls before Christ returns? "Consider your ways," says Haggai. "Go up ... and build the House." WHILE REGENERATION AND REVIVAL ARE THE SOVEREIGN ACT OF GOD, EVANGELISM IS THE CONSTANT OBLIGATION OF THE CHURCH. The Divine sovereignty and human endeavor are not mutually exclusive; they are meant to be co-operative. It is not the case of "either ... or ..." It is not the case of either "waiting on God" or "working for revival"; it must be the two together – waiting and working. It is not a choice between agonizing in prayer or organizing an effort.

Haggai's second message is a striking one. Its purpose was to encourage. Some of the older Jews who remembered the former temple were downcast at the contrast between it and that which was now being built. Haggai therefore heartens them by a declaring of three great facts. (1) Jehovah's covenant with Israel still stands, and Jehovah's faithfulness to it continues v.5, (2) the Spirit of God still remains among them v.5, (3) God's promise is that there shall yet be a great shaking, that One shall come who is the Desire of all nations, and that "the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former" v.6-9. These are the three great things that must ever inspire ourselves – the covenant, the Spirit's presence, the promised return of the King. A shaking – an advent – a glory filled temple; this is the landscape of promise.

We have already mentioned Haggai's third message. The people had expected a return to material prosperity as a result of recommencing work on the temple. But Haggai now points out that God was not under obligation to them for their renewed work on the temple. Instead of having special merit, they were defiled; and it was grace on God's part to accept them. Yet now, none the less, God would give them a special sign of His favor, for FROM THIS DAY onwards He would bless them.

The fourth message is to Zerubbabel himself, and beyond him to the ultimate consummation of the Davidic line in the coming reign of Christ. Zerubbabel is here addressed as the representative of the Davidic line. Once more God speaks of the great shaking which is to come, but adds that "in THAT DAY" Zerubbabel shall be as a signet (the sign of authority). The signet was used of his grandfather, king Jeconiah, in a tragic way, to express God's rejection of him, "As I live, saith the Lord, though Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim King of Judah were the signet upon My right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence" (Jer.22:24). In the last great victory of the Divine purpose, Christ, the greater Son and wonderful Antitype of David and Zerubbabel, will be Jehovah's signet whereby He shall impress and imprint upon all nations His own majesty, His own will and ways, His own perfect ideal, and His own very image. Jeremiah's 70 year period of servitude (606 – 536 B.C.)

Began with Jehoiakim's submission to Nebuchadnezzar in 606 B.C. and ended with the proclamation of Cyrus in 536 B.C. The Revised Version correctly translates it, "Thus saith the Lord, After seventy years be accomplished FOR Babylon, I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place" (Jer.29:10). God had appointed 70 years "FOR Babylon" to rule over the nations. He nowhere said the Jews would have to be there for 70 years, but that they would be in SERVITUDE to them.

Jeremiah's 70 year period of desolations (590 – 520 B.C.)

This was as a consequence of Israel's further impenitence (Jer.25:9-11, Dan.9:1-2, Zech.1:12). The day when the siege began was the 10th day of the 10th month (Tebeth) 590 B.C. in the 9th year of Ezekiel's captivity in Babylonia (Ez.24:1-2, 2K.25:1, Jer.52:4). This is the first time in the historical books that an event is dated to the very day. From this date down to the date emphasized by Haggai (2:15-19) the 24th day of the month Chisleu, 520 B.C. is 25,200 days, exactly 70 years of 360 days each.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

ZECHARIAH: I AM JEALOUS FOR ZION

EARLY PROPHECIES: TEMPLE BEING REBUILT 1-8

A Sevenfold vision: Horses, horns & smiths, measuring line, reclothing Joshua, candlestand, roll-ephah-women, chariots.

A Fourfold message: 7:1-7, 8-14, 8:1-17, 18-23.

LATER PROPHECIES: AFTER TEMPLE REBUILT 9-14

The coming Shepherd-King, and Zion's consequent blessing 9-10

The offending of the Shepherd-King, and its tragic results 11

The final travail and triumph of Zion; Jehovah's victory 12-14

The little scroll of Haggai might almost be considered an introduction to this larger work from Zechariah. Zechariah was both a priest and a prophet. When many times the prophets had to stand in sharp opposition to the priest, Zechariah had united in himself all the sacerdotal traditions of the Aaronic priesthood with the zeal and authority of the prophet. Nothing could have been more timely than that the one voice should have this double appeal.

It is worthy of note that from this time the priesthood takes the lead in the nation. As to government the history of the covenant people falls into three main periods.

- (1) From Moses to Samuel we have Israel under the JUDGES.
- (2) From Saul to Zedekiah we have Israel under the KINGS.
- (3) From Jeshua and the repatriation of the Remnant, down to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 we have Israel under the PRIESTS.

Contents and Analysis

The first eight chapters are mainly VISION-prophecies, the remaining six chapters are wholly DIRECT prophecies. The first eight prophecies were written DURING the rebuilding of the temple; the remaining six chapters were written considerably AFTER the temple was rebuilt. The first eight have a PARTICULAR & IMMEDIATE reference to the Jewish "Remnant" now back in the land; the remaining six have a GENERAL & FAR-REACHING reference to Israel as a whole, to the ultimate future, and to the Gentile nations. The contents of the first eight are CAREFULLY dated (1:1, 7; 7:1); the contents of the remaining six are NOWHERE dated.

In the first part we have SEVEN VISIONS with a follow-up message of application to "all the people of the land." The second part of the book consists of one continuous, unfolding prophecy which looks beyond the prophet's own time to the conquests of Alexander the Great, and the sway of the Greek empire, and the heroic struggles of the Maccabees, and the coming of Israel's Shepherd-King, the Messiah. It trumpets the King's first advent, then, in veiled, mystic phraseology, tells of His rejection, and then sweeps on to His second advent, overleaping the present age and depicting the final travail and triumph of Zion, when the bells on the horses and the posts in the kitchens shall be "holiness unto the Lord."

It runs in three movements. First, in chapters 9 and 10, we have the coming Shepherd-King, and Zion's consequent blessing. Second, in chapter 11, we have the offending of the Shepherd-King, and its tragic results. Third, in chapters 12 to 14, we have Zion's final travail and triumph, and Jehovah's ultimate victory.

The key-word here in Zechariah is, "I am (become) jealous for Zion (again); I am returned unto Jerusalem with mercies" (1:14-16, 8:1-3).

The Seven Symbolic Visions

The seven visions described in the first part of the book are really seven in one, for they all came, so it would seem, in the one night, that of the 24th day of the 11th month (Sebat), in the second year of Darius. Take the FIRST of them, THE FOUR HORSES AND THEIR RIDERS. Zechariah sees an angel patrol drawn up among the myrtles in the vale. These heavenly "scouts" report to the Angel of Jehovah the result of their survey of world conditions; the nations are "at ease." Zechariah is intended to grasp that although the surrounding nations are at careless ease while Jehovah's remnant suffer hardships, and although there may seem little sign that judgment is about to fall on these wicked nations, according to Jehovah's word through Haggai (v.2:22), yet in the invisible realm, God is watching, and the heavenly powers are already preparing for the stroke of retribution. The Angel of Jehovah asks, "O Jehovah of hosts, how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which Thou hast had indignation these seventy years?" The answer is, "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very sore displeased with the nations that are at ease, for I was but for a little (while) displeased (with Jerusalem and Judah) and they (the nations) helped forward the affliction (lit. 'they helped for evil'). Therefore, thus saith Jehovah: I AM RETURNED TO JERUSALEM WITH MERCIES: MY HOUSE SHALL BE BUILT IN IT, SAITH JEHOVAH OF HOSTS, AND A LINE (A MEASURING-LINE FOR ITS REBUILDING) SHALL BE STRETCHED FORTH UPON JERUSALEM." Clearly then, the essential point in this first vision-picture is that Jehovah has now become jealous again for Jerusalem, and is about to punish the nations for their abuse of His covenant people.

The SECOND and THIRD visions re-express this very same fact under different symbols. In the second vision Zechariah sees "four horns" and then "four carpenters" which come to "fray" them. The four horns are the four nations which have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem, and the four carpenters are Jehovah's agencies of judgment against these nations. In the third vision Zechariah sees "a young man" with "a measuring line" going to "measure Jerusalem." But a heavenly messenger runs to this young man saying, "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as TOWNS WITHOUT WALLS, for the multitude of men and cattle therein" (that is, it would exceed all the wall measurements which this young man was intending to take, so great would be its prosperity). Jehovah Himself should be Jerusalem's wall, as v.5 continues, "For I, saith Jehovah, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her." Here again we see the judgment of the nations, and the return of Jehovah's favor toward Jerusalem – Jehovah has become jealous for Zion.

In the FOURTH vision-scene, Zechariah is shown "Joshua the high priest (of the returned remnant) standing before the Angel of Jehovah, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him." During the period of the "desolations" Jerusalem has been rebuked and chastised, and her priests and people have suffered Jehovah's indignation. But now there is a change. It is shown in the reclothing of Joshua, the representative of the covenant people. Instead of rebuke against Joshua, it is now Satan who is rebuked, and Joshua, representative of the returned remnant, is a "brand plucked out of the fire." Joshua's filthy garments are removed, the symbolic meaning of which is THE REMOVING OF INIQUITY. Joshua is then clothed with "rich apparel" and a "diadem" is set on his head, and a new commission and promise for the future are given him. Quite clearly again we have Jehovah's return of favor to His people and city.

The FIFTH vision, that of the golden candlestick and two olive trees, is a special encouragement to Zerubbabel, the CIVIL leader of the remnant, as the preceding vision was to Joshua, the RELIGIOUS leader. The mountain should become a plain before him, and he should certainly

complete the rebuilding of the temple. Verse 10 is the crux which should read, "Who hath despised the day of small things (the poor looking beginnings of the rebuilding)? For these seven eyes of Jehovah (the seven lamps of the candlestick) which run through all the earth SHALL BEHOLD WITH JOY THE PLUMMET IN THE HAND OF ZERUBBABEL." Once again the meaning is that of Jehovah's new pleasure and favor toward Zion. Verse 12 should read, "What be these two olive branches which through the two golden spouts (or tubes) pour out from themselves the golden oil?" (the oil dropped of itself from the fruit-bearing branches into two spouts or channels which conveyed it to the central reservoir). The answer is, "These are the two sons of oil which stand by the Lord of the whole earth" – Joshua and Zerubbabel, as representing the covenant people, and through whom the spirit of Jehovah was now flowing again to bless.

In the SIXTH vision Zechariah sees a huge scroll (30'x15'), passing through the air, and is told that this is the curse which goeth forth against wickedness in the land. When God sets up His house (as in the preceding vision) His word goes forth (as in this vision) to judge and sentence all that is not in harmony with that house. There cannot be a restoration of Jehovah's blessing without the expulsion of that which is evil. That large, floating scroll, open for all to read, explains why there had been such adversity among the remnant: it was Jehovah's curse upon the evil which was still permitted. But now, Zechariah is shown what is to be done to the evil. It is to be removed to Babylon. The "ephah" was the largest of the dry measurements used by the Jews (6 or 7 gallons). The outstanding point of the vision is plain enough. Let the false swearing and stealing which were extracted on the flying scroll go where they properly belong, even to Babylon, the seat of anti-Godism right from the days of Nimrod (Gen.10:10). If the "ephah" was the old-time Jewish symbol for TRADE, then the woman in the ephah would represent Babylonian corruption which was leavening commerce among the returned remnant. The proper home for such corruption is not Jerusalem, the city of Jehovah, but Satan's rival city, Babylon.

Finally, in the SEVENTH vision, and the symbolic CROWNING OF JOSHUA, which follows it, we see again Jehovah's judgment on the Gentile nations, and His return of favor toward Jerusalem. There can be little doubt that the four war-chariots represent swift-coming Divine judgment. The four angel drivers are "the four spirits of the heavens which go forth from standing before the Lord of the whole earth" – thus corresponding to the four angels of Rev. 7, as Jehovah's agents of JUDGMENT. Special judgment is meted to "the north country" from where the great Gentile invaders had come. But in marked contrast with this, there comes to Zechariah – apparently at dawn – the instruction to enact a remarkable CORONATION CEREMONY. He was to receive silver and gold from certain Jewish visitors who were present from Babylon, and to make a composite diadem with which to crown Joshua, the new high priest at Jerusalem. Then he was to say, "Behold the man whose name is the BRANCH, and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of Jehovah ..." There is here a definite type reference to Christ. But the immediate meaning, is that Jehovah, besides sending forth His chariot judgments on the surrounding Gentile powers, has returned with mercies and gracious promises to the remnant of His people.

In these seven visions of Zechariah we can see the unifying idea: "I AM JEALOUS (AGAIN) FOR JERUSALEM AND FOR ZION WITH A GREAT JEALOUSY; and I am sore displeased with the nations that are at ease; for I was but a little while displeased, and they helped for evil. Therefore, thus saith Jehovah, "I AM RETURNED TO JERUSALEM WITH MERCIES." We are now at chapters 9-14 which constitute one of the most remarkable prophecies ever penned. Many of the translation obscurities can be overcome by reading one of the newer

English translations. Chapter 9-10 is about THE COMING SHEPHERD-KING, AND ZION'S CONSEQUENT BLESSING. In verses 1-8 Zechariah gives his prelude of predicted judgments on the Gentile nations, and then in v.9 he breaks out in rhapsody over the coming King and the coming blessing on Zion. Also in this chapter we find the prediction of the period of the Maccabees, which led up to the first coming of Zion's King, which COULD have led right to the final struggle and victory of Zion which is depicted in the 10th chapter, had it not been for the unbelief and sin of the Jews. As a result of what happened when Zion's King first came and offered Himself, nineteen hundred years ago, the final struggle and victory now depicted in chapter 10 are postponed, and the present age intervenes (as it does between 9:1-10). Zechariah, like the other O.T. prophets, is not enlightened as to the present long interval of the "Church" age (Eph.3). It may be asked, "Why did not God reveal this in advance since He foreknew that it would come to pass?" The answer is twofold. First, if God had plainly revealed this beforehand, then the Lord Jesus could never have come and made a real, BONA FIDE offer of Himself as Messiah; and God could never have tested the Jews in relation to Him. Second, God HAS been pleased to foreshow the rejection and crucifixion of Christ again and again in Old Testament prophecy, so that we ourselves, in this present age, both Jew and Gentile, may know that He had anticipated and graciously overruled the unbelief and sin of the Jews when Christ first came to them.

Part II – THE OFFENDING OF THE SHEPHERD-KING, AND ITS TRAGIC RESULTS (11).

This part, like the former, begins with an outburst of calamities on the surrounding powers – Lebanon and Bashan and the pride of Jordan, denoting areas north, northeast and east, just beyond the bounds of the area which was now occupied by the Jews. Then Zechariah tells us how Jehovah instructed him to "feed the FLOCK OF SLAUGHTER" (Judah), and how he did so (emblematically), and what eventuated.

Thus the true Shepherd is despised and rejected, with tragic consequences. The remaining tell of a faithless shepherd who should exploit the flock. The big fact to grasp is that the transaction of the thirty pieces of silver, in the light of Matthew 28:9-10, clearly has reference to Christ. As a result of His humiliation the Jews have been under false shepherds ever since; and the falsest of all shepherds is yet to exploit them as the present age draws to its close. No wonder our Lord wept over Jerusalem, on the very day when He fulfilled Zechariah 9:9, If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke 19:42).

Part III – THE FINAL TRAVAIL AND TRIUMPH OF ZION: JEHOVAH'S VICTORY (12-14). In this part the language makes it clear that this passage passes over the present "Church" interval, right on to that culminating epoch at the end of the present age, when after all the tragic delay caused through the rejection of the true Shepherd-King, Jehovah shall again take up and complete His grand purposes with and for and through Israel.

Such, then, is the Book of Zechariah. In both the first and last parts of the book we hear the same recurrent key-note – Jehovah is "jealous for Zion." The Pulpit Commentary remarks on chapter 9:13, "NOTHING BUT INSPIRATION could have enabled Zechariah and Daniel to foresee the rise of the Macedonian dynasty, and the struggle between the Jews and the Syro-Grecian power in Maccabean times, which is here announced." What then shall we say about those passages in Zechariah which look right on to the Messiah's first and second comings – to His public entry into Jerusalem in lowly dignity, riding on an ass; to His being "wounded" in the house of his own kinsmen; to the "smiting of the Shepherd and the scattering of the flock"; to the

preservation of the remnant even as at this very day; to the “mourning” for Him, which is yet to be, when the Jews “look on Him whom they pierced”; to the last super-conflict and the final kingdom-glories? Yes, what shall we say to all this? Is it not a marvel of inspiration? Oh for that final triumph which Zechariah has predicted! “EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS!”

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

MALACHI: BEHOLD, HE SHALL COME ... BUT

APPEAL (A) – IN VIEW OF THE PRESENT SIN (1-2)

Jehovah the speaker: the priests are appealed to 1:6-2:9

Malachi the speaker: the people are appealed to 2:10-17

APPEAL (B) – IN VIEW OF THE COMING “DAY” (3-4)

The day will judge the guilty (3:1-6) therefore appeal 7-12

The day will bless the godly (3:13-4:3) therefore appeal 4-6

Malachi calling! – the last call of the Old Testament before the voice of prophecy dies into a silence of four hundred years. One great phase of Divine revelation is now to close. The last spokesman utters his soul, and retires behind the misty curtains of the past. A peculiar solemnity clings about him. What does this last speaker say? What is the final message? What is the parting word?

One step toward appreciating the message of Malachi is to see him amid his own times. All agree that his book is post-exilic, and later than the other two post-exilic prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The likelihood is that it was written a little later than the days of Nehemiah. Here follows a brief summary of the post-exile days:

B.C. 536 At the decree of Cyrus, the 50,000 return to Judea under Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-2).

534 The foundations of the new temple are laid (Ezra 3), but the rebuilding is held back.

520 Ministry of prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Temple rebuilding resumed (Ezra 5, Haggai 1:15).

516 Restoration of Temple completed (Ezra 6:15), just 20 years after return of the 50,000.

457 Return of the further 1,800 (plus wives, daughters and servants) under Ezra (Ezra 7).

445 Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem by royal edict, as Governor to rebuild THE CITY (Neh.2).

430 (approx.) Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem after absence on visit to Artaxerxes (Neh.13:6-7). Malachi prophesies sometime after this.

When did Malachi write?

Now Malachi did not write during the days of Ezra. The offerings, sacrifices and other observances of the temple service have become perverted and profaned when Malachi prophesies. Also, in Ezra’s days all the necessities of the temple service were provided from

the royal revenues, and the peoples' negligence toward the temple would scarcely apply. No, the city had been rebuilt when Malachi prophesies.

Did Malachi prophesy during the days of Nehemiah? No, not during Nehemiah's FIRST TWELVE YEARS as Governor of Jerusalem when such grand restorations were effected. No, not during the brief INTERVAL was away at the Persian court. For there is a settled attitude and behavior, and a state of callousness and defiant hostility, indicated in the time of Malachi which were not the product merely of a sudden collapse all within a couple of years, but a growth through a longer period. No, not during Nehemiah's SECOND TERM at Jerusalem. There is a reference to "the Governor" (unnamed) in Malachi 1:8. This verse also speaks of "offerings" for the Governor; but Nehemiah expressly tells us that HE made it his practice to maintain himself apart from such Governor's dues (Neh.5:14-15); and it is not likely that he changed later!

Nehemiah, it will be realized, may have lived for a considerable time beyond the last event recorded in the book that bears his name; and so long as he lived he would exert a strong influence for moral and religious purity. But the conditions described by Malachi suggest a deterioration which had come about AFTER THAT INFLUENCE WAS WITHDRAWN. Not only had the earlier zeal of people and priests cooled down; it had given place to a complex of slovenly formalism (3:14) and even deceitful evasion (1:14). Our last glimpse of Nehemiah in Jerusalem is about 430 B.C., but he probably continued there for some years after that; so we put the ministry of Malachi somewhere between 420 and 397 B.C.

Daniel's First "Seven Weeks" – and Malachi

Daniel was told that from the date of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, to the cutting off of the Messiah, was to be "seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks." The date of the decree most definitely was 445 B.C. Why should the sixty-nine weeks from then to the cutting off of the Messiah be divided into "seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks"? Clearly the Scripture has some important boundary – point in view at the end of that first "seven weeks," or forty-nine years; and it is hard to resist the conclusion that this boundary – point was THE CEASING OF PROPHECY WITH MALACHI. This would make Malachi's ministry END at 397 B.C., a date which in fact, well suits the circumstances. Thus Malachi bounds the 49 years or "seven weeks" of the predicted "troublesome times" (Dan.9:25). In a special way God now waits to be gracious. In the light of this, how significant is that great, final promise of Jehovah through Malachi – "BRING YE ALL THE TITHES INTO THE STOREHOUSE, THAT THERE MAY BE MEAT IN MINE HOUSE; AND PROVE ME NOW HEREWITH, SAITH JEHOVAH OF HOSTS, IF I WILL NOT OPEN YOU THE WINDOWS OF HEAVEN, AND POUR YOU OUT A BLESSING, THAT THERE SHALL NOT BE ROOM ENOUGH TO RECEIVE IT." (3:10)!

The Meaning and Message of the Book

And now what is the special purpose, the central message, the key thought of the book? If we mentally place ourselves in the ring of Malachi's first audience, and read through the book at speaking pace, letting it speak to us as though it were the living voice of the prophet himself ringing in our ears, we simply cannot miss seeing that from beginning to end this little book is AN APPEAL – a powerful, passionate, pleading appeal – an appeal to REPENT of sin and to RETURN to God – an appeal accompanied by rich PROMISE if the people respond, and by stern WARNING if they refuse.

The simple fact to note is that this APPEAL of Malachi quite naturally falls into TWO PARTS. In chapters 1-2 the appeal is made in view of THE PRESENT SIN OF THE NATION. In chapters 3-4 it is in view of THE COMING "DAY OF JEHOVAH."

After the few verses of introduction it is the PRIESTS who are first addressed. Also notice that it is JEHOVAH HIMSELF who directly addresses these priests, and all the way through to v. 2:9, the verses are in the first person. Then at v. 2:10 there is a change. It is the PROPHET now, who speaks on behalf of Jehovah. It is no longer the priests who are addressed, but THE PEOPLE GENERALLY. The prophet puts himself among them, and asks, "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us? ..." And from this point all the verses are in the third person.

Now in chapters 3-4 a new note is struck. The prophet views the present IN THE LIGHT OF THE GREAT "DAY OF JEHOVAH" WHICH IS TO COME. It will be noted that beginning with the first verse of chapter three it is Jehovah Himself who speaks directly again, using the first person, "I," "Me," "My," right to the end of the book. First, in v.1-6, we are told that THE COMING ONE who was the nation's hope of future blessing was coming to JUDGE (not merely, as was being presumed, to bless the nation indiscriminately!); and rising from this there is RENEWED APPEAL to the people to "return" and to "bring all the tithes" and to "prove" Jehovah's present offer of blessing.

Then from v.13 to the end of the book, there is a further addition about this coming "Day of Jehovah" – not only will it judge the guilty, it will VINDICATE THE GODLY MINORITY; and arising from this is the closing appeal of the book, to "give heed" again to "the Law of Moses." The final section of the book which runs from 3:13, brings out a contrast between two classes – the larger number who RESISTED Jehovah and "spake together", and minority who FEARED Jehovah and "spake often one to another. There are only two tenses in the Hebrew language, and the context must decide. Verses 13-16 should read:

"Your words are stout against Me, saith Jehovah; yet ye say,
What do we speak in our conversation together against Thee?
Ye say, It is a vain thing to serve God ...
But those who fear Jehovah speak one to another, and Jehovah
doth attend and hear. And a book of remembrance is being
written before Him, of them that fear Jehovah, and that
esteem His name. And they shall be to Me a peculiar treasure,
saith Jehovah of Hosts, in the day that I am preparing ..."

"Behold, He shall come ... but"

The key thought of Malachi is found in chapter 3:1-2 – "BEHOLD, HE SHALL COME, SAITH JEHOVAH OF HOSTS, BUT WHO MAY ABIDE THE DAY OF HIS COMING?" In our study of Haggai we saw that the Jewish Remnant had become indifferent to the rebuilding of the temple through a wrong attitude to prophecy. On the strength of Jeremiah's prediction that seventy years of "desolations" were determined on Jerusalem, the leaders of the people were saying, "The time is not come, the time that Jehovah's house should be built" (Hag.1:2). Thus they excused themselves into blameworthy indolence – and were rightly rebuked for it. A hundred years later in Malachi's time, there is a WRONG ATTITUDE TO DIVINE PROMISE. The earlier prophets had foretold of the coming One who should bring final deliverance and age-long blessing to the covenant nation; Ezekiel and Daniel had continued the strain; the post-exile

prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, had carried it still further, the time was now surely drawing nearer, and the promised One would come to exalt the nation in untold dignity and prosperity. All would then be well, so the leaders, priests and people told themselves, and the present did not very much matter. Thus they sank into a non-chalant formalism, and even into unblushing hypocrisy in their dealings both with God and with each other. Malachi now shows them that the Divine promise is a two-edged sword. Not only will the coming "Day" slay the enemies OUTSIDE the nation, but also the wicked INSIDE the nation. The "Messenger of the Covenant" in whose promised coming they were "delighting" should surely come, as promised; BUT (let them mark it well, this very big "but") – who should "abide the day of His coming"? for He would come as a "refiner's fire" and would be a "swift witness" against all evildoers. Yes, there is a "but" in the promise. "Behold, He shall come ... BUT." That is the center thought in Malachi.

Closing Observations

We note that the Old Testament leaves us with a FINAL PROMISE OF THE COMING OF CHRIST. Thus the very first promise and the very last, in the Old Testament, are concerning HIM. But what a wealth of development lies between Genesis 3:15 and Malachi 4:6! The united voice of the Old Testament Scriptures is, "Behold He comes!" Our Lord's first coming as the suffering Servant is most certainly a fact of HISTORY; and His second coming as King and Judge is just as certainly a fact of PROPHECY. The present interval between the first coming and the second was not revealed to Malachi, nor to any other of the Old Testament prophets. And yet, none the less the two aspects of His coming – as suffering Servant and as universal Sovereign – are unmistakably present to the eye of Old Testament prophecy. There is a real sense in which John the Baptism was Malachi's Elijah-forerunner (Mal.4:5 & Mat.17:13-13); yet it is equally clear that, as a result of our Lord's rejection there is to be a more dramatic, FINAL fulfillment of Malachi's Elijah prediction (Mat.17:11, "shall" & Rev.11).

We must make a sharp distinction always between Divine foreknowledge and Divine fore-ordination. God foreknew the Jewish rejection of Christ; but He did not fore-ORDAIN it. God never predestines sin! In His government of this world God does not allow His larger purposes for the human race to rest upon the uncertain behavior of the human will; yet He does leave enough scope for the free action of the human will to make men conscious at all times that they are acting of themselves, and by their own intelligent choice. Thus He permitted even the crucifixion of Christ. He foreknew it, and fore-provided against it, so that THE CRUCIFIXION OF ISRAEL'S MESSIAH BECAME THE CORONATION OF THE WORLD'S SAVIOR, and from the ugly debris of Jewish failure there emerged God's further purpose, that is, the CHURCH, and the proclaiming of a WORLD-EMBRACING GOSPEL of personal salvation throughout the present age. God could not reveal all this to the Old Testament prophets; for had He done so, Christ could never have come and made a bona fide offer of Himself as Israel's Messiah.

Then again, with this little scroll of Malachi before us, we should ever guard against a WRONG ATTITUDE TO DIVINE PROMISE. We have seen how this wrong attitude cursed Malachi's generation. So today there is a complacent indifference to the hope of Christ's return. "Thou wicked and slothful servant!" – will those awful words fall on some of US who have been believers in the Lord's second coming? Oh, may the deeper prospect of His coming ever be an incentive to holiness, and an urge to the winning of other souls to Him!

Again, if we have read Malachi observantly, we cannot have missed seeing that the two besetting evils of his day were FORMALISM and SKEPTICISM. In these we see the beginnings of Pharisaism (formalism) and the Sadduceeism (scepticism) which later reached their harvest –

whiteness in our Lord's days. How these two things curse us today! And how they cause men to argue back against God! Seven times the priests and people of Malachi's time are faced with the vital issues of real heart-religion:

- 1) Wherein hast Thou loved us? 1:2
- 2) Wherein have we despised Thy name? 1:6
- 3) Wherein have we polluted Thee? 1:7
- 4) Wherein have we wearied Thee? 2:17
- 5) Wherein shall we return? 3:7
- 6) Wherein have we robbed Thee? 3:8
- 7) Wherein have we spoken against Thee? 3:13

The formalist does not like to have his formalism DISTURBED. The skeptic does not like to have his skepticism DISPROVED. Both will evade the real issues of heart-religion by self-justifying counter – argument.

And finally, in Malachi we see how precious to God are the godly minority in times of declension. A "book of remembrance" is kept; and they, God's remnant, are to be Jehovah's "peculiar treasure" in the "day" which He is "preparing." Thus, as the Old Testament closes, we see the godly remnant speaking softly to one another of a great hope – "He is coming!" Then, for four hundred years they disappear from sight, until they reappear from obscurity in New Testament times, in the aged Simeon and Anna, who are found in Jerusalem, "waiting for the consolation of Israel." And so it is today. They who fear and love Jehovah-Jesus speak one to another amid the closing decades of the present age, comforting one another with the words, "He is coming!" And God's book of remembrance is being kept. Yes, He is surely coming – "Unto you that fear My name," saith Jehovah, "shall the Sun of righteousness arise, with healing in His wings!" And our prayer is, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Yes, comforting, thrilling prospect, He is coming, coming a SECOND time. The inviolable guarantee of this is the historical fact of His FIRST coming, as vicarious Savior, which fulfilled scores and scores of Old Testament predictions, with Divine precision. That first batch of fulfillments, two thousand years ago, constitutes the mightiest conceivable guarantee that ALL THE OTHER predictions and promises concerning His reign on earth in world-wide empire will similarly be fulfilled. Yes, He is coming! HE is coming – the Church's Bridegroom, Israel's Messiah, and God-Man Emperor of all nations!

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

THE INTER-TESTAMENT PERIOD

1. THE POLITICAL ASPECT
2. THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT
3. SCRIBES, PHARISEES, SADDUCEES
4. ESSENES, HERODIANS, ZEALOTS AND JUDEA OF OUR LORD'S DAY

1. THE POLITICAL ASPECT (EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS)

The Old Testament canon closed with Malachi at about 397 B.C. The 400 year interval between Malachi and Matthew has been called “the dark period” of Israel’s history in the pre-Christian times, because throughout it there was neither prophet nor inspired writer. As Psalm 74:9 says, “We see not our signs; there is no more any prophet; neither is there among us any that knoweth how long.”

The condition of the Jews as a nation and race at the beginning of this 400 year period should be clearly borne in mind. Jerusalem 200 years earlier had been overthrown and the Jewish people carried into the Babylonian exile (587 B.C.). Then upon Babylon’s overthrow by that of Media-Persia, and Cyrus, the Persian emperor, had issued his famous decree (536 B.C.) occasioning the return of the Jewish “Remnant” to Jerusalem and Judea, under Zerubbabel, some 50,000 in all. After many setbacks, the building of the new temple had been completed (515 B.C.). Then Ezra the scribe had joined the repatriated “Remnant” at Jerusalem (458 B.C.) with a much smaller contingent of 2,000 with their families, and had restored the Law and the ritual. Then in 446 B.C. Nehemiah had come to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and function as governor. So there was now again a Jewish state in Judea, though of course under Persian overlordship.

But the returned “Remnant” was ONLY a remnant. The bulk of the nation preferred to stay on in Babylonia and Assyria (now under Persian rule), where they were prospering, and where, from the commencement of the Media-Persian rule, they were treated more as colonists than as captives.

Naturally it is upon the REMNANT, the repatriated and reconstituted Jewish community in Judea, that our interest especially fixes, for it is in them that the continuity of Jewish history, nationally and politically, is preserved between the Old and New Testaments, i.e. it is they that are the Jewish NATION, in distinction from the Jews as a scattered and disintegrated race. The little Jewish nation in Palestine simply reflects the history of the different empires that successively secured the mastery of Palestine, with the exception of one short juncture, namely, the Maccabean revolt, when for a short spell there was independent government again. We may say that Jewish history during those four centuries between the Testaments runs in 6 periods: the Persian, the Greek, the Egyptian, the Syrian, the Maccabean and the Roman. The Persian Period (536-333 B.C.)

This is the 2nd of the Gentile world-empires foretold by Daniel. Palestine was part of the Syrian satrapy, the Persian rule seems to have been tolerant. Samaria, the central portion of Israel had been repopled by the Assyrian emperor in 721 B.C. with a mongrel people. Later, it was from this area and people that Nehemiah encountered spiteful opposition when he came to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. And now, long years later, in the opening stages of the inter-Testament centuries, and toward the end of the Persian rule, it would appear that the rival WORSHIP of Samaria (Jn.4:19-22) became established, by the founding of the Samaritan temple. That event dates the total separation of Jew and Samaritan. The rival worship was part of a more general rivalry, keen and resentful, which persisted right on until New Testament times.

The Greek Period (333-323 B.C.)

Here is the 3rd of the Gentile world-empires foretold by Daniel. Alexander the Great is such a meteoric phenomenon in history that one cannot but wonder what his total impact on the world would have been had he not suddenly died at the premature age of 32. Catapulted into leadership through the assassination of his father when he, Alexander, was but a youth of 20, he

completely transformed the face of the world, politically, in little more than a decade. He is the “notable horn” in the “he goat” vision of Daniel 8:1-7.

In his Syrian campaign he marched southward on Jerusalem. Josephus tells how the high priest Jaddua, in his priestly garments, and heading a procession of white-robed priests, issued forth to invoke the conqueror’s clemency. Alexander, who is said to have recognized in Jaddua the fulfillment of a dream, not only spared Jerusalem and offered sacrifice to Jehovah but also had the prophecies of Daniel read to him concerning the overthrow of the Persian empire by a king of Grecia; and thereafter he treated the Jews with marked preferment, according them full rights of citizenship with the Greeks in his new city, Alexandria, and in other cities. This in its turn, created decidedly pro-Greek sympathies among the Jews, and, along with Alexander’s spreading of the Greek language and civilization, had its far reaching repercussions in the Hellenistic spirit which developed among the Jews and greatly affected their mental outlook afterward.

The Egyptian Period (323-204 B.C.)

The untimely death of Alexander precipitated an interval of confusion which resolved itself into a fourfold breakup of his empire under four generals: Ptolemy, Lysimachus, Cassander and Selenus. These are the four “notable ones” which take the place of the “great horn” as predicted in Daniel 8:21-22.

After severe fighting for empire between East and West, Judea now fell to Ptolemy Soter, along with Egypt. Ptolemy captured Jerusalem on a Sabbath, which the Jews scrupled to break even in self-defense. For a time he dealt heavily on the Jews, but afterwards became just as friendly. His successor, Ptolemy Philadelphus continued his favorable attitude and in his time the famous Septuagint translation of the Old Testament Scriptures was made from the Hebrew into the Greek language, which had now become the language of the civilized world. The Jews were now so numerous in Egypt and North Africa that such a translation had become a necessity. It came into general use well before the birth of our Lord, and made the Scriptures known to many of the Gentiles.

During the humane and sometimes kindly treatment of the first three Ptolemies the Jews in Judea grew in numbers and wealth, but during the later part of the Egyptian period they had anything but an enviable time. Palestine was increasingly becoming a battle ground between Egypt (Ptolemy) and Syria (the Seleucidae). Situated thus, Palestine was once again “between the hammer and the anvil.” In a big battle at Raphia, near Gaza, Antiochus the Great was defeated by Ptolemy Philopater. Philopater at this time alienated the Jews by his rash intention of entering the Holy of Holies. He was resisted by the high priest, Simon II, whereupon Philopater, returning to Alexandria, persecuted the Jews, and even started measures to extirpate them throughout his dominions. When he died, his successor Ptolemy Epiphanes, was only 5 years old. Antiochus the Great seized his opportunity and in 204 B.C. invaded Egypt. Judea and other territories, soon after became annexed to Syria and passed under the rule of the Seleucidae.

The Ptolemies The Seleucidae

Ptolemy Soter 323-285 Seleucus Nicator 312-280

Ptolemy Philadelphus 285-247 Seleucus Soter 280-261

Ptolemy Euergetes 247-222 Seleucus Theos 261-246

Ptolemy Philopater 222-205 Seleucus Callinicus 246-226

Ptolemy Epiphanes 205-181 Seleucus Ceraunus 226-223
Ptolemy Philometer 181-146 Antiochus the Great 223-187
Ptolemy Physcon 146-117 Seleucus Philopater 187-175
Ptolemy Soter II 117-107 Antiochus Epiphanes 175-163
Ptolemy Alexander I 107- 90 Antiochus Eupater 163-162
Ptolemy Soter II again 89-81 Demetrius Soter 162-150
Ptolemy Alexander II 19 days Alexander Balas 150-146
Ptolemy Dionysus 80-51 Demetrius Nicator 146-144
Ptolemy XII & XIII 51-43 Antiochus Theos 144-142
(with Cleopatra) Usurper, Tryphon 142-137
Egypt subdued by Rome 30 Antiochus Sidetes 137-128
Demetrius II (again) 128-125
Seleucus V 125-124
Antiochus Grypus 124-96
Seleucus Epiphanes 95-93

The Syrian Period (204-165 B.C.)

There are two points of special note about this period. First, it was at this time that Palestine became sectionized into the 5 provinces which we find in the New Testament: Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Perea, and Trachonitis. Second, this Syrian period was the most tragic part of the inter-Testament era for the Jews of the homeland.

Antiochus the Great was harsh towards the Jews. So was his successor, Seleucus Philopater. Yet the Jews in Judea were still permitted to live under their own laws, administered by the high priest and his council as the nominal rulers. But with the accession of Antiochus Epiphanes a "reign of terror" befell Jewry.

By this time there had developed in Judea a Greek-minded or Hellenising party, advocating un-Jewish innovations. They were for relaxing orthodox observance of Judaism with the national exclusiveness which it entailed, in favor of Greek liberty of thought and manners and forms of religion. The wranglings of Nationalists and Hellenists for the control of affairs caused much bitter contention and even murders.

After several earlier interferences with the temple and priesthood, Antiochus Epiphanes now used this Jewish factiousness as a provocation to vent his spleen on them to the full. He wreaked a terrible havoc in 170 B.C. Jerusalem was plundered, the wall torn down, the temple coarsely desecrated, and the population subjected to monstrous cruelties. Thousands were massacred. The women and children were sold into slavery. The temple sacrifices were abolished. The Holy of Holies was rifled and its costly furniture was carried away. Jewish religion was banned. Circumcision was prohibited on pain of death. A foreign governor was appointed, a traitor made high priest, and paganism forcibly imposed on the people. A commissioner was appointed to pollute both the temple at Jerusalem and that at Samaria, and to rededicate them, respectively to Jupiter Olympius and Jupiter Xenius.

All copies of the Law which could be found were either burned or defaced with idolatrous pictures, and the owners executed. The first book of Maccabees says that many Jews apostatized, and that some even joined in the persecution. In 168 B.C. Antiochus caused a sow to be offered on the altar of sacrifice, and then on the very altar, had a statue erected to Jupiter Olympius.

The Maccabean Period (165-63 B.C.)

The revolt and resistance movement was provoked by the sheer excesses of Antiochus. It was started by an aged priest, Mattathias, and developed by his son Judas, known as Judas MACCABEUS, from the Hebrew word for hammer. In defiance of overwhelming odds, the godly faith of Mattathias and his sons blazed out with glorious brightness and called forth the willing self-sacrifice of a godly multitude. The devotions of hundreds of thousands led them to martyrdom.

Antiochus' commissioners, in their circuit of the land wanted to obliterate Judaism and replace it by the king's state religion. Mattathias refused compliance, slew Antiochus' commissioner. He and his five sons then took refuge in the mountains of the wilderness, and many of the faithful with their families gathered to them. About 1,000 of them were burned alive in the caves where they took shelter.

Mattathias and his band grew into an army. Judas developed a powerful guerrilla warfare, and they defeated numerous Syrian armies. Judas then assumed the offensive. Jerusalem was captured, the temple refurnished, and on December 25th, the anniversary of its profanation three years earlier, the orthodox sacrifices were reinstituted (which date the Jews still observe as the feast of the Dedication Jn.10:22). Antiochus is said to have died in a state of raving madness.

Antiochus' son invaded Judea with an army of 120,000. The Maccabees valiantly resisted, but provisions failed. Many of the besieged deserted through sheer hunger. Judas' numbers grew less and less, until capitulation seemed inevitable and the cause lost. But just when zero-point seemed reached, Lysias, the Syrian regent, suddenly heard of a rival regent at the Syrian capital and induced the young son of Antiochus, with the Syrian princes, to make peace with Judea on friendly terms, promising them the restoration of all their religious liberties. Thus the Maccabean revolt, just as it seemed on the point of being crushed, was crowned with success!

Judas was later slain in battle against a further Syrian army. Under Jonathan, the younger brother of Judas Maccabeus, the orthodox party gained the ascendancy. He also became high priest, thus uniting the civil and priestly authority in one person, and thus commencing the "Asmonean" or "Hasmonean" line of high priests (so called from Hashmon, great-grandfather of the Maccabee brothers).

Upon the murder of Jonathan, his brother Simon assumed leadership. Judea was freed of all alien troops; and from that time (about 142 B.C.) was once again under independent Jewish government. Except for one short lapse, this continued until Judea became a Roman province, in 63 B.C. Simon was treacherously murdered by a son-in-law who coveted the high-priesthood. Simon's remaining son, the able John Hyrcanus, now became high priest and remarkably extended the power of Judea. In fact, since the break-away of the ten tribes after Solomon's reign no Jewish king had held so spacious an area. With him the Asmonean dynasty (135-63 B.C.) is usually reckoned as beginning; though perhaps more truly it commenced with his father Simon, in 140 B.C., when a great assembly at Jerusalem made the dual office of prince and high priest hereditary in the Asmonean family. The later rulers of the Asmonean line did not have the earlier Maccabean qualities. Bitter partisan controversies became aggravated into recurrent internecine strife and a civil war which was only terminated by later Roman intervention.

Antipater, father of the Herod who reigned at the time of our Lord's birth laid siege of Jerusalem. After a siege of three months Pompey took the city. At that time, with callous disregard, he strode into the Holy of Holies – an action which at once estranged all loyal Jewish hearts from the Romans; that was in 63 B.C.

The Roman Period (63 B.C. onwards)

Judea now became a province of the Roman empire. The high priest was completely deprived of any royal status, and retained priestly function only. This high priest, John Hyrcanus II, marks the end of the Asmonean and Maccabean line of high priests.

Antipater appointed Herod (his own son by marriage with Cypros, an Arabian woman) as governor of Galilee. He was appointed king of the Jews about 40 B.C. On returning to Judea he sought to ingratiate himself with the Jews by his marriage with Mariamne, the beautiful granddaughter of John Hyrcanus, and by making her brother Aristobulus high priest. He also greatly increased the splendor of Jerusalem, building the elaborate temple which was the center of Jewish worship in the time of our Lord.

But he was as cruel and sinister as he was able and ambitious. He seems to have had an almost Satanic determination to obliterate the Asmonean family. He slew all three of his wife's brothers, even his wife Mariamne, and later his mother-in-law Alexandra. And still later he murdered his own sons by Mariamne – Aristobulus and Alexander. This is that "Herod the Great" who was king when our Lord was born.

2. THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT (INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS)

We cannot read far into the pages of our New Testament without sensing that great changes have come over Jewry since the last writer of the Old Testament laid down his pen. There are new sects or parties – Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians. There are new institutions – Synagogue, Scribes, Sanhedrin. Jewry (the people) and Judaism (the religion) are now practically co-extensive, and each implies the other.

Idolatry Cured

The Babylonian captivity had a profound impact on the Jewish people. They went into exile with what seemed a hopeless incurable infatuation for idolatry; they emerged from it what they have remained to this day, the most monotheistic people in the world, the custodians and promulgators of belief in the one true God, Jehovah. After the Babylonian exile the Jewish people are totally and forever converted from idolatry into convinced worshippers of the one true God.

How shall we account for it? The answer is that it was THE MIRACLE OF PROPHECY BEING FULFILLED BEFORE THEIR VERY EYES. Away back in the writings of their own prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, the very happenings that were now upon them had been clearly foretold. The destruction of Jerusalem, the exile of Judea's sons and daughters in Babylon, the sudden overthrow of Babylon, the ensuing edict of Cyrus for the restoring of the temple at Jerusalem these were all foretold 200 years in advance.

And in addition to this, God had put a wonderful witness to Himself in the very court of Babylon. After the emperor himself, the most renowned figure of the era was the man DANIEL. Through him, this far-famed Jew, this man of uncompromising loyalty to Jehovah, such miracles of Divine

wisdom and power had been done as had outclassed all that the arts and magic of Babylon could do.

Rise and Growth of Judaism

Those 50,000 who returned were the devoutest of the devout. They knew what they believed, and why they believed it. There were certain absences which strike the mind. There was NO KING and no throne; the royal line of David is gone. There is NO TEMPLE; and even though a new one may be built on the same foundations, it can never take the place of its incomparable predecessor. And no longer is there any NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE; they are only there on sufferance as a subject province in a restricted area covering merely a small part of the former kingdom of Judah. No throne, no temple, no independence! What is left? Why have these Jews returned to such ruins and wastes and hardships? Why have they returned with such devout eagerness? It is because there is still one thing left which has recently become the most precious and vital possession in all the world to them: it is the treasure of the sacred SCRIPTURES. These have now proved themselves beyond doubt to be the inspired word of the one true God, Jehovah; and they are the articles of Jehovah's covenant with the people Israel.

But besides this, these Jews now see in their Scriptures, the wonderful succession of predictions concerning the coming of a Messiah who should permanently regather and exalt the chosen people, and under whose glorious reign all the promised blessings of the Abrahamic covenant should burst into fulfillment. All other predictions have come true, as these Jews have lived to witness, and so will all these further promises which tell of this coming Messiah.

Now these two things – this new zeal for the Law (past) and this Messianic hope (future) – lie at the very root of “Judaism,” the system of the Jewish religion which originated just after the Exile and developed during the inter-Testament period. The Jewish state, as restored under the remnant leaders, belongs to a different order of things from the earlier kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Now there is an utter aversion to idolatry, and the people as a whole recognize the immeasurable superiority of Israel's religion to every form of paganism. There is now an impelling new desire to grasp the truths of the revelation which has been committed to them as the covenant nation, and a passion that the nation shall fulfill its vocation as the guardian of that peerless deposit of Divine truth which will ultimately mean salvation to the ends of the earth. These 50,000 purpose to fashion the new Jewish state as the holy people of Jehovah, separated from all others by the most scrupulous observance to the Law.

As professor John Skinner says, “Under Ezra's auspices, a great reformation was carried through. The principle of separation from the heathen was revived and relentlessly enforced by the dissolution of all mixed marriages. Ezra's efforts were continued by Nehemiah, who had set himself to render Jerusalem safe from attack by rebuilding the walls. The Law now became at once the standard of holiness and the symbol of nationality; and in spite of disintegrating tendencies still at work, it gained such a hold on the affections of the Jewish people that all danger of them being absorbed by the surrounding nations was at an end.”

Synagogue, Scribes, Oral Law

The local synagogue, in which the Scriptures were read and expounded, and the order of the scribes, who were the specialists in translating and expounding those Scriptures, assumed an ever – increasing importance. Alas, there began to form the elaborate system of interpretations, amplifications and additional regulations of which the Judaism of our Lord's time was the result. We know what that finished product was, and how utterly lacking in vital spirituality our Lord

found it to be. More and more the trend became one of legalistic literalism and religious externalism. There accumulated around the Scriptures, and especially that of the Law of Moses, that mass of comment, interpretation and supplementation which became known as the Oral Law, and which was handed down with such traditional sanctity that by the time our Lord was on earth obedience had become transferred from the Law to the traditional interpretation.

The Talmud

The Talmud remains the revered and largely authoritative encyclopedia of Jewry to this day. After being handed down orally for generations, it was gradually committed to writing in its various parts and forms, until finally, about the end of the 2nd century A.D. it was all compiled by Rabbi Jehuda into the TALMUD, which is in two main parts: (1) the MISHNA or Oral Law, and (2) the GEMARA, or commentaries upon the Mishna. This MISHNA, or Oral Law, with its Halachoth (legal exegesis or determinations) and its Haggadoth (moral, practical, and often fanciful expansions).

In our Lord's time the Oral Law was still mainly oral. We can appreciate what a formidable obstacle He found it. To contradict it, as He did (Mat.15:1-9, 23:16-18, 23), was to go against the whole weight of scholarly opinion, devout conviction, and public sentiment. Moreover, we can well understand that when, in the sermon on the Mount, our Lord six times used the formula "Ye have heard that it was SAID ... but I say unto you ..." He was not putting His "I say unto you" over against the Old Testament Scriptures, but against maxims of this ORAL or traditional law. His customary way of referring to the Scriptures themselves was "It is written."

In its earlier stages it certainly restored the Scriptures to their proper place in the popular mind; and its two most characteristic institutions – the synagogue and the scribe – were meant to perpetuate this. It certainly did maintain the regular and systematic public reading of the Scriptures. It fostered devout regard for the Sabbath, and it kept aflame the Messianic hope, though not in the earlier and truer spirit. Its evil lay in that which it SUPERIMPOSED upon the Scriptures. In the end it resulted in such a hard and ceremonial religiosity, generally speaking, that when our Lord came the most formidable obstruction to His gracious mission was the dead-weight of religious externalism, formalism, and self-effort righteousness by which Judaism had well near obliterated the spiritual truths of God's Word.

THE SYNAGOGUE

There is not a word about synagogues in the Old Testament, not even in the latest-written chapters; but as soon as we read on into the four Gospels we find them everywhere, a synagogue to practically every occupied locality; and when we read on into the Acts of the Apostles we find them similarly established everywhere among the many Jewish communities throughout the Roman empire.

This is good to know, for it was from the synagogue and not from the temple that the early Christian Church, as organized by the apostles, took its constitution and main forms of worship. Our Lord Himself evidently visualized His Church on earth as assuming the synagogal form when He promised that He would be in the midst wherever two or three were gathered in His name and when He gave authority to such groups to exercise discipline (Mat.18:17-20). Furthermore, the titles given by the New Testament epistles to Christian church office-bearers, i.e. "Elders" (presbuteroi), "Bishops (episkopoi), "Deacons" (diakonoi), are all carried over from

the synagogue, while never once is the title “Priest” (hierus) appropriated from the Jewish temple.

The synagogue did not exist BEFORE the Exile; nor anything like it with its regularly constituted assembly and fixed officials. In Ps.74:8 the word “mo’adah” translated synagogue, should more literally read “solemn feasts” or “set seasons.” It has nothing to do with a synagogue.

Yet it is equally certain that the synagogue was in being SOON AFTER the Exile. In Acts 15:21 we find the apostle James saying, “For Moses OF OLD TIME hath in every city them that preach him, being read IN THE SYNAGOGUES every Sabbath day.” So the synagogues must then have been several hundred years old.

It seems clear therefore, that the synagogue originated DURING the Exile. There was no longer a Jewish temple, and they were in a foreign land, but their captivity in Babylon was not of the sort which prescribed meetings together for religious purposes. The demand was the greater because all but the older Jews were now losing their knowledge of the Hebrew language, and were speaking in the language of Babylonia. Thus regular gatherings would begin to take shape, for the reading and the interpreting of the Scriptures. So the synagogue came into being during the 500 years from the end of the Exile to the time of our Lord.

The basic idea of the synagogue was INSTRUCTION IN THE SCRIPTURES, not worship, even though an elaborate liturgical service developed later. Also, since the public reading of the Law had now to be by translation into the Aramaic tongue which the people had learned in Babylonia (Neh.8:8), the transition from translation to EXPOSITION and even to discourses was easy, though no doubt it took place gradually.

That such synagogue discourses were common in our Lord’s time is seen in such references as Matthew 4:23, 9:35; Luke 4:15,44; Acts 13:5,15, 14:1, 17:10, 18:19. These verses also show us that the right to utter instruction was not confined to those who were the regularly trained and appointed teachers. The leader of the congregation might invite ANY suitable person whom he saw present to address the people; and anyone could offer to do so. Thus we find that our Lord, though not trained in any of the schools, could everywhere preach and teach in the synagogues. The great institution of preaching – one entirely unknown to heathenism – took its rise in the synagogue; and that zeal for the Law, by which Israel was so strikingly marked from the period of the return from Babylon to the coming of Christ, was cherished and increased by its arrangements more than any other agency.

As to its CONSTITUTION, the most important feature of the synagogue was that it was CONGREGATIONAL, not priestly. Priests were always honored when present, but they had no special synagogue privileges, their functions being regarded as belonging especially to the temple, where their right to perform those functions was hereditary. In the synagogue the office bearers were not hereditary; they were constituted by congregational vote or consent. As to DISCIPLINE, the jurisdiction of the synagogue became very extensive, which was inevitable in a constitution where the ecclesiastical and the civil law were one, as in post-exile Jewry.

3. SCRIBES, PHARISEES, AND SADDUCEES

The scribes who meet us in the Gospel narratives were a class of professional experts in the interpretation and application of the Law and the other Old Testament Scriptures. Much could be said of their origin as a class as that of the synagogue. They became a class due to five factors:

- (1) The people's conversion from idolatry to a passionate faith.
- (2) The need for special teachers in their exile.
- (3) The change-over from Hebrew, as a spoken language, to Aramaic.
- (4) The rise and spread of the synagogue.
- (5) The cessation of the living voice of prophecy, and their interest in the WRITTEN Scriptures.

We may say that the new order of scribes originated with the great and saintly Ezra, though Ezra must not be associated with the elaborate deteriorations which developed later. There seems to have become two leading principles of the scribes: first, the multiplying of oral traditions; and secondly, the introduction of such a system of interpretation and exposition of Scripture as utterly destroyed its meaning. The study of the Scriptures themselves degenerated into an absorption with mere minutiae, a concentration on supposedly hidden meanings, fuddling engrossment with the mere "letter" of the Word, until idolatry of the letter destroyed the very reverence in which it had originated, the true spiritual instruction became all but extinct. It is not surprising that the people were arrested by the contrast between the forthright teaching of Jesus and that of the scribes.

The scribes must be carefully distinguished from the PRIESTS. The function of the priest related entirely to the official ceremonies and duties of the temple worship. Of course a priest might devote his time to the study of the Law and the other Scriptures, thus becoming both a priest and a scribe, as was Ezra – no doubt many priests did just that. The scribes must also be distinguished from the PHARISEES. The Pharisees were an ecclesiastical party, held together by their peculiar aims and views, whereas the scribes were a body of experts in a scholastic sense. A man might conceivably be all three – a priest, a Pharisee and a scribe. The priest related to daily occupation, the Pharisee to religious conviction, the third to special vocation.

The Pharisees

The origin of the Pharisee movement was when Ezra and the addendum remnant returned in which the first ideal of separation became supreme again. Separation to Jehovah was the controlling ideal. The high-priesthood gradually became the coveted office of ambitious ecclesiastics who thought far more of its political advantages than of its spiritual responsibilities. This provoked a movement all the more sharply advocating strict adherence to the God-given national Law and the original ideals of Judaism.

The scribes, on the contrary, were the zealous champions of the integrity of the Law, and the upholders of all that was distinct in Judaism. They were the life and soul of the popular resistance to paganism, which carried the nation safely through the dangers of the Greek period, in spite of the apostasy of the chief priests. There was no healing the rift between the priestly clique and the scribes. It went on and on, until it eventually crystallized itself into "Sadducees" versus "Pharisees."

It was in the days of John Hyrcanus, that the Pharisees, named as such, first appear on the scene as an historical movement. The Pharisees were the spiritual successors of the CHASIDIM, i.e. the "Pious Ones" who had banded themselves together in a secret league to

preserve the Jewish faith when the maddened Antiochus Epiphanes was trying to stamp it out by fearful atrocities. The name PHARISEES means “Separatists”; and it is likely that they were first so labeled by enemies because of their pious but proud and often petty exclusiveness. Separation was the all dominating feature and the vital virtue in the Pharisee’s concept of religion, and going with this was a fanatical adherence to the letter of the Law. Most of those who were scribes by vocation would be Pharisees in conviction.

A further snare was their easy liability to HYPOCRISY. They rested in mere OUTWARD compliance; then they masqueraded in an outward profession of piety while covertly sinning. The mass of the people gave up trying altogether and were resigned to being hapless sinners. Yet they still admired the Pharisees as representing something which somehow ought to be, even though the Pharisees despised them.

Undoubtedly in the Pharisee movement there were many sincere and aspiring souls, however misguided they may have been. Moreover, it was such as they who kept the Messianic hope aflame and influential in inter-Testament Israel, and preached the hope of bodily resurrection for the faithful when the Messiah should bring in His kingdom.

The Sadducees

They could not develop in post-exile Jewry while inspired prophets continued and represented the theocracy in its noblest form; but in the inter-Testament period, when the living voice of prophecy had died, the opposing tendencies increased until eventually, just after the Maccabean revolt, they emerged by name as “Pharisees” and “Sadducees.” It seems that the name “Sadducees” comes from “Zadokites.” Probably when the high-priesthood passed to the Asmonean house after the Maccabee victory, the Jewish priesthood group, anxious to retain the prestige and advantage of such venerated tradition for their aims and policy, should now stress in a new way that although they loyally supported the Asmonmean priesthood they were still in reality, the Zadokites.

Professor Skinner says, “The Sadducees seem to have been neither a religious sect nor a political party, but a social clique. Numerically they were a much smaller group than the Pharisees, and belonged for the most part to the wealthy, priestly families who formed the aristocracy of the nation. With the mass of the people they never had much influence, and they did not greatly care for it. Their one ambition was to make themselves indispensable to the reigning prince. They felt that if Israel was to be made great and prosperous it must be by well filled treasuries, strong armies, and skillful diplomacy ... To expect a Divine deliverance merely by making the people holy, they accounted as sheer and dangerous fatalism.”

Yet in their own way they were as jealous for Judaism as the Pharisees. It was their idea of it which was radically different. They totally rejected the Oral Law, they were skeptical of the Written Law; for we are told that they denied the bodily resurrection, and did not believe in either angels or spirits. The Pharisees and Sadducees provoked each other into existence and mutual opposition. The very fanaticism of the Pharisees provoked the skepticism of the Sadducees. The other-worldliness of the one group irritated the worldly-mindedness of the other. And so the feud continued. The Pharisees tried to influence the nation from the people UPWARDS, while the Sadducees tried from the ruling power DOWNWARDS. We can well understand how intolerable to such a group were the teachings and character and Messianic claims of our Lord Jesus. Their hatred is measured by their readiness to consort even with the detested Pharisees

in order to kill Him. It was they that were directly responsible for His crucifixion (Lk.3:2; Jn.11:49, 18:13-14,24, 19:15; Mk.15:11).

Yet, not all the priests were Sadducean, It was a devout priest who led the Maccabean revolt. It was a righteous priest that the angel Gabriel announced the coming gift of a son as the Lord's forerunner. A generation later we find that despite the bitter hostility of the chief priests, "a great company of the PRIESTS became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).

4. ESSENES, HERODIANS, ZEALOTS AND THE JUDEA OF OUR LORD'S DAY

The Essenes withdrew from ordinary human society to haunts of their own in rural solitudes, where they practiced a monastic kind of life and a mystical kind of Judaism. They could not mix with the vulgar crowd of temple-frequenters, who they held, defiled its precincts. They were a community apart. They kept the Sabbath so rigidly to the letter of the Law that they could neither kindle a fire nor allow food to be prepared. They counted it defilement ever to eat food cooked by any but their own fraternity, and would even have preferred death to it. If they were ever touched by an uncircumcised person they must at once undergo corporal cleansing. The motive was good , but the method mistaken. But they were wrongly out of touch with men. Hence they made no real impact on their times, nor do they receive mention in the New Testament. Yet they are significant as showing yet further the hungerings and reactions of the Jewish people during those inter-Testament centuries.

The Herodians were in no sense a religious cult or union. It was political; and the leading aim of its adherents was to further the cause of the Herod government. Many saw in the Herods the one Jewish hope of separate national continuance; the one alternative to direct heathen rule. We can imagine how the Pharisees, for instance, must have hated the Herodians! The two parties were bitterly intolerant of each other, which makes the consorting of the Pharisees with the Herodians against our Lord all the more astonishing.

The Zealots were in a drastic way the Jewish nationalist party. They revolted against the Roman domination, calling upon their countrymen as the people of God to resist human despotism and to restore completely the theocratic polity. But the opposition of the Zealots to Rome by force of arms, gradually degenerated into a pretext for violence even against their own countrymen. It is probable that Barabbas and his confederates were Zealots, also the two robbers who were crucified with our Lord. Maybe the penitent robber, like others, had thought at the outset that the "kingdom of God" could be brought by force. Watching Jesus on the cross he suddenly saw differently.

Jewry in our Lord's time

One common military control kept order everywhere with iron hand. At that time Palestine was in five sub-areas – Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Perea, Trachonitis. The first Herod, misnamed "Herod the Great," had reigned over all five; but at his death (about the time of our Lord's birth) the kingdom had been partitioned to three of his sons. Archelaus received Judea and Samaria, Herod Antipas received Galilee and Perea, and to Philip was granted Trachonitis. Ten years later Rome had deprived Archelaus of Judea and Samaria, and had appointed a procurator known as "Governor of Judea." . During our Lord's public ministry the 5th of these procurators was in charge, namely Pontius Pilate. He exercised supervisory control over all Palestine, and in turn was accountable to the emperor. The procurator's ordinary residence was not at Jerusalem but at Caesarea. At such times as the feast of the Passover, when Jerusalem was crowded, and Jewish nationalist feeling might excite thoughts of revolt, the procurator took up

temporary residence in the capital – which explains Pilate’s presence there when the fracas occurred which occasioned our Lord’s crucifixion.

At that time Herod Antipas ruled as Tetrarch over Galilee and Perea. He too was at Jerusalem when the clamor of our Lord’s crucifixion broke out. Pilate therefore, on learning that Jesus was of Galilee, sent Him round to that Herod; but Herod threw back the responsibility on Pilate.

The Pharisees had much influence with the people, and Herod therefore treated them with a careful forbearance. The power of the Sadducees had been greatly weakened by Herod’s murdering 45 of their leaders early in his reign, and abolishing the hereditary high priesthood. Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees shared a hatred of the Herod regime. The Herodians, Nazi-like, had no scruples against using spy-ring tactics, and always had a double faced card to play between the Herods and the Roman “Governor.”

Yet in the hour of Israel’s deepest degradation, when Herod’s kingdom seemed to mock the aspirations of all faithful Israelites with its counterfeit semblance of Messianic glory, their eyes beheld the Lord’s Anointed, the true King of the kingdom of God, the Ruler “whose goings forth were from of old, from everlasting.”

Those Jewish sects live again today; they wear up-to-date apparel, and are busy in modern Christendom. The Essenes stayed away in their monastic solitudes, and the Zealots in their hilly lurking places. Our Lord took no message to the former, and asked no help of the latter. The Pharisees were the old-time RITUALISTS. The Sadducees were the old-time RATIONALISTS. The Herodians were the old-time SECULARISTS. The mark of the Pharisee is that he is always ADDING TO the Word of God, the message of the Gospel; the mark of the Sadducee is that he is always TAKING FROM it, and the secularist Herodian was heedlessly PASSING BY it. The Pharisee in his hyper-religiosity, could not content himself that salvation was by grace alone on God’s part, and by faith alone on our part. The Sadducee cannot believe the miraculous and supernatural. The Herodian in the name of modern progress would trample under foot the sacredness of Christian service.

These are the three great enemies of evangelical Christianity today. Perhaps the sorriest feature of all in the behavior of those long ago Pharisees, Saducees and Herodians was that, although they hated and strove against EACH OTHER, they all united in common cause against HIM. Is there anything more astonishing than to read, even early in our Lord’s ministry, “The Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel WITH THE HERODIANS against Him, how they might destroy Him” (Mk.3:6)? How intense the hate which made them so lower themselves! And is it not surprising to read a bit later on, “Then the Pharisees WITH THE SADDUCEES came tempting Him” (Mat.16:1)? And was there not a grim strangeness in the way that all three groups closed in TOGETHER upon Him at the end (Mat.22:15,16,23) in a final, CONCERTED EFFORT to undo Him?

The ritualist will not have Christ and the Gospel in their SIMPLICITY. The modernist will not have them in their Divine INFALLIBILITY. The secularist cannot bear them with their “crude” emphasis on salvation THROUGH THE BLOOD.

The Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin was the supreme civil and religious tribunal of the Jewish nation. With that representative body must lie forever the real responsibility for the crucifying of Israel's Messiah, the incarnate Son of God. It consisted of 71 members, made up of:

- (1) the high priest,
- (2) 24 "chief priests" (1Chr.24:4,6)
- (3) 24 "elders" who represented the laity,
- (4) 22 "scribes" expert interpreters of the Law.

The jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin was acknowledged both by the Jews of the homeland and those of the diaspora. Its religious jurisdiction was binding on Jews everywhere.

The Jewish leaders had so shamefully violated the code of their own Sanhedrin in the unconstitutional condemnation of our Lord Jesus. His being taken by night before the ex-high priest Annas (Jn.18:13), the make believe nocturnal trial before Caiaphas in the high priest's palace (19-27), the sentence and execution without an intervening day, not to mention many other features, were utterly against the Sanhedrin code of fair play. And on any showing it was illegal for the Sanhedrin to meet in the high priest's palace instead of its own council hall, and still more so for the high priest to usurp the presidency for the occasion!

Perhaps it mitigates these dark doings somewhat to say that this was an abnormal summons of the assembly and not a statutory meeting – certainly it is difficult to think that men like Gamaliel and Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were present; yet many of the members must have been there. Is there a more tragic verse anywhere in the history of Israel, "Now the chief priests and elders and ALL THE SANHEDRIN sought FALSE WITNESS against Jesus, TO PUT HIM TO DEATH"!

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE OLD.

G. Campbell Morgan said, "In the Old Testament we have an interpretation of human need; and the New Testament is a revelation of Divine supply. In the Old we have unveilings of the human heart. In the New we have the unveiling of the heart of God, and the way in which He has answered humanity's need in Christ.

How unspeakably important it is that we should be enlightened and inspired, dominated and energized, by the truest, purest and highest ideas! All our life is either enriched or impoverished, ennobled or vulgarized, dignified or degraded, blessed or cursed, by the ideas which govern our minds. Of all books on earth, this is the most wonderful in its matter and meaning and message. Its pages are alive with an inexhaustible vitality. There is a glorious moral and spiritual explosiveness in them which makes new MEN, and shakes whole NATIONS, and wakes new ERAS, and will yet issue in a new WORLD.

The greatest need of our troubled 20th century is a return to the New Testament. It goes right to the heart of the human problem – the human heart. There is today the same heart-need, the same heart-cry; and there is still the same unchanging, all-sufficient answer given by the New Testament. That answer is JESUS CHRIST.

THE DOMINANT IDEA – FULFILLMENT!

Dominating all the writings of the New Testament the characteristic concept is that of FULFILLMENT. Matthew, right at the beginning, sets the key, and for emphasis strikes the key-note 12 times over with his "That it might be FULFILLED" (1:22, 2:15,17,23, 4:14, 8:17, 12:17,

13:35, 21:4, 26:56, 27:9,35). Right away, in His first public discourse of our Lord, he reports as the very crux of it, "I came ... to FULFILL." But Matthew is not alone in this emphasis. What was the very first word spoken by our Lord as He commenced His public ministry? According to Matthew it was, "Thus it becometh us to FULFILL..." (3:15). According to Mark it was, "The time is FULFILLED, the kingdom of God is at hand" (1:15). According to Luke it was, "This day is this Scripture FULFILLED in your ears" (4:21). John, as is usual, contrastively counterpoints the three synoptics, and instead of giving us our Lord's own first declaration gives us the reaction of those who first "received" Him – "We have FOUND!" (1:41, 45). And thereafter, 7 times he reiterates Matthew's key-note: "That it might be FULFILLED" (12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 19:24,28,36).

So it is, the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old; or to be more precise, the CHRIST of the New Testament is the fulfillment. He is the fulfillment of all that the prophets saw, and psalmists sang, and godly hearts hoped for.

The New Testament is THE ANSWER to the Old. Without it the Old is like a river which loses itself in the sands. It is revelation without destination; something is pre-visualized but never post-realized; promise without fulfillment; preparation without consummation. If the New Testament is not the answer to the Old, then the Old has never had an answer, and never can have. But the New Testament IS the answer. It is THE answer. It is the TRUE, CLEAR, GLORIOUS FULFILLMENT.

THE UNFINISHED SYMPHONY

Try to imagine yourself reading or studying the Old Testament for the first time. So you read, and of course, the first section you traverse is the Torah or Law – the Pentateuch. The thing which probably strikes you most is the prevalence of animal sacrifice. It begins in Genesis 4, and again in chapter 9, 12, and 22. It presents itself more clearly in Exodus, until in Leviticus there is an entire organization of sacrifices, offerings, rites, and ceremonies that somehow point to realities outside of themselves, yet this is nowhere clearly explained. However, you read on through the remaining books, hoping to find an explanation. You travel through the historical books (Joshua to Esther), the philosophy books (Job to Song of Solomon), and the prophetic books (Isaiah to Malachi); but although the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Law are referred to again and again, you come to the end of the Old Testament without the light you need; and you have a disappointing sense that the Old Testament is a book of UNEXPLAINED CEREMONIES.

Still you have decided that the Old Testament is just about the most wonderful book you ever read. So you must read it again, starting at Genesis. You see the obliteration of the antediluvian civilization, also God's covenant with Noah that the race should never be flood-destroyed again. Next you encounter the far-reaching covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22, renewed later to Isaac and Jacob. Later you see the 12 tribes freed from Egyptian bondage by Jehovah's outstretched arm, welded into a nation at Sinai, given a Law and ordinances, and constituted a theocracy. You watch the covenant people invade and occupy Canaan; the future is florid with possibilities. But alas, the Book of Judges follows with its sordid declensions and servitudes. The First Book of Samuel recounts the change-over from theocracy to monarchy. I Kings brings disruption of the one kingdom into two. II Kings ends with both kingdoms swept into exile. In Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther a remnant returns to Judea; but it is only a remnant. The walls of Jerusalem are rebuilt, but the Davidic throne is no more. In Judea the Jews are a minor dependency; outside they are scattered to the four winds. You read on through the philosophy books, but there is nothing further about them there; nor is there in the prophets, except in the

last little trio, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, where things are far from well with the returned remnant. Thus you finish your 2nd reading of the Old Testament with a sad sigh that it is a book of UNACHIEVED PURPOSES.

You really must read it again, for here surely, the true God is revealed, as also the way to find Him. You start at Genesis again. Surely this is the most credible and sublime account of origins ever penned! You re-peruse Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Surely this is the most wonderful Law ever given! But your special interest is now focused on those philosophical books, Job to Solomon's Song, for it is those that deal with the aching problems of the individual human heart. In them you will surely find solution! But do you? For although there are indeed illuminating, penetrating, practical, reassuring counsels, lessons, and promises; somehow there are no clear or final solutions to the dire problems of sin and pain and death and the beyond. You are still left groaning with Job, "Oh that I knew where I might find HIM!" In the ensuing writings of the prophets you find loftiest ethics and most startling predictions, but they do not solve your spiritual quest; and you end your 3rd reading of the Old Testament equally aware that it is a book of UNAPPEASED LONGINGS.

Yet because of the marvel of Old Testament prophecy, especially prophecy in the sense of prediction, you persist in reading it through again. There can be no surviving doubt as to genuineness. Boldly drawn, time-spanning, markedly detailed foretellings on Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and other mighty powers were hazarded and then fulfilled with such accuracy that any candid investigator must consent, "This is the seal of the Living God upon these Scriptures." Moreover, the fulfilling of those prophecies guarantees the similar consummation of the many others which reach on into a more distant future. The main body of the Old Testament prophecy speaks as no other known literature about the future, and garnishes it with the most compensating ultimate restitution. It all focuses in the idea that SOMEONE IS COMING who will be God's answer to the cry of the ages. Away back in Genesis 3:15 the "Seed of the woman" is to bruise the head of the serpent. The promise of this "Seed" is renewed to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in chapters 12, 17, 22, 26, 49. There are traces of it in all the succeeding Old Testament scrolls, until in Isaiah and his compeers, the stream of Messianic prophecy reaches flood-fullness. Yet when you reach Malachi again, although empires have perished, and centuries have filed into antiquity, and the seers lie in their graves, the Promised One has not come. "Behold He shall come!" exclaims Malachi, as he too, the last of the prophets, recedes behind the misty curtain of the past; and you close the Old Testament realizing that it is a book of UNFULFILLED PROPHECIES.

THE COMPLETED MASTERPIECE

But now, let's say you are introduced to and read the New Testament. What do you find? You read it over and over, and all the time you are discovering a book of corresponding fulfillments. In His vicarious death and atoning self sacrifice, His resurrection and ascension, His present high-priestly ministry in heaven, and His promised return, you see the unexplained ceremonies of the Law suddenly flame into new meaning. They all point to HIM – as for instance the five different kinds of offerings in Leviticus, the tabernacle ordinances, the annual entering of the high priest into the Holy of Holies with covenant blood-sprinkling, and his later re-emerging in his glorious garments to bless His people.

As you read of the Savior's birth, and hear the announcing angel say, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His

father David..." you realize that the unachieved purposes of the Old Testament are being taken up again, and are finding fulfillment in HIM.

As you read His teachings about the love and fatherhood of God; as you hear Him say, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"; as you see Him, not only ascending to heaven but shedding forth the Holy Spirit and thereby coming to indwell the hearts of His redeemed people – you see the unappeased longings of the Old Testament philosophy books finding lovely fulfillment.

And as for the unfulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament, from the time of His miraculous birth at Bethlehem right on to the climax of His miraculous ascension from Olivet, He is fulfilling those predictions of the older dispensation. He proves to be their fulfillment, in His sinless life and miracle-attested ministry, and most movingly in His Calvary death.

Yes, the Jesus of the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament ceremony, history, philosophy, and prophecy. In the Old Testament He is COMING, in the Gospels He HAS COME in visible humanity. In the Epistles He has come IN by the invisible Holy Spirit. In the Apocalypse He comes BACK in the glory of world empire.

THE N.T. AS A WHOLE

The 4 Gospels are the very crux of the Bible. All Old Testament branch-lines converge into one main line JESUS OF NAZARETH. We "change" here from that which is distinctively Jewish to that which is distinctively Christian; from the old covenant and dispensation to the new; from Moses to Christ; from law to grace.

There is an orderly unfolding movement observable in the New Testament. It has been aptly called "progress of doctrine." Besides design there is development, besides pattern there is progress.

ORDER OF THE GOSPELS

This "progress of doctrine" shows itself in the four Gospels. Matthew necessarily leads us, for his specialty is the linking up of the Gospel with the Hebrew Scriptures, thus introducing the New Testament as the fulfillment of the Old. "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken," is his distinguishing refrain; and he plainly adapts his narrative to the Jews, of whom, as to the flesh, Christ came.

Correspondingly, Mark's Gospel moves away from the studied Jewish adaptation of Matthew. There is no genealogy of our Lord's Davidic and Abrahamic descent. Only twice (as against 12x in Matthew) do we find "that it might be fulfilled." Our Lord is seen not so much fulfilling the past as commanding the present. He is the wonder – Worker with power over both visible and invisible realms. This is the Gospel of action, and its first intended approach seems to be to the Roman rather than the Hebrew. It was perfectly adapted to such Roman converts as those in Acts 10, and may well be summarized in Peter's words to them, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all those who were oppressed by the devil."

Then there is Luke who in the widest sense, presents Him as "the Son of Man." In Luke the door swings wide open. Here is broadest human sympathy, universality of outlook, and a Savior so presented as to engage the Gentile mind at large. The very preface prepares us for this. The

other evangelists, according to Hebrew form, begin without a dedication, whereas Luke not only prefaces a dedication in Greek fashion and classic style but dedicates his Gospel to a Gentile convert. Thereafter, in a way which brings out, as none of the others do, the common humanity of the perfect Man with all the human family and without regard to national distinctions or the older demarcation between Jew and Gentile.

This outward “progress” from Matthew to Luke corresponds with the racial affinity of the three writers. Matthew, also called “Levi, the son of Alphaeus,” was a Jew, and a near kinsman of our Lord. Mark, or “John Marcus” (Acts 12:12), was half Jew and half Gentile, hence, presumably, his name John (Hebrew) and surname Marcus (Greek). Luke, or Lucas, was a Gentile, as his Greek name, Greek style of writing and Paul’s references to him seem to make certain. And also this outward “progress” of the Gospel, from Jewish Matthew, through Jew-Gentile Mark, to Gentile Luke parallels with the three stages of expansion in the Acts of the Apostles. First the Gospel is preached within the confines of Jewry (Act.1-7). Then it spreads through Samaria, reaches to the Ethiopian chancellor, and breaks with Pentecostal effusion on the Gentile (Roman) household of Cornelius (8-12). Finally, through the missionary travels of Paul, it is propagated freely and fully to the whole Gentile world (13-28).

But if, in our three synoptic Gospels, the presentation of the historical Christ shows these three progressive stages, from its originating Jewish aspect to its most universal Gentile adaptation, the 4th Gospel is its perfective and protective climax. That which has been rightly inferred from the reports of the three is now plainly declared in the review by the fourth; the historical Jesus is the eternal Son. He who is Israel’s Messiah is Himself Jehovah. He who is the world’s Savior is the world’s Maker. He not only teaches truth, He is the Truth. He imparts life because He is the life.

THE BOOK OF THE ACTS

As for doctrinal progress in the Acts, was there ever a more wonderful unfolding of events and truths going hand-in-hand? We start with the renewed offer of the “kingdom” to the Jews, and end with the “churches” planted throughout the lands of the Gentiles; and from beginning to end, under the control of the now-invisible Lord, the evolution of outward events is made to register the corresponding evolution of evangelical doctrine. The Lord who was visible in the Gospels is now invisible, but at every necessary point there is an unmistakably supernatural intervention, so that the guiding of the history might be seen as the sealing of the doctrine.

The Acts must immediately follow the Gospels, for we need to see the now completed external facts of our Lord’s life, death, resurrection and ascension in their first meaning for the Jews. Equally must the Acts precede the Christian Church Epistles, for we are thereby prepared to see the Christ-facts in their fuller meaning for the Church.

Yes, as the story opens, Jesus crucified, risen, ascended, is Israel’s MESSIAH; but more and more as the story unfolds He is the world’s SAVIOR. Yes, all over the earlier pages we find “To the Jew first”; but more and more legibly, as the later pages are turned, we find “and also to the Gentile.” Yes, wonderful are the outward miracle-signs which fill the earlier pages, then later decrease; but far more wonderful are the inward soul-saving truths which go on expanding all the way through.

The Messianic kingdom has now been twice offered and twice rejected. In the Gospels it was offered through the lips of Christ Himself, but Israel rejected it and nailed Him to the cross. Now,

in the Acts, it is offered again by the crucified, risen, ascended Jesus, through Spirit-fired, miracle-attested messengers; and Israel rejects it again. First the Jews of the homeland finalize THEIR rejection in the martyring of Stephen. Later, the Jews of the Dispersion, gathered in their representative thousands at Jerusalem, signalize THEIR rejection in the attempted lynching of Paul (Act.22).

Yet although Israel, civically and representatively, has now twice rejected Jesus and the offered kingdom, there are GROUPS of men and women, both Jews and Gentiles, in Judea and Samaria and throughout the Roman world, who HAVE believed on Him and who DO own Him as King. What of THEM? Why, they now become the very crux of the story. As Israel's refusal crystallizes into hard-set fixity, there generally emerges the realization that the very failure of Israel is being sovereignly overruled in the formation of the CHURCH, of which those many scattered groups of believers are the first units!

THE EPISTLES

There are three words which concentrate for us the meaning of the Christian life. As I Corinthians 13:13 puts it, "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Now the three principal writers of our New Testament epistles are Paul, Peter and John, and they come in that order. They all speak about faith and hope and love, yet each one has an emphasis. First comes Paul, who is distinctively the apostle of FAITH. Next comes Peter, the apostle of HOPE. Last comes John the apostle of LOVE. If you change their positional order, you foil the true spiritual order. Their present arrangement is designed to indicate the true order of spiritual progress.

Take the nine Christian Church Epistles. The first four emphasize the Cross; the next three the Church; the last two the Lord's second coming. Is not that true progress?

Take the nine Hebrew Christian Epistles and their characteristic emphases. The first two stress "faith" and "works." The next two emphasize "hope" and "growth." The next four (John and Jude) "love" and then "contending." Finally the Apocalypse speaks of "overcoming" and "inheriting." What noble system of progress is here! Look it through leisurely and see how the spiritual balance is preserved at each forward step of the progress.

From beginning to end of the New Testament there is a sustained movement of progress until the thorn-crowned Christ of the Cross is the glory-crowned King of the new Jerusalem.

Praise we the God of Love,
Whose wondrous thoughts to men
Have been transmitted from above
Through inspiration's pen;
Whose Spirit moved and wrought
Through holy men of old,
And thus to all the ages brought
The Book of worth untold.

THE FOUR GOSPELS COLLECTIVELY.

Each contributes a unique aspect, yet all blend in such a fourfold unity of presentation as only Divine superintendence could have effected. It is their unity of subject plus their diversity of treatment which makes them so interesting to the mind, and so satisfying to the heart, in their portraiture of the historical "Jesus of Nazareth."

A SIGNIFICANT PARALLEL.

There is a parallel between the four Gospels and the four “living creatures” in the opening vision of the prophet Ezekiel. “As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle” (Ez.1:10). The lion symbolizes supreme strength, kingship; the man, highest intelligence; the ox, lowly service; the eagle, heavenliness, mystery, Divinity.

Matthew – the Messiah-King (the Lion)
Mark – Jehovah’s Servant (the Ox)
Luke – the Son of Man (the Man)
John – the Son of God (the Eagle)

It needs all four aspects to give the full truth. As Sovereign He comes to reign and rule. As Servant He comes to serve and suffer. As Son of Man He comes to share and sympathize. As Son of God He comes to reveal and redeem. Wonderful fourfold blending – sovereignty and humility; humanity and Deity!

MATTHEW

The lion was the emblem of the tribe of Judah, the royal tribe, that in which the Davidic dynasty ran. In Matthew our Lord is uniquely “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” “the Root of David,” the “King and Lawgiver.” The opening sentence at once gives the key: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of DAVID, the Son of ABRAHAM.” That beginning is peculiar to Matthew, as also is the genealogy which immediately follows it, in which our Lord’s human lineage is traced downwards from Abraham through David. Mark has no such genealogy. Luke travels right back to Adam. John goes right back into eternity. Each has a beginning peculiar to itself and in keeping with the special emphasis which is thereafter maintained throughout. All expositors agree that Matthew is the Gospel in which, as in no other, our Lord is offering Himself to the Jews as their Messiah-King, performing His Messianic miracle-credentials, and uttering the “laws” and the “mysteries” of the KINGDOM.

MARK

The ox is the emblem of lowly service. Especially among old-time easterners it represented patient, productive labor. All students of the Gospels have noticed that Mark is preeminently “the Gospel of action.” No genealogy is prefixed, and there are only the briefest snatches of our Lord’s discourses, where given at all (which alone is why Mark’s story is the shortest of the four). The emphasis right through is on Christ as the active One, the strong but lowly Servant; and the characteristic word (which in the Greek occurs 43x) is “straightway.”

LUKE

Equally clear, in Luke it is “the face of a man.” There is no obscuring of His kingship or His Deity, nor is there any obtruding of His humanity, yet Luke has lifted up the lovely manhood and its human sympathies in a way which is unmistakably peculiar to this 3rd Gospel. He begins with noticeably human touches, telling us about the parents and the birth of that wonder babe, “John the Baptist” (Matthew, Mark, and John give nothing of this). Then he narrates the birth of Jesus, telling of the pre-natal journey to Bethlehem, and of the birth in the outhouse because there was no room in the KATALUMA, or traveler’s enclosure; and instead of bringing eastern sages to Jerusalem inquiring “Where is He that is born KING?” he tells how angels sang to local

shepherds, “Unto you is born this day a SAVIOR.” Thereafter he tells us how in His babyhood Jesus was presented in the temple, how when He was 12 He went with His parents to the Passover at Jerusalem; how He continued with them as an obedient Son; and how He “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”

All this is found ONLY in Luke. He was a doctor, and perhaps Mary would feel that she could therefore speak with less reserve to him about our Lord’s birth and childhood. It is not until the latter half of chapter 3 that Luke gives us the genealogy, but in it, having traveled back by a different route (i.e. by Mary’s ancestors) to David, and linking there with the main line back to Abraham, he pushes right back to Adam, the first MAN.

JOHN

There is no human genealogy in John’s prologue, but in a few profound strokes of the pen he has lifted us to a loftier and sublimer height than any of the other Gospels. What is mere EARTHLY antiquity? To begin with this wonderful Christ you must go right beyond the first sunrise of time, into ETERNITY! Before the world had its beginning the Word had His being. “In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God . . . All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.”

He is not just the “Son of David,” or the “Son of Abraham” or the “Son of Adam” – He is the SON OF GOD. He is the WORD, and therefore co-eternal with the eternal MIND. But lest as such He should be thought of as impersonal, He is also the SON, and therefore co-personal with the FATHER. Albeit, although He is co-eternal and co-personal with the Father, He is not personally identical with the Father; nay, as the Word He was “WITH God,” and as the Son He is “IN THE BOSOM OF the Father.” Nor is even this all; for, lest He should be thought essentially subordinate to the Father – as a word is to a thought, or a son to a father – He is also the LIFE and the LIGHT. He does not merely transmit the life or reflect the light – He “IS” the life, He “IS” the light. The life is “IN Him.” The light shines “FROM Him.”

As the “Light” He REVEALS. As the “Son” He REDEEMS. As the “Life” He RENEWS. There is no obscuring of the manhood; but the emphasis is on the Godhead. It is the “eagle” aspect.

FOURFOLD OUTLOOK

Matthew writes with first reference to THE HEBREW mind. Perhaps that will have been gathered already from his repeated references to the Old Testament. Mark, the travel companion of Peter, writes with a primary applicability to THE ROMAN mind, presenting our Lord more pronouncedly as the mighty Miracle-worker. Luke, the travel-physician of Paul, adapts his approach with equal appropriateness to THE GREEK mind, more prominently exhibiting the matchless manhood of the Friend and Savior of sinners. John, whose writing occupies a unique place, being an interpretation as well as a record, and composed practically a generation after the others, writes more particularly for THE CHURCH, to emphasis the unqualified Deity of our Lord Jesus, but also to set forth for the whole world of mankind, without racial distinction, the revelation of Divine “grace and truth” through “the Word become flesh.” It has been truly observed that those three peoples of old – the Jew, the Greeks, the Romans – represent, as no others, human types which persist right through our racial history. They represent religion, culture, and administration (especially legal and commercial). The first three Gospels spoke then with particular adaptedness to those three, and they still do, complemented and crowned by John, with his one Divine “Word” for the whole human world.

SYNOPTICS vs. JOHN

The OUTER facts of His life. The INNER facts of His life.

The HUMAN aspects of His life. The DIVINE aspects of His life.

The PUBLIC discourses (largely). The PRIVATE discourses (largely).

The GALILEAN ministry (mainly). The JUDEAN ministry (mainly).

CHARACTERISTIC DISCRIMINATION

What is the subject of Christ's preaching? According to Matthew it is "the kingdom of heaven." According to Luke it is "the kingdom of God." This expression "the kingdom of God" had its dangers for the Jewish mind. It occurs in Matthew's writing only 3-4 times. The Hebrew had no superlatives. To express the superlative it used the word "God." What is it that is to be described? Is it that magnificent, that exceeding great city? Then the language calls it the "city of God." Is it the unexcelled cedars of Lebanon? Then the Hebrew calls them "the cedars of God." Had Matthew used the expression "the kingdom of God," the Jew would have been in the way of falling into his favorite error, thinking of the kingdom only in its outward aspects, as a kingdom of superlative material magnificence, splendor and wealth – for the Jew! "This is just what we have been waiting for," he would have said.

On the other hand, what is "the kingdom of heaven" to the Gentile? It is something which sounds vague and unreal to him. Luke has a different name therefore. The kingdom that Jesus proclaimed is "the kingdom of God." Is not that startling? "The kingdom of God," mind you – nothing to do with any of the paltry, petty deities of polytheistic heathendom, but the kingdom of the one true Creator-God. Luke lived in a day when thousands of disillusioned men and women were turning from the unrealities and stupidities of Greek and Roman polytheism to seek the true Reality. It was this break-away which accounted for the increasing proselytizing to the Hebrew faith. It was inspired strategy to announce this "kingdom of God!" This was the word needed for the Gentile.

CHARACTERISTIC ENDINGS

It is interesting also, to note the characteristic way in which each of the four records ends, and the progress of thought that the four endings exhibit when taken together. Matthew ends with our Lord's RESURRECTION. Mark goes further, and ends with His ASCENSION. Luke goes still further, and ends with the promise of THE SPIRIT. John completes the four by ending with the promise of HIS SECOND COMING. How appropriate that Matthew, the Gospel of the mighty Messiah-King, should end with the mighty act of His resurrection, the crowning proof of Messiahship and Divine power! How perfectly fitting that Mark, the Gospel of the lowly Servant, should end with the lowly One exalted to the place of honor! How beautifully in keeping that Luke, the Gospel of the sympathetic-hearted ideal Man, should end with the promise of the coming enduement! How fitting a completion that John, the Gospel of the Divine Son, written with special thought for the Church, should end with the risen Lord's own promise of His return! Truly, the interwoven design exhibited by the four "Gospels" makes them a masterpiece of variety in unity.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW: THE PROMISED KING ATTESTED YET REJECTED: SLAIN YET RISEN

Introduction: Genealogy, Nativity, Baptism, Temptation

1. THE DETOUR IN GALILEE (4:12-CH.18)

- a) What Jesus Taught – The Tenfold Message 5-7
- b) What Jesus Wrought – The Ten “Mighty Works” 8-10
- c) What People Thought – The Ten Reactions 11-18

2. THE CLIMAX IN JUDEA (19-28)

- a) The Presentation – Jesus Offered as King 19-25
- b) The Crucifixion – Jesus Slain as Felon 26-27
- c) The Resurrection – Jesus Risen as Savior 28

About Matthew Himself

1. He was a “PUBLICAN,” a Jew who had become a taxgatherer for the hated Romans, which was regarded as deeply dishonorable. Only Matthew has the self-humbling reminder, “Matthew the publican” and he alone preserves the stinging words, “The publicans and the harlots” (21:31).

2. He became a disciple of Jesus. Mark and Luke tell that he hospitably opened “his own house” to our Lord; and he gave a great feast for many other publicans to hear Jesus; and (a hint of his considerable money) that “he left all.” Not one of these things does Matthew himself mention.

3. He was later appointed an apostle. Matthew and Thomas go together each time and are given in that order by Mark and Luke, but Matthew puts Thomas first – another incidental token of humility.

Matthew properly leads our four Gospels. As none of the others, he links the New with the Old, showing our Lord’s fulfilling of the Hebrew Scriptures. He has more Old Testament quotations and allusions than Mark and Luke together. Moreover, since Matthew (and only he) writes primarily for the JEWS, is he not the true leader-in of the NEW, as well as the obvious link back with the Old? For even the New is “to the Jew first.”

Up to Ch.4:12 all is introductory – and in Judea. After Ch.19:1 all is culminative – back in Judea. Between the two is the ministry in Galilee, which occupies the bulk of the book. The silencing of the forerunner’s voice had given solemn signal that the voice of the King Himself should now speak with full publicity; but there was an awful hostility in Jerusalem which threatened to abort the predesigned message and ministry of the King. So, “He departed INTO Galilee” (4:12). After He had finished His predesigned words and works in Galilee, and the hour had struck for the decisive presentation of Himself at Jerusalem, “He departed FROM Galilee” (19:1).

Matthew so clearly demarcates the “into” and the “out of” Galilee, for it helps us to keep in mind that the whole Galilean ministry was in reality a kind of DETOUR. Our Lord’s objective was Jerusalem, but circumstances made an immediate approach impractical; and the Galilean detour became a necessary strategy.

THE MINISTRY IN GALILEE

Matthew is an impressionist rather than particularist. His strategy is to present meaningful groupings of our Lord’s sayings and doings; of the impacts which He made; and of the reactions thereby provoked. Matthew thus is the perfect preparation for the other three Gospels.

First, chapters 5-7 is a grouping of our Lord's TEACHINGS; in chapters 8-10 there is a grouping together of our Lord's MIRACLES; and in chapters 11-18 there is a grouping of the various REACTIONS to our Lord and His ministry, accompanied with His own counter-reactions or verdicts. These three groupings seem to run in tens.

The Tenfold Message

1. The Beatitudes 5:3-16, The Subjects of the Kgdm.
2. Moral Standards 5:17-48, Christ vs. "It was said"
3. Religious Motives 6:1-18, Alms, Prayer, Fasting
4. Mammon Worship 6:19-24, Earthiness vs. Godliness
5. Temporal Cares 6:25-34, Anxiety vs. Trust in God
6. Social Discernment 7:1-6, Censuring, Indiscretion.
7. Encouragements 7:7-11, Prayer makes it all Practical.
8. Summary in a Sentence 7:12, Such a Life Fulfills Scripture.
9. The Alternatives 7:13-14, Two Ways, Broad vs. Narrow.
10. Final Warnings 7:15-27, False prophets, profession, foundation.

In this part on Jesus teachings, the first three sections concern virtues, morals and motives. The next three concern things material, temporal, social. The next three give encouragement, summary, exhortation. The discourse then closes with three solemn warnings.

The Ten Miracles

1. The Cleansing of the Leper 8:1-4
2. Centurion's Servant: Palsy 8:5-13
3. Peter's Wife's Mother: Fever 8:14-15
4. The Stilling of the Storm 8:23-27
5. Gergesene Demoniacs Healed 8:28-34
6. The Man Cured of the Palsy 9:1-8
7. The Woman with Hemorrhage 9:18-22
8. The Ruler's Daughter Raised 9:23-26
9. Two Blind Men Given Sight 9:27-31
10. The Dumb Demoniac Healed 9:32-34

In this grouping of the miracles there are two generalizing statements that Jesus healed "all" and "every" sickness; yet it remains that only the above noted ten are particularized. There is a representativeness and completeness about them. The first three miracles heal functional physical diseases which affect THE WHOLE BODY, i.e. leprosy, palsy, fever. The next three show our Lord's power in other spheres, i.e. in the NATURAL realm (the stilling of the storm), in the SPIRIT realm (the expelling of the demons), in the MORAL realm (thy sins be forgiven thee). The final four concern local and organic ailments of the body, i.e. bleeding, blindness, dumbness, and the crowning power-display of raising the dead.

Take the first trio – with three things that JESUS HIMSELF did or said. Nothing would startle the Jew like the instantaneous cure of leprosy. So Matthew puts it first. Yet to crown such a wonder, "Jesus put forth His hand and TOUCHED him. . ." That Jesus thus touched the loathsome untouchable made the cure as much a revelation of God-like compassion as of superhuman power. Next in the healing of the palsied servant of the Gentile centurion Jesus makes the astonishing statement, "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness.”

Take the second trio – and three remarkable utterances ABOUT Jesus. The stilling of the storm evokes the wonder-struck exclamation, “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!” Next the demons in the two Gergesene demoniacs cry out, “Jesus, Son of God! Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?” Next, as the palsied man is cured, the Scribes mutter, “This man blasphemeth,” thus provoking the immensely revealing rejoinder, “The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins.”

Look now at the remaining four – four notable CULMINATIONS. In the raising of the dead girl to life we see a culmination of faith, even though she is dead. In that of the hemorrhaging woman, faith that even to touch the garment of Jesus will bring healing, without even a word from Himself. In the case of the two blind men faith even amid blindness and apart from all visible evidence. Finally, in the cure of the dumb demoniac, the emphasis is thrown on the wicked cynicism of the Pharisees – a culmination of hostile prejudice and unbelief, for they even dare to attribute our Lord’s gracious cures to complicity with Satan!

The Ten Reactions

1. John the Baptist – Undecided 11:2-15
2. “This Generation” – Unresponsive 11:16-19
3. Galilean Cities – Unrepentant 11:20-30
4. The Pharisees – Unreasonable 12:2,10,14,24,38
5. The Multitudes – Undiscerning 13:13-15
6. Nazarethites – Unbelieving 13:53-58
7. Herod the King – Unintelligent 14:1-13
8. Jerusalem Scribes – Unconciliatory 15:1-20
9. Pharisees, Sadducees – Unrelenting 16:1-12
10. The Twelve Apostles – Glad Recognition 16:13-20

The general reaction at the end of the Galilean ministry may be summed up in the prefix “un.” Later in the climax at Jerusalem, the passive “UN” was to give place to the active, fateful “anti.” It was already evident while the long-promised kingdom was welcome enough in its material aspects (i.e. the healing of the sick and the feeding of the hungry), there was mass unwillingness to accept its ethical and spiritual standards.

Going with the ten reactions recorded by Matthew are our Lord’s counter-reactions, which are equally arresting. His reaction to the undecided John evokes an eye-opening explanation of the forerunner’s prophetic identity and positional significance. His reaction to the unresponsiveness of “this generation” is sad resignation with the comment, “But wisdom is justified of her children”; i.e. although there had not been a worthy response either to ascetic John or to His own social friendliness, the fault lay in the hearers, not in the approach. His reaction to the impenitent cities, as collective units, was to predict judgment, and turn away from them with a new message for the INDIVIDUAL, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden. . .” To the unreasonable Pharisees His reaction is an awesome warning against perverting the truth too far and perpetrating unpardonable insult to the Holy Spirit. To the misty-minded multitude it is that henceforth His kingdom teaching becomes mainly by parable. To His disdaining townsmen it is a suspension of His mighty works. Toward Herod it is silence and avoidance. To the Jerusalem scribes it is to charge them with hypocritically nullifying the very Scriptures of which they were

professedly the custodians. To the Saducees it is a rebuke and refusal. To the Twelve, who recognize and confess Him, it is, "Blessed! . . .flesh and blood hath not revealed it. . .and upon this Rock I will build My church."

After this, until His departure from Galilee, our Lord no more addresses the public, but devotes instruction to His disciples alone. Already, as the Galilean detour nears its end, our Lord sees Israel's implicit rejection of King and kingdom, and announces the coming new dispensational turning-point: "I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH."

THE CLIMAX IN JUDEA

Chapter 19 begins, "And it came to pass that when Jesus had finished these sayings, He departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of JUDEA. . ." Then Matthew's story quite naturally forms itself around three successive developments:

1. The Presentation 19-25
2. The Crucifixion 26-27
3. The Resurrection 28

The Presentation

By the "Presentation" we mean our Lord's public presentation of Himself as Israel's Messiah-King. This part of the narrative runs in a fourfold sequence:

- The Journeying TO the City 19-22
- The Entry INTO the City 21:1-17
- The Clashes IN the City 21:18-Ch.23
- The Discourse on Olivet 24-25

First, in the JOURNEY to the city we are to see that our Lord foreknew the outcome of His timed appearance at Jerusalem before He ever entered its gates (20:17-19).

Second, in our Lord's triumphal ENTRY we are meant to see that He certainly DID THUS offer Himself as Israel's Messiah-King, and that the Jewish so understood (21:5). He not only accepted from the multitude their continuous "Hosanna to the Son of David!" but, with flash of regal indignation in His eyes, cast out the money traffickers from His temple; and when the chief priests, provoked by the children's hosannas, asked "Hearest Thou what these say?" He replied, "Yea, have ye never read: Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?" Certainly those Jewish leaders understood. It was no accident that a little later there was a superscription over His cross, "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

Third, in the fateful COLLISIONS which now ensued inside the city between Jesus and the Jewish sects we are meant to see not only that THEY had set themselves implacably to reject HIM, but that HE also had now rejected THEM. The barren fig tree which He cursed was His symbol of them. From the moment of His entry, see how they contest Him (21:15,23-27). Herodians, Sadducees, Pharisees concertedly close in upon Him (22). They are not only answered by Him, they are humiliatingly silenced (22:46). Oh, tragedy of self-blinded religiosity and outraged love, that He who commenced His ministry in Galilee with eight "Blesseds" should have to close it in Jerusalem with those eight "Woes"! The Jewish leaders could not resist His wisdom, but they DID resist His WITNESS. And so the broken-hearted royal Redeemer withdrew, with that sob which was the sudden outgushing of an infinite deep, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent to thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chicks under her

wings; but you would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, ye shall not see Me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.” Fourth, in our Lord’s OLIVET PROPHECY of things to come we are meant to see, before anything else, that it was uttered OUTSIDE the city, by a Christ who had now withdrawn, and that the predicted happenings were BECAUSE of His having been rejected.

“Ye shall not see Me henceforth....And Jesus went out....
There shall not be left here one stone upon another....
When shall these things be?...And Jesus answered [i.e. the Olivet discourse].”

Thus did the triumphal end in dark anti climax. Our Lord’s attention was now devoted exclusively to the inner circle of His disciples. The omniscient foreknowledge which expressed itself in its Olivet discourse must have been a steady relief to them, for they had doubtless been staggered by the angry dignity with which He had now deliberately antagonized the nation’s religious leaders and flung the ruling class away. There is anger but no temper. Calmly, as He sits on the slopes of Olivet, He tells the ultimate triumph beyond present tragedy and impending troubles.

The Crucifixion

Among His Own Disciples 24:1-56
Before the Jewish Sanhedrin 24:57-75
Before the Roman Governor 27:1-26
Crucified, Dead and Buried 27:27-66

In the first of these, where our Lord is WITHDRAWN WITH THE TWELVE the emphasized feature is that He perfectly FORESAW every detail in the new turn of events. In response to Mary’s anointing Him He says, “She hath done it for My burial.” At supper with His disciples He tells them that it is actually one of themselves who is about to betray Him, and indicates Judas. He sadly fore-apprises Peter of his denial. And it is superlatively significant how this foreknowledge now expresses itself as to the Cross. He links it with the Jewish Passover in such a way as to imply that He is the NEW Passover (26:2). He links it with Jeremiah 31:31, etc., and designates His blood as “the blood of the NEW covenant.” He links it with the Old Testament prophecies such as Isaiah 53, for His bloodshedding is to be SUBSTITUTIONARY (shed for many), and PROPITIATORY (for the remission of sins). In the Gethsemane agony the Father’s sovereignty is recognized in it all, and the incarnate Son bows in sublime yieldedness.

In the second scene, where our Lord is BEFORE THE JEWISH SANHEDRIN, the big fact is that Jesus was condemned specifically for claiming to be Israel’s Messiah. His baffling silence eventually provoked the high priest to cry, “I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God.” And the Lord therefore said, “Thou hast said, moreover I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” That was all the Sanhedrin wanted. They at once charged Him with “blasphemy” and declared Him “guilty of death.” He was crucified for that, AND FOR NOTHING ELSE.

In the third scene, where He is before the Roman Governor, we are meant to note that the Jews handed Him over for claiming to be their Christ, only they had now given it just that twist that would make it tingle in Pilate’s ears, namely, that Jesus had proclaimed Himself KING of the

Jews. Pilate's first question is, "Art Thou King of the Jews?" The experienced Pilate soon knew that there was no cause of death in His prisoner (v.23-24), but the thing which would save his own neck if his Roman superiors should ask why Jesus was allowed to be crucified was that He had advertised Himself as "King" of the Jews in opposition to Caesar: hence Pilate's large written accusation over the Cross, "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS," which also served as a sarcastic slap-back at the Jews, whose motive in delivering Jesus, as Pilate well knew, was envy (27:18).

And now, that fourth scene, the awe-inspiring, soul-subduing spectacle, THE CRUCIFIXION. There are two things above all others Matthew would impress upon us. First as He describes (more fully than Mark, Luke or John) the accompanying abnormalities – the midday darkness, the earthquake, the cleaving of the rocks, the disturbed graves, he would have us exclaim with the startled centurion, "Truly this was the Son of God!" Second, as he reports the simultaneous rending of the temple veil in the Holy of Holies, not from human hand from below, but by a Divine "from the top," not merely part way, but completely, "from the top to the bottom," he would have us see the profound GODWARD significance of that Cross. That Sufferer is "the Son of God"; and that Cross has effected something tremendous between earth and heaven. The after-details ensure that physical life became extinct, and that the corpse was really entombed. There could be no bodily re-emergence except by miraculous resurrection.

The Resurrection

- The brief account falls into four paragraphs:
- The Intervention of the Angel 28:1-7
- The Reappearance of the Risen Lord 28:1-10
- The Lying Invention of the Jews 28:11-15
- The New Outsending of the Eleven 28:16-20

"All authority is given unto Me, in heaven and in earth." But did He not always have this authority? As God the Son, yes; but not as Jesus, "Son of Man," "Son of David." Both by plain and veiled intimations the Scriptures convey that Satan has sustained a peculiar relationship of authority over the earth. He was not always Satan and Diabolos, but Lucifer, the "anointed cherub." He is called "the prince of this world." When He tempted our Lord, saying, "All this power will I give Thee [i.e. all the kingdoms of the world] for it is delivered unto me," our Lord did not dispute the claim (He.2:14, Eph.2:2).

But his power is now broken, and his authority is forever taken away. THAT is the meaning of our Lord's resurrection, and of His words, "All authority is given unto ME. . ." As the first Adam fell and forfeited his dominion, so Jesus "the second Adam" overcame by choosing the Father's will even to that costliest extreme of Calvary, by which He became not only the Redeemer of Adam's fallen race but the leader of a new humanity, the tried, tested, proven, all-worthy Executor of the Divine will, and the resurrection-attested Administrator of the Divine purposes.

In our risen Lord's pronouncement at the end of Matthew's Gospel there is that which was NOT predicted in the Old Testament, and which transcends all that WAS predicted; for Israel's rejected Christ, who has now become the world's Savior, is lifted "far above all principality and power and authority, and every name that is named" and crowned as the ADMINISTRATOR OF THE WHOLE UNIVERSE!

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The audience of Jesus time understood this phrase without explanation. It foretold a visible kingdom, with Messiah reigning on the throne of David, over a reunited Israel and the Gentile nations in world empire. It was to be visible, Messianic, global – the very antithesis of a “church”, which is by its very name, ECCLESIA, a called-out, exclusive minority.

That promised kingdom was announced by the forerunner, then preached by our Lord with Messianic credentials. To a people doting on the material prospects of the long-looked-for kingdom, its MORAL requirements were unacceptable. The kingdom was rejected and the King crucified. It was reoffered in the period of the Acts; and so the kingdom is withdrawn. But the kingdom will be set up when the King returns and the repentant Israel says, “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah!”

From the time of their rejection of Him onwards our Lord would veil His kingdom teaching somewhat in parables. There was mercy in this, for it spared the unreceptive hearer from the heavier guilt of further spurning of plainly stated truth. There was judgment in it too – “From him shall be taken away even what he hath.”

Yet the very parables which were to VEIL the truth from some were to reveal NEW TRUTH to sincere disciples, for “To him that hath shall be given.” Yes, Jesus was now opening up new truths about the future aspects of the kingdom, following its rejection by Israel.

The Seven Parables of Matthew Thirteen

First, we must clarify that these do NOT refer to the Church – for the Church had not yet been even mentioned. Each one of them, except the first, begins: “The kingdom of heaven is like. . .” That kingdom is NOT the Church. Nor do they picture Christendom in this present age, as certain dispensationalists aver. What then is the purport of these parables? Let their LOCATION be our first guide. They occur in the section of the narrative which tells of the various reactions to our Lord’s message. Already He has rebuked Galilee’s unrepenting cities; and now in the parable of the sower, He portrays the results of His preaching among the multitudes. Only a fraction have proven good-soil hearers. The other six parables are designed to reveal, though in partly veiled form, certain far-reaching truths hitherto unreleased concerning the POSTPONEMENT of the kingdom, consequent upon Israel’s present imperviousness.

The Wheat and the Tares

The good sower is the “Son of Man.” The field is the world. The good seed are the children of the kingdom. The tares are the children of the wicked one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age. The reapers are the angels. And the parable ends, “THEN [i.e. at the end of the age] shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Now this sending forth of angels when the Son of Man returns at the end of the present age, and the setting up of the kingdom THEN, is found again and again in the New Testament. Our Lord Himself directly states it in His Olivet discourse. The kingdom comes “THEN” and not before.

What our Lord did NOT disclose in the parable was that the “THEN” was so far away, with the present dispensation of grace intervening. THAT could not very well have been revealed, else the continued offer of the kingdom to Israel by the Lord and His apostles would have become

merely theatrical, whereas it was thoroughly genuine; the nation's free will was respected, and events were allowed to take their course accordingly. It is the Divine foreknowledge which speaks in these parables, divulging what was to happen in view of Israel's FOREKNOWN behavior. The setting up of the kingdom was to be postponed.

The idea must be rejected that in this present dispensation the "children of the kingdom" are one and the same as regenerated Christian believers. The Spirit born members of our Lord's body and bride are far more than "children of the kingdom" in the way our Lord meant. When the kingdom comes, THEY will enter it, not as SUBJECTS only, but to REIGN WITH Christ (as other Scriptures show).

But let it be settled in our minds that "the kingdom of heaven" has NOT YET come; nor is it here in any so-called "mystery-form" more or less identical with Christendom or "the sphere of Christian profession."

Mustard Seed and Leaven

The third and fourth parables, mustard seed and leaven, both illustrate the present hiddenness but ultimate greatness of the kingdom. Because Scripture elsewhere uses leaven unfavorably in a symbolic sense, is it unthinkable that our Lord should here use it in a GOOD sense? Whatever may be said against leaven, there is no getting over our Lord's own words, "The kingdom of heaven is LIKE UNTO leaven." In the mustard seed and leaven – the one buried in the ground yet eventually a great tree, the other hidden in the meal yet eventually filling the whole, our Lord surely pictures the then-rejected kingdom as similarly being now hidden, or removed from view, but at last reappearing in greatness all-pervading. Instead of some supposed "mystery-form" of the kingdom now on earth, let it be realized that there is a present suspension, and that when our Lord returns all these parables will suddenly "come alive" with new activity again and be seen in their true fulfillment.

Hidden Treasure and Pearl Merchant

In the two short parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl merchant the kingdom is again represented as hidden, but with the further aspect that it is nevertheless the supreme "find" to those who are seeking the best. Instead of publicity and common offer, there is now concealment and individual discovery; there is "seeking" and "finding," and an esteeming of the coming kingdom as such treasure that it is worth selling all else to possess it. We need not be surprised that the easiest interpretation is the truest, namely, that the "treasure" or "the pearl of great price" is the "kingdom of heaven," and that the man that now finds is the sincere seeker who "seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" and, to quote Paul, "counts all things but loss for the excellency" of inheriting the coming kingdom.

The Drag-Net

Like the others, it has its own particular emphasis, which is the final severance of evil-doers from the upright who inherit the kingdom (v.49-50).

Thus there is progress in these seven parables. In the first we are given the results of our Lord's own preaching up to that time. In the second the wheat and the tares "grow together UNTIL. . ." In the third and fourth the mustard seed and leaven tell the present abeyance but future triumph of the kingdom. In the fifth and sixth the treasure and the pearl express the supreme worthwhileness of counting all things loss for that coming kingdom. In the seventh the emptying of the dragnet shows the doom-filled exclusion of the wicked from the kingdom.

It should be born in mind all through that these seven parables have their first reference to our Lord's own time on earth, from which time the kingdom has been "hidden," withdrawn, postponed. The Church age now intervenes. So far as the kingdom is concerned there is suspension. But at the end of the PRESENT age these parables will take up again from where they were interrupted by the present suspension and will have their FINAL fulfillment. The kingdom shall come. The angels shall "gather out all things that offend." Then shall the righteous inherit the kingdom.

It is in this light that all the later parables of the kingdom should be interpreted. The time of their final fulfillment is surely at hand.

The Opening Genealogy

Why that longish genealogy at the beginning? Remember that Matthew wrote primarily for Jews, who, in keeping with Old Testament prophecy, expected their Messiah to be born of a certain family. Matthew need not begin way back with Adam, but he must start with Abraham, the progenitor of the covenant nation, and then show the descent through David, head of Judah's royal line in which ran the covenant promise of the coming Messiah-King. Matthew must show that Jesus was truly Son of Abraham and Heir of David.

In Matthew's list there is an omission of Jehoiakim between Josiah and Jeconiah. Between Adam and Christ there are just 60 generations. These sixty seem to go in six tens, each tenth man being notably significant. From Adam onwards the first tenth man is NOAH. In his days God sent destructive judgment on the whole race, and it looked as though Satan had aborted the Messianic line; but that line is preserved in Noah, demonstrating the indestructibility of the Divine purpose.

The next tenth man is ABRAHAM, with whom God entered into unconditional covenant that of his seed should come the Messiah in whom all kindreds of the earth should be blessed.

The next tenth man is BOAZ, who married beautiful Moabitess Ruth; and through Gentile Ruth all the Gentile peoples are representatively incorporated into the Messianic hope.

The next tenth man is UZZIAH. It was "in the year that King Uzziah died" that Isaiah, greatest of all Israel's writing prophets, "saw the Lord" [i.e. the Messiah] sitting on the throne that rules all thrones.

The next tenth man is ZERUBBABEL, the Jewish prince who headed the return of the remnant to Judea after the Babylonian exile. Zerubbabel is a type of Christ, as the supreme leader of Israel from age-long exile into Millennial blessing.

Ten generations later, we read, "JOSEPH, the husband of Mary of whom was born JESUS who is called CHRIST." Each tenth man is typical, prophetic, anticipative – Christ fulfills all. The number 10 is that of completeness, and six is the number of man as a sinner. Six complete cycles of ten: then comes Christ, who is the goal of all generations and the Savior of sinners. In Him the line ENDS. In Him it NEVER ends. It perfectly conforms, that He who is God's great SEVEN should immediately follow those six completed tens, bringing in the new SPIRITUAL generation, and the kingdom which, although at present withheld, shall crown the preceding 6,000 years of human history with a seventh great thousand-year day, the Millennium of Messiah's worldwide empire, with its exact time-cycle of 10 times 10 times 10 years of peace and glory.

Christ vs. "It was said"

"It was said of old time. . .but I say unto you. . ." Our Lord's usual mode of quoting the Old Testament is, "It is written," whereas the Sermon on the Mount has "It was said," indicating reference to the ORAL Law – six times it occurs in Matthew 5. Our Lord instead of repudiating them, intensifies them, insisting on an inward and spiritual, as well as an outward and formal, compliance.

The Wilderness Temptation

Why that wilderness temptation? It was because Christ, as the new representative Human, must be tested and tried. It is vital to realize that our Lord was there as MAN. With pious-sounding cunning Satan at once sought to blur the battle point. "If Thou be the SON OF GOD. . .command that these stones be made bread." But immediately Jesus brought the encounter into right focus again by His reply, "It is written, MAN shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

The first temptation concerned the body, "Command that these stones be made bread." The second related to the soul, "Cast Thyself down," i.e. give self-display. The third went right to the spirit, "Fall down and worship me." The first suggested something reasonable, the second something questionable, the third something definitely wrong. How often that is Satan's technique of temptation! – physical, psychical, spiritual; from that which is reasonable, to that which is questionable, to that which is damnable. In the first there is the disguise of sympathy, in the second a veneer of admiration, in the third the mask is off, all pretense is gone, and the real motive is exposed – "Worship me."

Three times the sword flashes in our Lord's hand, as He repulses the tempter with, "It is written." Three times we see the secret of victory – submission to the Word of God.

The Unpardonable Sin

Startlingly enough, it was addressed to VERY RELIGIOUS persons, the Pharisees. It is called "BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT."

Blasphemy is speaking in such a way as vilifies or insults or otherwise outrages God. They were saying, "This fellow casts out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons." That is, they were ASCRIBING THE HOLY SPIRIT'S GRACIOUS AND HOLY ACTIVITIES TO THE DEVIL. They DID know that our Lord's healing miracles were manifestly beneficent intervenings of GOD; nevertheless, in jealous rebellion against clear light, and to guard their prestige among the people, they lied to their own consciences, and outspokenly averred that those gracious works of God were wrought by Satan!

Our Lord and Peter's Confession

It should also be clearly appreciated that our Lord NEVER gave "the keys of the Church" to Peter. What our Lord actually said to Peter was, "And I will give unto thee the keys of THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN." That kingdom is not the Church, nor will it come until the Church age is over, when our Lord's mystic body and bride shall have become completed. When the kingdom comes, as it surely will at His return, the keys of its administration will be seen by all in the hands of Peter and his co-apostles.

The Man Without a Wedding Garment

Note that it was spoken primarily against the Pharisees (21:45-46, 22:1), to illustrate the "KINGDOM OF HEAVEN." Yes, the kingdom of heaven which shall yet come, that Millennial "feast" which shall yet provide peace and plenty for the meek, will include all, yet there will be no

tolerance of wickedness or hypocrisy, i.e. for the man who will not wear the required “wedding garment.” Let it be settled in our minds, this parable of the royal wedding feast does NOT relate to the Church but to the “kingdom of heaven” – which was offered, refused, is now withheld, and is soon to be set up on earth. The man without the wedding garment is NOT some faulty kind of present-day “believer,” but an illustration of what will happen when that kingdom age of righteousness is brought in, when our Lord fulfills Isaiah 11:4, and other similar pledges, “But with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth; but with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked.”

Those precious words of the risen Jesus with which Matthew himself closes, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.” Note the “I am.” In the Greek it is the strongest possible form of expression – “EGO EIMI.” Both EGO and EIMI mean “I am”; but the former puts the emphasis on the “I” while the latter puts it on the “am.” Taken together they are the strongest Greek form to express the name of God as the great “I AM.” That is how the risen Christ here refers to Himself. “Lo, I AM with you!” But there is a lovely feature in the Greek construction here which does not reveal itself in our English translation. It reads like this,

“And lo, I with you AM. . . .”

You and I, dear fellow believer, are in between the “I” and the “AM.” He is not only WITH us, He is ALL AROUND US – not only now and then, but “always,” which translated literally, is “all the days” – this day, this hour, this moment.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK: JESUS, JEHOVAH'S SERVANT, THE MIGHTY WORKER

Foreword – Four Voices Announce Him: (1:1-13)

“Son of God” “The Lord” “One Mightier” “My Son”

1. THE JORDAN – THE MIGHTY WORKS IN GALILEE 1:14-8:30

First message and disciples More mighty works and effects 1:14-20 4:35-6:6

First mighty works and effects The Twelve endowed and sent out 1:21-2:12 6:7-13

First critics – and replies Herod's idea: the Twelve report 2:13-3:6 6:14-31

Crowds flock: Twelve chosen Still mightier mighty works 3:7-19 6:32-56

Scribes warned: reply to kin Critics; sighs; final signs 3:20-35 7:1-8:26

Parables = few “good” hearers Avowal: “Thou art the Christ” 4:1-34 :27-30

2. THE JOURNEY – THE TRAGIC ENIGMA IN JERUSALEM 8:31-15

Strange new note: the Cross The triumphal entry: Day 1 8:31-9:1 9:1-11

Transfiguration: Cross again Fig tree: Temple purge: Day 2 9:2-13 9:12-19

Mighty miracle: Cross again Foes: Olivet prophecy: Day 3 9:14-32 9:20-Ch.13

Apostles rebuke; counseled Bethany – and betrayal: Day 4 9:33-50 14:1-11

Judea again: sayings, doings Passover-Garden-Trial: Day 5 10:1-31 14:12-72

To Jerusalem: Cross in view Pilate; Cross; Burial: Day 6 10:32-52 15:1-47

Finale – Fourfold triumph (Ch.16)

Risen (1-8), Appearing (9-18), Ascended (19), Working (20)

The Uppermost Purpose

We need only to read Mark two or three times, and his uppermost purpose captures us. He wants us to see JESUS AT WORK. It is as though he says, “Look! What Jesus DID proves who

He WAS. What He WROUGHT authenticates what He TAUGHT. The mighty WORKS verify the startling WORDS. Watch Him at work, and marvel at this supernatural Wonder-worker! THAT will convince you.”

So, there is no opening genealogy as in Matthew, no introductory account of what preceded and attended and succeeded the birth of Jesus. Right away we are at the Jordan, to hear John announce that “One mightier” is at hand. Forthwith Jesus is on the scene; the miracle ministry begins; and by eager, graphic strokes Mark reaches in chapter one what Matthew takes 8 chapters to overtake. He covers in 9 chapters what Matthew traverses in twice as many. Not that his account is skimpy, for it is alive with vivid detail; but he focuses on what Jesus DID, and omits much of what Jesus SAID.

In fact, it is solely the absence of our Lord’s discourses which makes this the shortest of the four Gospels. The whole Sermon on the Mount belongs (but is omitted) between v.39 and v.40 of the first chapter. Matthew’s long chapter 13 on the kingdom parables has only a shadow parallel in Mark. Our Lord’s commission to the Twelve, which takes all 42 verses of Matthew 10, has a meager 7 verses here; while his denunciation of Galilee’s impenitent cities finds no mention at all. The long condemnation of scribes and Pharisees which fills Matthew 23 is without even an echo in Mark; and the Olivet discourse is reduced to a third.

Yes, Mark is distinctively the Gospel of what Jesus DID. Even the “kingdom,” which filled our Lord’s preaching and is named over 50 times in Matthew, is on our Lord’s lips only 14 times in Mark. It is clear as can be what our evangelist intends: we are meant to look and marvel at the “mighty WORKS.”

There are no designed groupings like Matthew’s. That is not Mark’s policy. He wants us to catch the wonder of this Mighty-One IN ACTION. So, instead of specialized groupings or methodical sectioning, we have a purposely unhalting SUCCESSION of astonishing doings. Mark is the camera-man of the four Gospel-writers, giving us shot after shot of unforgettable scenes. The people are “astonished” at His “doctrine” and are “amazed” at His “authority.” His “fame” spreads “throughout the region” and is “blazed abroad.” Out of sixteen chapters twelve begin with, “And,” indicating the unhalting continuity of the narrative.

Significant Peculiarities

In Mark, our Lord Jesus is uniquely transcribed as the SERVANT. Perhaps the most fascinating phenomenon of all, is the exquisite way in which the perfect balance is sustained throughout between human servanthood and Divine lordship. The lordship is on every page, yet everywhere the Lord is the SERVANT – of the Divine will and of human need; the authorized and empowered Sent-One, expeditious, swiftly executive, dominating every situation, yet unobtrusive, compassionate, and in all things obedient to the supreme will; the lovely inspiration of Paul’s words, “He took upon Himself the form of a SERVANT ... and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

There is a complete absence of any INCARNATION NARRATIVE. There is nothing which answers to the introductions in the other three Gospels; no Davidic genealogy; no pointing star; no eastern sages bringing their gifts and inquiring “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?”; no angel messengers, as in Luke; no worship of shepherds; nothing about Bethlehem or Nazareth; no Benedictus of Zachariah; no magnificent of Mary; no Nunc Dimittis of Simeon; no incident of our Lord’s boyhood; no prologue of His pre-existence, as in John; no clothing of the

Eternal Word in flesh; no emerging of the Eternal Son from the bosom of the Father. All this is in accord with the SERVANT emphasis.

There is either outright deletion or severe abridgment of OUR LORD'S DISCOURSES. Yet if Matthew's opening genealogy and narrative record are left out, with those chapters which consist of sermons or parables Mark is by far the longer of the two as a chronicle of doings! There is also a complete absence of INDICTMENTS such as occur in the other Gospels. Is it not that such best befits the SERVANT aspect of our Lord which Mark is emphasizing?

Notice some of the many INCIDENTAL ADDITIONS. "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, NEITHER THE SON, but the Father." It is Mark alone who retains our Lord's insertion of "neither the Son." Why? Because it is the Servant speaking, "The servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth."

It is in Mark only that the HANDS of Jesus are so conspicuous. When He healed Peter's mother-in-law He "took her BY THE HAND." At Bethsaida "He took the blind man BY THE HAND," and afterwards "put His HANDS upon him." "After that, He PUT HIS HANDS again upon his eyes." In the healing of the demoniac son "Jesus took him BY THE HAND, and lifted him up." In giving hearing and speech to the deaf and dumb man He "PUT HIS FINGERS into his ears." These are all in Mark only, as also is the surprised question of the townsfolk, "From whence has this Man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto Him, that even such mighty works are wrought BY HIS HANDS?" This is yet another contribution to this SERVANT aspect of our Lord. Are not the hands the very symbol of service?

It is Mark who lays peculiar stress on our Lord's UNOBTRUSIVENESS. "He entered into a house, and WOULD HAVE NO MAN KNOW IT, but He could not be hid." "He took him aside from the multitude." "He led him OUT OF THE TOWN."

Also in Mark special notice is given to our Lord's WITHDRAWMENTS. "Rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile ... And they departed into a desert place by ship privately."

Still further, in Mark our Lord's LOOKS AND FEELINGS are adverted to more than anywhere else. "He looked round about on them with ANGER, being GRIEVED for the hardness of their hearts." "He looked round about to see her who had done this thing." "And looking up to heaven He SIGHED." "But when He had turned about and LOOKED ON His disciples, He rebuked Peter." "He MARVELED because of their unbelief." "When Jesus saw it, He was MUCH DISPLEASED." "Then Jesus, beholding him, LOVED him." "And He SIGHED DEEPLY in His spirit." All these personal touches are Mark's alone, as also are others which might be cited. They are all characteristics which blend into Mark's presentation of our Lord as the SERVANT.

The Title "Lord"

Even the title "Lord" seems intendedly excluded. According to Matthew and Luke the leper says, "LORD, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." In the storm on Galilee the disciples cry, "LORD [or in Luke, 'MASTER'] save us; we perish!" At the last supper they ask, "LORD, is it I?" In each case Mark omits the title. Although "Master" occurs in Mark's account of the storm, it is not the same Greek word as Luke uses; and there is the almost rude-sounding complaint (peculiar to Mark's account), "Carest Thou not that we perish?" – as if it were blameworthy for the One who was always working ever to be found sleeping!

Although the title “Lord” is addressed to Him between 70-80 times in the other Gospels, it is NEVER so used in Mark – at least, not before His resurrection, except in 7:28, where the Syrophoenician woman uses it more in the sense of “Sir” (in 9:24 the word lacks manuscript authority; and in 10:51 it is only Rabbi). Not until the very last paragraph does Mark Himself name Jesus “Lord” – not until the Servant has finished the work given Him to do on earth and is EXALTED TO THE THRONE IN HEAVEN!

Mark’s Signature Word

The word which above all others characterizes Mark is EUTHEOS, translated as “immediately,” “straightway,” “forthwith.” It is almost like the author’s signature on the busy exploits on the story. The word occurs 42 times in Mark; only seven in Matthew and but once in Luke. Mark’s memoir of Jesus abound with EUTHEOS. And does not this again accord with the emphasis on service – prompt, tireless, active, expeditious service? How markedly the emphasis on our Lord as the SERVANT is sustained throughout the Gospel of Mark. And, in crowning endorsement, it closes with the words, “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, THE LORD WORKING WITH THEM, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.”

The Plan

There are three questions to press in studying a book of Scripture: (1) What is its main AIM? (2) What is its broad PLAN? (3) What are its chief TRAITS? And that is the right order. Mark however, forces us to invert the order. The other three Gospel writers plainly indicate their purpose (Lk.1:1-4; Jn.20:31; Matthew’s “that it might be fulfilled”), but in Mark it is the TRAITS which guide us to both the AIM and the PLAN. Those traits, as we have seen, plainly betoken the main aim of portraying Jesus in His SERVANT aspect.

As the Galilean ministry begins, miracle exploits one after another break upon us. Chapter 2-3 pursue the march of marvels, showing also the surprising, unanswerable originality of the benign Miracle-worker’s replies and pronouncements. Specimen parables follow briefly in chapter 4, but are quickly followed by even mightier miracles. Still more spectacular wonders follow in chapters 6-8. All this in so few chapters, with such energetic rapidity!

The like had never been witnessed from the foundation of the world. This is truly the Son of the Blessed! This is indeed the Christ of Israel! This is at last the King long awaited! The kingdom of heaven has come! Surely He will now be borne on a sheer flood of enthusiasm to the crown and scepter which rightly belong to Him in Jerusalem!

But no; suddenly the light dims, the air chills; for at chapter 8:31 we read with utter surprise:

“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must SUFFER many things, and be REJECTED of the elders and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be KILLED.”

To be sure, Matthew and Luke both record the same thing but not with the same divisive significance as Mark. It is Mark alone who comments, “And He spake that saying OPENLY.” It was the publicity of it, accentuating the shock of it, which provoked Peter’s remonstrance (v.32); but our Lord’s counter-reply was to make it even more public, for Mark adds in v.34, “And when He had called the PEOPLE, with His disciples also, He said unto them, ‘Whosoever will come after Me, let Him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow ME.’”

Just when it seems a peak-point is reached, hopes are dashed, and there comes this abrupt, astonishing transition. Instead of a throne waiting at the capital, there is a cross! Instead of royal purple, a felon's death! That such a one as HE should be thus spurned, killed, shamed, and that SUCH a ministry of mighty works and gracious cures and super-wisdom should end in such ignominy, is an almost incredible incongruity; it is the most tragic refusal and enigma of the ages.

Although the disciples were deceived by appearances, and the multitudes by their own superficiality, the Prophet of Nazareth had seen right through the seeming to the real. He knew how insubstantial was the popular clamor; how deeply influential the entrenched enmity of the Sanhedrin, leaders, scribes; and how unwilling the people were to respond in HEART to the moral challenge of "the kingdom of God."

About Mark Himself

See him first appear in Acts 12:12. His mother's name, "Mary," indicates that she was Jewish. He himself had a Jewish forename and a Roman surname, "John" and "Mark"; so his father may have been a Roman.

In Acts 12:25 Barnabas and Paul show their confidence by taking him on that first epic missionary journey. Alas, when they reach Perga, on the frontiers of the great heathen world, his courage fails, and he returns home. Nearly 20 years slip away. Paul, now a battle-scarred veteran, is in prison in Rome. In Colossians 4:10 he says, "Aristarchus, my fellow-prisoner, saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you receive him)." Then Paul adds, "These only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me." Paul now speaks of Mark as a "fellow-worker" and a "comfort"! So there is fullest restoration!

In Paul's last letter before his martyrdom Mark is mentioned. "Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry." Yes, Paul was longing to have Mark by him again! Yes, for Mark had proved a loyal friend to him before in Rome. Yes, for Mark had now so proved his courageous devotion to Christ through the years, that his early default at Perga was utterly erased!

Once again we find mention of Mark, this time by Peter. Turn to I Peter 5:13, "She that is elected with you at Babylon saluteth you, and so doth Marcus, my son." There are clear evidences that there was a special bond between them.

But what had Mark been doing during all those years between Perga and his reappearance in Paul's later epistles? Tradition which there is no reason to distrust tells of his remarkable ministry in Egypt, his winning many converts, and his founding the first Christian church at Alexandria. How comfortingly he demonstrates that early failure can be retrieved, canceled out, expunged, by later loyalty; that poor beginnings can give place to noble developments; that natural cowardice can be transformed to martyr-heroism through grace!

They on the heights are not the souls
Who never erred or went astray,
Or reached those high rewarding goals
Along a smooth, flower-bordered way.
Nay, they who stand where first comes dawn
Are those who stumbled – but went on.

There is a tradition, going right back to sub-apostolic days, that this second Gospel, although attributed to Mark, was in reality, written by him as the amanuensis of Peter, or else as the translator and continuator of an original by Peter in Aramaic. My own view is that Mark was the compiler-translator of records already written by Peter in Aramaic.

The First-Intended Readers

It soon becomes plain that the writer has GENTILES in mind. If he had been writing for Jews, would he have used words such as in chapter 7:3, “For the PHARISEES, and all the JEWS, except THEY wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders”? Would he have explained that the “preparation” was “the day before the Sabbath” (15:42)? – or that the Mount of Olives was “over against the temple” (13:3)? – or that the disciples of John and of the Pharisees “used to fast” (2:18)?

Just as much as Matthew is for the Jews, Luke is for the Gentiles. Somehow, those Palestine non-Jewish proselytes to Judaism and converts to Christianity seem to belong between outright Jews and outright Gentiles; and that is where John Mark seems to fit too, if as seems likely he was of both Jewish and Roman parenthood. He would have a dominant interest in those Palestine Gentiles, Romans, proselytes, Christians; and an aptitude to write the kind of record best adapted to them. This incidentally, would account for the numerous Latinized expressions in Mark’s Gospel. Matthew must come first – “to the Jew first” – being the obvious first link-up of the New Testament with the Old. And Luke must come third – “also to the Gentile” – because Mark is the BETWEEN Gospel for Gentile-Jews, i.e. those who were Gentiles by birth and Jews by faith; and because it was specially adapted to that transition period when the Gospel was moving out from Jewish exclusiveness, as in Matthew, to a racial outlook, as in Luke.

Rich Spiritual Values

We have been saying that Mark’s is the Gospel of Jesus as Jehovah’s Servant, the PERFECT Servant. Let us not forget that He is to us the PATTERN Servant, the ideal Example of service, Whom we are to follow. Notice chapter 1:9-12.

- 1) A Preliminary Separation – Our Lord’s baptism was His initial, deliberate separation of Himself to His public Messianic ministry. This separation was two-fold (a) a separation FROM His former kind of life, (b) a separation TO His new ministry of teaching and healing; and utter separation to God. That is also the first prerequisite for US.
- 2) A Preliminary Anointing – Our Lord (a) saw something, i.e. “the heavens opened”; (b) felt something – “the Spirit descending upon Him.” That also is the second prerequisite for us. We must know the “heavens opened” to our praying, and the enduement with power from on high.
- 3) A Preliminary Assuring – Our Lord at Jordan received a preliminary assuring (a) as to sonship – “Thou art My beloved Son”, (b) as to character – “in whom I am well pleased.” That is the third prerequisite for us. We need the inwrought assurance of the Holy Spirit, and motives well-pleasing to God.
- 4) A Preliminary Testing – There are two things to note about this preliminary tempting of our Lord; (a) It was Divinely sanctioned, i.e. “The Spirit driveth Him”; (b) it was real temptation – “of Satan.” Strange though it may seem, even the entirely separated, Spirit-anointed, Heaven-attested Servant must undergo this preliminary testing, to settle it whether He will go only and utterly God’s way – or man’s. The question of all questions for the Christian is, “Am I really willing to yield myself here and now to Christ for His will alone to be done through my life?”

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE: BEHOLD, THE MAN

1. “GOOD TIDINGS” – A SAVIOR (1:5-4:13)

In the days of Herod Thirty years later

Two annunciations Baptism of Jesus by John

Two elect mothers Genealogy of Jesus by Mary

Two wonder sons Onset of Jesus by Satan

2. “IN THE SPIRIT” – GALILEE (4:14-9:50)

Itinerations Culminations

Miracles, sayings before Peter’s Confession; Cross foretold

Twelve chosen

Teaching, miracles after Jesus transfigured; Cross foretold

Twelve chosen

Multiplied operations; the Demoniac son cured; Cross foretold

Twelve sent out

3. “HE SET HIS FACE” – JERUSALEM (9:51-18:44)

The earlier weeks The last few days

Messengers sent on; answers Galilee; dropsy cured; sayings parables

Pharisees warned; rebukes Samaria; lepers cured; sayings parables

Covetous reproved; woman Jericho; blind; Zacchaeus; sayings healed

Jesus urged away; Lament Jerusalem; ascent; Lament over them over Jerusalem

4. “THIS IS THE HEIR – KILL HIM” (19:45-23)

Before the arrest After the arrest

Jesus vs. priest, scribe, Jesus before high priest and council Sadducee

Jesus foretells the future; Jesus before Pilate; Herod; mocked

Olivet address

Last Passover; Gethsemane; Jesus sentenced, crucified, buried betrayal

Matthew’s genealogy uses the word “begat” right down the list until “Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary.” So, clearly, Matthew’s genealogy is that of Joseph, who, besides being (only) legally the father of our Lord, was of Davidic descent. Luke’s genealogy does not use “begat.” It begins, “And Jesus Himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph which was the son of Heli ...” Joseph was not the offspring of Heli, but of Jacob (as shown by Matthew’s begat), but he had become the son of Heli in another and very real Jewish sense by his marriage to Mary. In old-time Jewish genealogies, when a link in the chain of descent was carried on through a woman, her husband’s name was inserted instead of her own, and he thereby became something more than a son-in-law, and was called “the son of...” Undoubtedly, in Luke we are given Mary’s lineage. Both our Lord’s parents were of Davidic descent.

“Behold the Man”

In Matthew He is Israel’s King. In Mark He is Jehovah’s Servant. In Luke, behold the MAN, the perfect MAN. In Matthew we have significant GROUPINGS. In Mark we have successive SNAP-SHOTS. In Luke we have a beautifully told STORY.

In this story the first feature that detains us is Luke’s NATIVITY NARRATIVE. It has no parallel in the other Gospels. Mark and John tell nothing at all about our Lord’s advent at Bethlehem. Matthew does, but although he supplies data untouched by Luke, he does not describe, as Luke does, the birth, babyhood and boyhood; and his account is only a quarter the length of Luke’s.

Then comes Luke’s report of our Lord’s MINISTRY IN GALILEE, noticeably shorter than either Matthew’s or Mark’s, and followed by a further peculiarity, the long chronicle of our Lord’s JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM. In contrast with only two chapters in Matthew and one in Mark, it extends through no less than TEN chapters in Luke, thereby forming the longest part of the story (9:51-19:44). There can be no doubt that all these chapters belong to that last journey. Seven times the writer inserts comments which imply it:

“He steadfastly set His face TO GO TO JERUSALEM.”

“He went through the cities and villages, teaching and journeying TOWARD JERUSALEM.”

“And it came to pass, as He went to Jerusalem.”

“Behold, we go up to Jerusalem.

In neither Matthew nor Mark is there any parallel to this slow, protracted trek to Jerusalem. It has been called “The Great Insertion.” Whereas the Gospels by Matthew and Mark are each in two clear parts – the ministry in Galilee, and the climax in Judea – Luke’s memoir runs in four unmistakable movements:

1. The nativity, boyhood, manhood 1:5-4:13
2. The itineratings in Galilee 4:14-9:50
3. The journey up to Jerusalem 9:51-9:44
4. The final tragedy and triumph 19:45-24

The Characteristic Aspect

Luke is peculiarly concerned with the human nature, the MANHOOD of our Lord, so he must needs tell us more particularly about the wonderful birth, babyhood and boyhood; Matthew’s briefer account from the standpoint of how the birth fulfills prophecy. Matthew and Luke each give a long genealogy. The first important thing with Matthew is to establish our Lord’s Davidic lineage, whereas Luke’s first concern is the real human birth and the growth through boyhood to the perfect manhood.

Fragmentary Galilee Chapters

It is his special interest in our Lord’s manhood which explains also why Luke’s rendering of our Lord’s Galilean ministry (4:14-9:50) is so much shorter than in Matthew or Mark; and why he gives such a long, leisurely diary of the winding journey to Jerusalem.

Whereas the emphasis in Matthew is on what Jesus SAID, and in Mark on what Jesus DID, here in Luke it is rather on JESUS HIMSELF. See how the marvelous ministry of message and

miracle begins, with Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth (recorded ONLY by Luke), and with emphasis at once on the manhood of Jesus Himself:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon ME, because He hath anointed ME to preach the Gospel to the poor... And the eyes of all in the synagogue were FASTENED ON HIM... This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare witness and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, `Is not this Joseph’s son?’”

See how in chapter 5, after the miraculous draught of fishes (again recorded ONLY by Luke), Peter suddenly discerns the awful holiness of that wonderful manhood and prostrates himself before Jesus crying out, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”

See how in chapter 7, (recorded ONLY by Luke), as the widowed mother weeps her way out through the gate of Nain to bury her only son, the compassionate sympathy at once wells up in the tender-hearted Son of Mary as He says to her, “Weep not,” and restores her loved one to life.

See how again in chapter 7 (recorded ONLY by Luke), the “woman which was a sinner,” perceiving in that perfect manhood not only utter purity but a human understanding and compassion for which her desolate heart had ached, bathed His feet with her tears. All these instances are peculiar to Luke, and they serve to introduce this emphasis on the HUMAN. Journal of Jerusalem Journey

The extended narration of our Lord’s journey to Jerusalem also has few miracles and little discourse. This exhibits from different angles, and under different lights, and in different attitudes, the mind and heart of THAT MATCHLESS MAN.

In eleven chapters we have preserved for us a collection of a priceless treasury of sayings unrecorded by any of the other Gospel writers; no less than thirty or more.

Anger of John and James rebuked 9:51-56
Plough simile to would-be follower 9:61-61
The seventy sent ahead of Him 10:1-12
Return and report of the seventy 10:17-20
Parable of the good Samaritan 10:25-37
The cumbered Martha corrected 10:38-42
Parable of importunate friend 11:5-10
Parable of presuming rich fool 12:13-21
Reply about those slain by Pilate 13:1-5
Parable of the fruitless fig tree 13:6-9
Woman loosed from her infirmity 13:10-17
Reply to Pharisees concerning Herod 13:31-33
Sabbath cure of man with dropsy 14:1-6
Parable about guests and inviters 14:7-14
Parable of the great supper 14:15-24
Simile: intending tower-builder 14:28-30
Further simile: war-making king 14:31-33
Trio parable (2) the lost coin 15:8-10

Trio parable (3) the wayward son 15:11-32
Parable of the unjust steward 16:1-15
Account of rich man and Lazarus 16:19-31
Illustration: master and servant 17:7-10
The healing of the ten lepers 17:11-19
Reply concerning kingdom of God 17:20-21
Parable of unrighteous judge 18:1-8
Parable of Pharisee and publican 18:9-14
Jericho: conversion of Zaccheus 19:1-10
Parable of pounds and servants 19:11-27
The Savior weeps over Jerusalem 19:41-44

All these bear on the HUMAN NATURE of our Lord. Think what human feeling, sympathy, largeness, compassion breathes through the parables of the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the Pharisee and the publican, etc.

Most of the memorable sayings and practically all the parables are REPLIES. Also, these chapters break into two almost equal sections – the one ending with our Lord's FIRST lament over Jerusalem (13:34-35) the other with His SECOND lament (19:41-44).

The Aspective Emphasis

It has a VERY HUMAN BEGINNING. Right away we are in the hearts and homes and hopes of simple-living, godly, likable folk, "neighbors and cousins," shepherds, Simeon, Anna. There is a tarrying at the unusual cradle, to see the Babe in those humble swaddling wraps. Whereas Matthew at once concerns himself with the GENEALOGY, and Mark eagerly starts with the public MINISTRY, Luke lingers over the NATIVITY – the human birth, babyhood and boyhood of the "holy Child." This emphasis on the human is the master-key which unlocks this Gospel.

Here alone we find, "Blessed is the fruit of thy WOMB." Here alone we read of the "Babe"; the circumcision of the MALE; the twelve year old LAD. Here alone we read that "the Child GREW", and that He "increased in WISDOM and in STATURE"; and that at His baptism He was "about THIRTY YEARS of age."

From the birth to the baptism it is the human which has the emphasis. Luke has no star signaling the birth of a King, no eastern sages bringing rich homage to the infant Majesty; no inquiry from royal Herod. But there is the anxiety of an expectant young mother far from home, the ordeal of first childbirth in an outhouse or grotto, and the hurried expedient of a fodder-rack as a baby crib. At the Jordan baptism, thirty years later, there is no announcement by John, "The kingdom...is at hand!" Instead, John comes preaching "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."

Pass to Luke's records of the grown manhood. He alone tells how the Galilean ministry began at Nazareth; and it is at once a decidedly human touch that the little town is denoted, "Nazareth, where He had been BROUGHT UP." Here alone His first synagogue address appears, laying all the emphasis from the outset on that SPIRIT – ANOINTED MANHOOD. Here alone we see Jesus emotionally broken into tearful LAMENTING over the city (13:34; 19:41); KNEELING DOWN in prayer (22:41); being STRENGTHENED by an angel (22:43); agonizing so sorely that His SWEAT was "as drops of blood"; and yielding up His spirit on the cross, "Father, into Thy hands I commend MY SPIRIT. Here alone we find Him verifying His resurrection-body to the

Eleven, by asking them to “handle” Him; by partaking of the “broiled fish” and “honeycomb”; and by EATING IT “BEFORE THEM” – all in His lovely eagerness to show that He was still humanly ONE with them.

THREEFOLD INTERPLAY OF EMPHASIS

All the way through this third Gospel there is a THREEFOLD INTERPLAY of this emphasis on the human. (1) Certain traits of our Lord’s humanity are shown prominently IN HIMSELF. (2) These, in turn, re-emphasize themselves through HIS TEACHING. (3) The very NARRATIVE with which Luke surrounds our Lord enhances the emphasis.

Human Dependence on Prayer

Here alone we learn that when Jesus was endued by the Holy Spirit at the Jordan He was “praying”; in His wilderness withdrawals from throngings He “prayed”; that before He chose the Twelve He solitarily “continued all night in prayer”; that before He asked, “Whom say ye that I am?” He was “alone praying”; at His transfiguration He had climbed the mountain “to pray”; He was transfigured “as He prayed”; before He gave the Lord’s prayer He Himself was “praying”; He assured Peter, “I have prayed for thee...”; in Gethsemane He “prayed more earnestly”; and on the Cross His first and last utterances are prayers.

See now how it reappears in His TEACHING. Only in Luke do we have the parable of the midnight appeal, teaching IMPORTUNITY in prayer; the parable of the judge and the widow, teaching CONSTANCY in prayer; the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, teaching HUMILITY in prayer.

See also how Luke’s accompanying NARRATIVE enhances this emphasis. Only in Luke do we find, “And the whole multitude of the people were PRAYING without”; the angel’s word, “Fear not, Zacharias; for thy PRAYER is heard”; Anna serving God “with fastings AND PRAYERS night and day”; “Why do the disciples of John fast often and MAKE PRAYERS?”; the request, “Lord teach us to PRAY”; and that “men ought ALWAYS TO PRAY and not to faint.” Many have called this the Gospel of prayer!

Human need of the Holy Spirit

He is named more in Luke than in Matthew and Mark together, and even more than in John. In the others gospels the virgin birth is stated as fact, but here there is a highly significant pre-conceptive description, with singular accent on the activity of the Spirit.

“The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy being which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

Only Luke says, “And Jesus, being FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, returned from Jordan.” Only Luke adds, “And Jesus returned IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT.” Also peculiar to Luke is, “In that hour Jesus EXULTED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT” (10:21).

Even more, that Spirit-begotten manhood needed the ENDUING of the Holy Spirit for spiritual victory and service. Our Lord became incarnate to be One of us – like us, with us, for us, as the new Adam, the new representative Man, the new Champion of the race. It would have been no MORAL victory for the incarnate Son of God to overwhelm Satan by some sudden release of Divine power. Our Lord was tempted as MAN. He overcame as MAN. In all such connection His Divine power was in abeyance. He overcame in His dependent, prayerful, Spirit-endued

MANHOOD! This means that our OWN human nature may now be endued by that same Holy Spirit for similar victory and service.

Now this emphasis on the Holy Spirit reappears in our Lord's TEACHING. Only Luke prefixes our Lord's prelude-manifesto at Nazareth; "The SPIRIT OF THE LORD is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the glad tidings." Note the featuristic difference between Matthew 7:11 and Luke 11:13. Luke has, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give THE HOLY SPIRIT?" Luke alone records our Lord's striking allusion to the Holy Spirit as "the finger of God" (11:20); and closes his Gospel with the Savior's parting promise, "Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but tarry ye in Jerusalem until ye be endued with POWER FROM ON HIGH."

The very narrative has the same impress. At the beginning the angel preannounces John, "He shall be filled with THE HOLY SPIRIT." Next Elizabeth was filled with THE HOLY SPIRIT; again Zacharias was filled with the HOLY SPIRIT. A little later the HOLY SPIRIT comes upon Simeon, to whom it had been "revealed to him by THE HOLY SPIRIT..." And he came BY THE SPIRIT into the temple. All this prepares us for a distinctive emphasis. At the beginning the Holy Spirit is the "power of the Highest" and right at the end He is the promised "power from on high."

Human Universality

The note of unconfined goodwill towards those outside the pale of Jewry is struck early, in the nativity chapters. While Matthew's report is exclusively Jewish, Luke at once overflows to the Gentiles.

The suddenly inspired Zacharias alludes to an Isaiah prophecy on the GENTILES when he says, "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light TO THEM THAT SIT IN DARKNESS AND IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH." When the eager angels troop down into the night sky, the message is, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be TO ALL PEOPLE" – connecting our Lord's human incarnation with the whole race. While all three synoptists link John the Baptist with "The voice of one crying in the wilderness," Luke alone continues with "And ALL FLESH shall see the salvation of God."

Now in our Lord's TEACHINGS how different is the uniform "headline" of our Lord's parables. In Matthew there are sixteen major parables, and twelve of them begin, "The kingdom of heaven is like." There are twenty in Luke, and eighteen begin with, "There was a certain MAN" or some similar general headline.

In Luke's accompanying NARRATIVE we see first that his Gospel is addressed to a GENTILE, the most excellent Theophilus. When he gives our Lord's genealogy he travels way back beyond all Hebrew confines to Adam, the only other man who ever had a completely racial significance, and who, like our Lord, had no father but God. Luke alone records comments about the GENTILE widow of Sidon, and the GENTILE Syrian, Naaman. Luke alone adds the appealing detail that the GENTILE centurion's servant was "dear unto him" (7:2,5). In the account of sending out the Twelve he noticeably omits the words preserved by Matthew "Go not into the way of the Gentiles." Luke alone tells how James and John wanted to call down fire on certain inhospitable SAMARITANS, and how Jesus rebuked them. He alone tells of the ten lepers who were cleansed, and of the one, a SAMARITAN, who ran back to give thanks. He alone preserves for us; "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the GENTILES, until the times of

the GENTILES be fulfilled. All these references bring out the distinctive, wide human outreach of this third Gospel.

Human Poverty

From the first, that sublime manhood is associated with poverty. His parents were so poor that when they dedicated Him in the temple they could bring only an offering of two birds instead of the regulation lamb.

At the very outset of His ministry Jesus announces Himself as “anointed to preach good tidings to the POOR.” The beatitudes preserved by Luke address the actual PHYSICAL poverty and hunger and tears. Next, in chapter 14, we find Jesus saying, “When thou makest a feast, call the POOR, the LAME, the BLIND” and a little later, “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the POOR, the MAIMED, the HALT, and the BLIND.” A bit further on we find the story of Lazarus and Dives. How the poor must have listened to such stories. Still further we find Zacchaeus, converted and exclaiming, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the POOR!”

Now see how Luke’s accompanying NARRATIVE completes these. When Mary sings her Magnificat, “He hath regarded the LOW ESTATE of His handmaiden. Later she adds, “He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of LOW DEGREE. And yet again, “He hath filled the HUNGRY with good things.” Luke alone tells us that as our dear Lord travels around, He was dependent, in His human poverty, on grateful women who “ministered unto Him of their substance.” And it is Luke alone who shows us again and again, our Lord sitting at other men’s tables for His sustenance (5:29, 7:36, 10:38-42, 11:37, 14:1, 19:5) – “as POOR yet making many rich.”

Human Sympathies

Notice how markedly the human sympathies of our Lord appear in Luke’s Gospel. Here is given prominence to WOMEN. From the beginning prominence is given to Elizabeth, Mary and Anna.

It appears all through our Lord’s TEACHINGS. In Luke alone we find Jesus absolving the penitent “WOMAN which was a sinner”; sympathetically pacifying a “certain WOMAN” by His unforgettable “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things”; here alone He heals “the WOMAN which had an infirmity eighteen years,” and then confounds the criticizing Sabbatarian bigots. In Luke alone we meet the WOMAN having ten pieces of silver; and here alone we see Jesus turning about, on the via Dolorosa, to say, “Weep not for Me, DAUGHTERS of Jerusalem.”

Luke’s own NARRATIVE completes all this. He alone tells us about John’s mother, Elizabeth; and of Anna the prophetess; of the “certain women who ministered of their substance”; of Martha’s complaint, and Mary’s sitting at Jesus feet; of the certain woman in the company who called out, “Blessed is the womb that bare Thee!”; and of the many “women, which also bewailed as they followed Jesus to the cross.” WOMEN are mentioned in Luke more than in any of the other three Gospels, and widows more than in the other three combined.

Note also the sympathy with PARENTAL FEELING. All the Gospels relate the healing of Jairus’ daughter, but Luke alone tells us that she was his “ONLY daughter.” All record the healing of the demoniac son after our Lord’s transfiguration, but only in Luke do we find “for he is mine ONLY child.” And when Luke shows us that Nain widow weeping behind the pallbearers, he explains

that the premature casualty was the “ONLY son of his mother.” These and other like touches indicate a sympathetic entering into the sorrows and feelings of other humans.

Finally, mark the compassionate outreaching toward OUTCASTS. Our sinless Lord, the “despised and rejected,” knew the feelings of the outcast. Here only we have the PUBLICAN, standing “afar off” saying, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” Here only we have the “woman in the city which was a SINNER.” Here alone we find publicans visiting John’s baptism, and drawing near to Jesus. Here alone we read, “This man receiveth SINNERS.” Here alone we have the parable of the prodigal son, and we find at Calvary, the penitent “robber” to whom Jesus said, “Verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” Yes, this is the Gospel of outcasts! This is the large – hearted humanity, sympathy, compassion of that perfect Man who is the ideal become actual.

And it is all with a big vital purpose – our SALVATION. It is in Luke only, that we come across the word “Savior” (1:47, 2:11). Here only we find the word “salvation” (6x), and here that we find the lovely word “evangelizo” (10x) which occurs only once in the other Gospels. Only in Luke do we find “Thy faith hath saved thee” (7:50, 8:48). Luke alone uses the word “grace” eight times, and here for the first time in the New Testament we meet the word “redemption.” Right at the beginning the herald angel announces “To all people ... a SAVIOR!” Right at the end, the risen Savior tells that “repentance and REMISSION OF SINS should be preached in His Name AMONG ALL NATIONS. That Savior is our Kinsman, “bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh,” in all things “made like unto His brethren”; in all points “tempted like as we are”; overcoming by the Holy Spirit; even on the Cross praying, “Father, forgive them”; and leaving us the perfect pattern for ALL human living.

THE GREAT THEME

Part One: His Perfect Humanity

Luke shows us the threefold perfection of that wonderful Man. First he tells us about the PHYSICAL, i.e. the birth. Then about the boyhood and the MENTAL development. Then the Jordan baptism and the voice from heaven which attested His MORAL AND SPIRITUAL perfection when He was thirty, “Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” That threefold human perfection of Jesus may be called His NATURAL perfection. It was an indispensable prerequisite; but even that perfect natural manhood needed a special spiritual anointing.

Is then that perfect Man now ready? No, besides that anointing with the Spirit there must now be temptation by Satan. There can be no big spiritual blessing from God without there being the inevitable testing afterward. It is the Holy Spirit’s opportunity of showing what He can be to us. We tend to forget that all the while Jesus was being tempted He was still “full of the Holy Spirit,” and that the joy of victory must have been almost as glorious as the joy of the filling itself, through which the victory was achieved.

Part Two: The Galilee Ministry

See how it begins, “And Jesus returned IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT into Galilee.” Ah, now we shall see immediate response, delight, success! Here is the sanctified, Spirit-filled, victorious Servant of God. Like the ripe corn bending before the wind, the souls of His hearers will bow before His words. But is that what we find? No, the very opposite! “And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath; and rose up and thrust Him

out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill, whereon there city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong.”

Think of it, the first experience of the Spirit-filled Minister, a deadly rebuff! All the way through, opposition by the RELIGIOUS! – and in the end a cross! Think of it, They could not resist His WISDOM, but they did resist His WITNESS. Yet although they rejected His love, and resisted His word, they could not destroy His joy, nor His influence; for His cross became His throne, and from His grave He brought “life and immortality to light through the Gospel.” His crucifiers are dead; but Jesus lives on in millions of hearts forever.

Part Three: The Jerusalem Journey

“And it came to pass that when the time was come that He should be received up, He STEADFASTLY SET HIS FACE TO GO TO JERUSALEM.” At the beginning of His ministry He was already perfect; but the perfect instrument had now become perfected through trial and service. Is not that, then, enough? No, He who is perfect in HimSELF and perfected in SERVICE must be perfected “through SUFFERING!” Does not that, also, speak to you and me? Does it not suggest that the greatest contribution we can make for God and man is not busy service but sacrifice? Certainly, in the present scheme of things, the deepest fellowship with God seems always to come that way. Again and again sacrifice is not an alternative to service, but the highest form of it. Turn your eyes and ears to Jesus as He travels that Jerusalem way. Even apart from astonishing miracles and unforgettable parables, His incidental conversation and behavior are eloquent. On the way He is continually straightening out the wrong ideas of others; shaming hypocrisy and softening prejudice; steadying excitement and calming impatience; bearing with things and folks far below the level of His own life; gently correcting and kindly instructing; but never once Himself impatient or discomposed. See His frankness and bravery in rebuke, where it was needed. See how He visits not only the “cities” but the “villages” – for every soul in the meanest group of dwellings is precious to Him as that of a King. See how again and again He overleaps national conceit and racial barrier. Yet He who had no fears had TEARS, for He was in a world of pride and hatred and twisted motives. See Him twice weeping over the city.

Part Four: The Calvary Sacrifice

See the exemplary Man amid the deep, awful doings which culminated at Calvary; the murderous coalition of religious men with Satan against Him; the serpent-venom in the betrayer’s kiss; the panic-struck break up of the apostles; the denial and blasphemy of Peter; the fiendish hypocrisy of the Sanhedrin; the sarcastic mockery of Herod and the groveling cowardice of Pilate; Gethsemane, with its first breaking of that direst storm which ever shuddered over a soul; Calvary, where the floodgates of bitter waters were opened full upon Him, and the billows of unknowable anguish whelmed Him, and the horror of the deep darkness enveloped Him. What now are His reactions? Amid the first, sudden intensity of the storm as it breaks upon Him in Gethsemane, there is complete abandon to the will of God, “Nevertheless, NOT MY WILL, BUT THINE BE DONE.” When His crucifiers drive the cutting iron through His hands and feet, and prop Him up, pinioned there in public shame and torture, His first word is, “Father, forgive them.”

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: THE WORD BECAME FLESH

1. THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS TO THE JEWS (1-12)

First “signs” witness and CONTACTS (1-4)

Further “signs” witness and CONFLICTS (5-10)

Final “sign” witness and CLEAVAGE (11-12)

2. THE PRIVATE MINISTRY OF JESUS TO “HIS OWN” (13-17)

Presage of His own departure (13-14:15)

Promise of the coming Spirit (14:16-16)

Prayer for them to God the Father (17)

3. THE PASCHAL CLIMAX: TRAGEDY AND TRIUMPH (18-20)

Apprehension and persecution (18-19:15)

Crucifixion and entombment (19:16-42)

Resurrection and reappearance (20-21)

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” The Greek verb form “exegesato” from which comes our English word exegesis, means that in the visible Jesus the invisible God is BROUGHT FORTH to view. The very HEART of the Eternal is lovingly manifested for the only begotten Son comes even from “the BOSOM of the Father.”

John’s reason for writing is, “That ye might BELIEVE that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His Name.” The reader is directly challenged, and must choose – to receive and be saved, or to reject and perish forever.

This fourth Gospel is a COMPLETIVE NECESSITY. The earlier three are a PRESENTATION of Jesus; this fourth is an INTERPRETATION of who He is. The other three show us Jesus outwardly, this fourth interprets Him inwardly. The other three emphasize the human aspects, this fourth unveils the DIVINE. The other three concern themselves mainly with our Lord’s public discourses; this fourth gives larger place to His PRIVATE conversations, His verbal conflicts with the Jews, and His closer teachings in seclusion to His inner disciples. The other three with His Galilean ministry, this fourth is almost wholly devoted to His JUDAEAN ministry. The other three begin with a human genealogy and the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy; John begins with a direct Divine revelation of that which was altogether pre-mundane and eternal.

There is no account of our Lord’s birth, baptism, temptation, transfiguration, or His ascension.

Miracles Parables

Matthew 20 16

Mark 18 5

Luke 20 20

John 8 1 (10:6)

Jesus' seashore "Follow Me," recorded by the synoptics, came later, and was a call to "full-time" service with Him. They had not only met Jesus earlier, at John the Baptist's gatherings along the winding Jordan valley, but had companied with Him both in Judea and in Galilee (1:40-47). All four Gospels make the Jordan baptism the starting point of public action, but prior to that He had done miracles (2:11, 4:45). The Galilean mission, on which the synoptists concentrate, did not begin until John the Baptist was imprisoned (Mat.4:12,17; Mk.1:14; Jn.3:24).

INCEPTIVE JUDEAN MINISTRY

Our Lord was not baptized in Galilee (Mt.3:13). The synoptists all tell us that straightway after His baptism our Lord underwent His lonely temptation, which also was in the "wilderness" of Judea, and that after the temptation He RETURNED to Galilee. The forerunner's words in John 1:15, 26, 32-33 were spoken after the temptation, forty days after His baptism.

We know that all this preceded the Galilean ministry because "John [the Baptist] was not yet cast into prison" (3:24). Chapter 4 tells us that Jesus returned yet again to Galilee, because His home was still there. Also in chapter 4, He "must needs go through Samaria" and afterwards He performs His second miracle at Cana, i.e. the healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda. All these things, which are peculiar to John's Gospel, precede the Galilee preachings. And in Ch.4:1 we read that "Jesus made and baptized MORE DISCIPLES THAN JOHN." This must have taken time. Being ill received in the capital, He turned to the less-prejudiced country people.

THE GALILEAN MINISTRY

Everything through chapter five preceded the Galilean ministry. We know this for three reasons: (1) Our Lord's use of the past tense when referring to John the Baptist (v.35) indicates the John's imprisonment had now taken place. (2) Chapter 6:1 tells us that our Lord now went to Galilee again. (3) John now records the feeding of the 5,000, which was in Galilee and near the end of the itineraries there. This miracle there, followed by that of our Lord's walking on the sea, is John's one and only extract from our Lord's Galilean tour.

THE FIRST FIVE CHAPTERS OF JOHN ALL FIT between Matthew 4:11 and 4:12, Mark 1:13 and 14, Luke 4:13 and 14. And MOST ALL THE GALILEAN MINISTRY fits between John chapter 5 and 6. And between John 10:21 and 22 we have a THREE-MONTHS BREAK, JESUS RETURNS TO GALILEE, WHICH HE NOW FINALLY LEAVES. This final departure from Galilee also appears in Matthew 19:1, Mark 10:1, and Luke's long account 9:51-19:44. His next visit to Jerusalem after THAT was for the triumphal entry and the crucifixion. So His final visit TO and exit FROM Galilee must certainly have occurred between John 10:21 and 22. Those wonderful extra chapters in Luke belong to the thronged journeying through Galilee and Samaria and Perea (the region east of the Jordan) to the border of Judea. Luke joins up again with Matthew and Mark (Lk.18:15) at the point where Jesus is about to cross the Jordan for Jericho and thence up to His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Now it was from THERE, Perea, along the Jordan border of Judea, that our Lord made those two short visits to Jerusalem and Bethany, which JOHN records, i.e. the December feast of Dedication (10:22-39) and the raising of Lazarus (11:1-46).

Order and length of our Lord's Ministry.

1. CONTACTS IN JUDEA (4 – 5 months)

Jordan baptism & temptation Mt.3:1-4; Mk.1:4-13; Lk.3-4
in wilderness

At Jordan again; meets Andrew John 1:19-42
and Peter
Return to Galilee; Cana and John 1:43-2:12
first miracle
At Jerusalem for the Passover; John 2:13-3:21
Nicodemus interview
Interval of teaching, baptizing John 3:22-36
in Judea, near Jordan
Galilee again; Sychar woman; John 4:1-54
second Cana miracle
At Jerusalem feast; Bethesda John 5:1-47
cure; Jews oppose
2. CIRCUIT OF GALILEE (about 1 year and 10 months)
The three synoptic accounts of Mt.4:12-18; Mk.1:14-9; Lk.4:14-9:50.
the Galilean ministry
Short break-to Jerusalem for John 7:2-10:21
feast of Tabernacles
Slow, final exit-journey from Luke 9:51-18:14
Galilee
Halt in Perea, visit to Jerusalem John 10:22-39
feast of Dedication
Perea again, whence up to Bethany John 10:40-11:54
to raise Lazarus
From "city called Ephraim" up Mt.19:1-21:11; Mk.10:1-11:11
to triumphal entry Lk.18:15-19:24; Jn.11:54-12:19
3. CLIMAX AT JERUSALEM (about one week)
Clashes with Jewish leaders in Mt.21:12-23; Mk.11-12; Lk. 19:45-21:4
the capital
Prophetic forecast on the Mount Mt.24-25; Mk.13; Lk.21:5-38
of Olives
At Bethany: the anointing by Mt.26; Mk.14; Jn.12
Mary
Last Passover: Discourse to the Mt.26; Mk.14; Lk.22; Jn.13-17
apostles
Gethsemane; the arrest; Peter's Ditto and John 18
denial
Arraignment, crucifixion, and Mt.27; Mk.15; Lk.23; John 18:28-19
burial

In John's Gospel we are at once struck by the different way of saying and seeing things from that of Matthew, Mark or Luke. In Matthew we have impressionist groupings; in Mark a rapid succession of camera shots; in Luke a beautifully unfolding story. Here, in John, everything subserves the developing of certain RECURRENT IDEAS. There is one which is center-most, ETERNAL LIFE BY BELIEVING ON JESUS AS THE SON OF GOD AND SAVIOR OF MEN.

The first of these chapter groups is occupied with the miraculous "signs" which our Lord gave, of which John here records seven, culminating with the raising of Lazarus from death. Note how the early CONTACTS quickly develop into later CONFLICTS, and then issue in utter

CLEAVAGE. The second group mainly concerns our Lord's wonderful new disclosures about the coming PARACLETE. The final chapters are the awful yet glorious outcome of the whole. So far as the spiritual message of John's Gospel is concerned, the key verse is undoubtedly 1:12. Notice how these three center-lines run with parallel persistence and increasing sharpness right through the chapters.

1. "His own received Him not"
2. "But as many as received Him"
3. "To them He gave power to become"

THE EIGHT MIRACLES

1. The turning of the water into wine (2)
2. The healing of the nobleman's son (4)
3. The curing of the Bethesda paralytic (5)
4. The feeding of the five thousand (6)
5. The walking over the sea of Galilee (6)
6. The giving of sight to the blind man (9)
7. The raising of Lazarus from death (11)
8. The miraculous draught of fishes (21)

There are three features about John's eight sign-miracles which should be noted: (a) he numbers the first two, so there is SEQUENCE; (b) there is no duplication as in the synoptists, so there is careful SELECTION; (c) there is an over-all purpose (20:11), so there is SPECIALTY. Also there is one unifying idea traceable through them all, namely that of TRANSFORMATION. Passing through them we find transformation from sadness to gladness, from disease to health, from paralysis to energy, from hunger to fullness, from agitation to tranquillity, from darkness to light, from death to life, from frustration and failure to copious success. These eight supernatural transformations provide not only evidential "signs" of our Lord's Deity, but striking illustrations of that transforming "power to become" which operates in "as many as receive Him."

As Many as Received Him

Our Lord's private interviews with individuals or small groups has often been noted as a unique feature of this fourth Gospel.

1. Peter, Nathaniel, etc. (1:35-51)
2. The ruler Nicodemus (3:1-21)
3. The Sychar woman (4:6-26)
4. The man born blind (9:35-41)
5. Martha and Mary at Bethany (11)
6. The eleven apostles (13-14)
7. Mary Magdalene (20:1-18)
8. The apostle Peter (21:15-23)

These eight exemplify "as many as received Him." The first, with Peter, sets the note "power to become." The emphasis is on what Jesus said to Simon and Nathaniel, "Thou art ... thou shalt be." "Thou shalt see greater things than these."

Then in the interviews which follow we see illustrated how that new life-power operates in "as many as received Him." With Nicodemus we see that its operation begins with a being "born anew." With the Sychar woman it becomes an inner spring of life and satisfaction. With the man born blind it is an inward as well as an outward eye opening to see Jesus as "the Son of God." With the Bethany sisters it is an energy which, in answer to faith, conquers the seemingly impossible. In the lengthy and touching conversation with the Eleven we learn that the executive

of this new power-life is the Divine Paraclete. Next in the pathetic yet thrilling interview with Mary Magdalene, we see how it brings individual manifestation of the risen Lord to His loved ones, transforming heart-break into joy-break. Finally, in the epilogue interview with Peter, we see it bringing restoration and new commission to ministry for the Savior.

“As many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name.” Yes, that is the central spiritual message running through this Gospel according to John.

A Remarkable Parallel

The old-time Tabernacle was furnished with SEVEN most significant objects. The true order of approach to God is one and the same, whether in the old dispensation or the new. John leads us, in exactly the same order as those seven articles of the Tabernacle furniture, to the great spiritual realities which they typify.

He begins by leading us to the (1) BRAZEN ALTAR OF SACRIFICE – atonement is through sacrifice, that of Christ. “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Then in chapter 3 he has us at the (2) BRAZEN LAVER OF CLEANSING – spiritual renewal, that of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

Next in chapters 4-6 he takes us to the (3) TABLE OF SHOWBREAD – spiritual sustenance, Christ as the Living Bread of His people, of which if a man eat, he shall live forever. Next in chapters 8-9, John takes us to the (4) GOLDEN CANDLESTAND – spiritual illumination, Christ the Light, especially of His people; and the man born blind is given sight as a living illustration. Then in chapters 14-16 we find ourselves at the (5) GOLDEN ALTAR OF INCENSE – acceptable supplication. Here we learn to pray prayers in the Name of Jesus, which become as fragrant incense when perfumed by the breathing of that Name which, above all others, is dear to the heart of God. Next, in that sublime seventeenth chapter of intercessory prayer we hear the words of our Great High Priest. We are taken through the “veil” into the very Holy of Holies, we are permitted a glimpse into His high-priestly ministry of intercession which He exercises for us in the presence of God.

Then in the heart-subduing climax of Calvary, we see in chapters 18-19, how He is also the very (6) ARK OF THE COVENANT – signifying Christ is our covenant access, and (7) THE MERCY SEAT – speaking of our acceptance with God in Christ because of the blood of His own vicarious Self-offering. Chapter 20, the resurrection chapter follows, in which our risen Lord announces our new covenant relationship with God, “I ascend unto My Father and YOUR Father; unto My God and YOUR God.” Finally He discloses the reality which corresponds with that unutterably holy SHEKINAH presence. In the evening of that day of resurrection, “He breathed on them, and said unto them `RECEIVE YE THE HOLY SPIRIT’.” Yes, that is the shekinah of the Christian experience.

THE PROLOGUE

In the prologue there are four designations of our Lord which at once capture attention: (1) the WORD, (2) the LIFE, (3) the LIGHT, (4) the SON. The first and last declare His relationship with God the Father, the middle two indicate function towards us human creatures.

Our Lord is the WORD, i.e. the EXPRESSION of God, not only towards man, not only from premundane antiquity, but before all the creation; fundamentally, eternally, indivisibly. He was

not merely from the beginning, He already was “in the beginning.” He was not only “with God”, He “was God.” As a word may be distinguished from the thought which it expresses (for the two are not identical), so can the Second Person of the Godhead be distinguished from the First. Yet as there simply cannot be a word apart from the thought behind it, so also “God” and the “Word” cannot be conceived of as ever having existed without each other. They are distinguishable but inseparable.

Our Lord is also the SON. The concept of Logos in relation to Theos is warmed into that of the Son in relation to the Father. The Logos is simply “with God”, but the Son is “in the bosom” of the Father. There is a reciprocal fellowship of love immanent in the Deity; and it is one of the ultimates, eternal as God, for there cannot be eternal fatherhood without eternal sonship.

These two metaphors, the “Word” and the “Son,” supplement and protect each other from erroneous conceptions of our Lord. To think of Him only as the eternal “Word” might suggest merely an impersonal quality or faculty in God. To think of Him only as the “Son” might falsely limit us to the concept of a personal yet created being.

Next, in relation to us human beings, He is the LIFE and the LIGHT. From Him all creature life derives, both physical and psychical. From Him irradiates all true illumination, both intellectual and spiritual. Also these two designations the “Life” and the “Light” correspond with the “Word” and the “Son.” As the Word He is the expresser, the revealer, the illuminator, the Light. As the Son He is the personal executive, quickener, imparter, the Life. And paralleling with these are the two words, “grace” and “truth.” The incarnate One is “full of grace and truth” i.e. full of grace to redeem MAN, and full of truth to reveal GOD. He is the God-man Revealer-Redeemer.

Oh, this all-transcendent Savior of ours! Why, in this first chapter alone there are eight glorious titles which belong to Him absolutely and exclusively: the Word, the Life, the Light, the Son, the Lamb, the Messiah, the King, the Son of Man.

Eternal Life through Believing

John gives his practical purpose as “That ye might BELIEVE that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have LIFE” (20:31). That word “believe” occurs in its several forms 98 times; the words “life” and “live” 55 times. When we pick out the principal references to eternal life we discover an unmistakable PROGRESS OF DOCTRINE.

- 1:4 The soul is to give LIGHT
- 3:14 The life imparted to us by faith is ETERNAL
- 3:36 This eternal life is our PRESENT POSSESSION
- 4:14 This present possession is an INWARD SATISFACTION
- 5:24 This eternal life gives EXEMPTION FROM JUDGMENT
- 6:40 This life includes the promise of IMMORTALITY OF THE BODY
- 10:27 This gives the strongest assurance of ETERNAL PRESERVATION
- 11:25 All its possessors share this AGE-END TRANSFIGURATION
- 17:24 This life is to be consummated in HEAVENLY GLORIFICATION

Incarnate Word: The Only Begotten Son

This presentation of Jesus as the incarnate Word and the only-begotten Son is the center-glory of John’s Gospel. Twenty-three times we find our Lord’s meaningful “I AM,” and from them we can pick seven tremendous metaphors expressive of His saving relationship toward mankind:

“I AM the Bread of Life”

“I AM the Light of the World”
“I AM the Door of the Sheep”
“I AM the Good Shepherd”
“I AM the Resurrection and the Life”
“I AM the Way, the Truth, the Life”
“I AM the True Vine”

In the Greek “I AM” is EGO EIMI. Both EGO and EIMI mean “I am” but the former emphasizes “I” and the latter “am.” Thus, EGO EIMI expresses personal being in the strongest possible way. It is the Greek expression for the Divine Name “I AM.” It is first seen in the Old Testament in Exodus 3 where God reveals Himself to Moses. In answer to Moses’ question “What is Your Name?” the Lord answered, “I AM THAT I AM.”

In John chapter 5 we see Jesus claiming equality with God in seven particulars:

1. Equal in working (v.19)
2. Equal in knowing (v.20)
3. Equal in resurrecting (v.21,28-29)
4. Equal in judging (v.22,27)
5. Equal in honor (v.23)
6. Equal in regenerating (v.24-25)
7. Equal in self-existence (v.26)

Full of Grace and Truth

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth” (1:14).

“And of His fullness have we all received” (1:18).

This “fullness” is another of John’s recurrent emphases. The fullness is EMBODIED that it might be IMPARTED. Two lines run through the succeeding chapters: (1) fullness of grace to RESTORE (His WORKS), (2) fullness of truth to REVEAL (His WORDS).

This is at once a Scriptural refutation of the so-called “KENOSIS” theory which would have us believe that our Lord “emptied Himself” (Phil.2:7) practically to the degree of ordinary human fallibility. Instead of an “emptying” down to our merely human level, there is a supernatural FULLNESS. The “kenosis” or self-emptying, has to do only with “form” (morphe) or expression, not essence (v.6-7). When our Lord “emptied Himself” (ekenosen) for the purpose of incarnation He separated Himself from the PRE-incarnate expression of Himself, i.e. from “THE GLORY” which He had with the Father “BEFORE THE WORLD WAS”. We cannot understand the mystery of that profound transition in which He disrobed Himself of that pre-cosmic “glory,” but we can understand that He neither did nor could detach Himself from what He eternally IS. Over against “kenosis,” there is a Divine “PLEROMA” – One who is “the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col.2:9). See it in every miracle- “full of grace.” Hear it in every message- “full of truth.” Follow it right through, and you will appreciate John’s words as never before – “We beheld HIS GLORY.”

Let us glance back retrospectively:

Matthew The promised One is here; see His credentials.

Mark This is how He worked; see His power.

Luke This is what He was like; see His nature.

John This is who He really is; see His Godhead.

Oh, this wonderful Savior! How we ought to prize Him, love Him, extol Him, witness to Him, and long for that day of days when we shall see Him! For all our need He is the “fullness” of supply. The fullness is embodied in HIM that it may be imparted to US. “Of His fullness have all we received.” Let us keep on receiving, for He came that we “might have life ... more abundantly.” And let us keep on serving Him. His parting words at the end of John’s Gospel have given us the three vital qualifications for this. First, “Lovest thou Me?”; second, “Feed My lambs ... Tend My sheep”; third, “Follow Me.” Yes, they are the three essentials – a deep LOVE for Him, a sense of His COMMISSION to us, and a devoted FOLLOWING of Him, with our eyes ever on that lovely prospect of which He Himself speaks, in the very last sentence of John’s Gospel: “TILL I COME.”

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES – RENEWED OFFER OF THE KINGDOM TO THE JEWS

Apostles prepared and commissioned (1)

1. RENEWED OFFER TO JEWS OF THE HOME-LAND (2-12)

2 – Miracle – Witness – Response

3-4 Miracle – Witness – Opposition

5 – Miracle – Witness – Opposition

6-7 Miracle – Witness – Opposition

First crisis point: Outrage against Stephen (7)

1. Final trial of nation at the capital

2. Official Jewish rejection of the kingdom

3. First outward movement of evangelism

4. Transference to new center – Antioch

The outward movement: Key cities and persons

8 – Samaria – Ethiopian Chancellor

9 – Damascus – Saul the future Paul

10 – Cesarea – Cornelius the Gentile

11 – Antioch – Gentile Inclusion

12 – Jerusalem – Herod judged as head of nation

2. RENEWED OFFER TO JEWS OF THE DISPERSION (13-28)

13-14 First Pauline missionary excursion

15 Second Pauline missionary excursion

18 Third Pauline missionary excursion, General Jewish reaction – opposition

Second crisis point: Outcry against Paul (22)

1. Climax of Jewish hatred against Paul

2. Culminating “No” by Jews of Dispersion

3. This causes witness to key persons

4. Leads to Paul’s final witness at Rome

The further witnessing before key persons

23 – Paul witnesses before the Sanhedrin

24 – Paul witnesses before Governor Felix

25 – Paul witnesses before Governor Festus

26 – Paul witnesses before King Agrippa

27 – Paul goes to Rome: final witness there

Third crisis point: Outgoing to Gentiles (28)

“Be it known therefore unto you that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it (28:28).”

Covering a period of 30 years, it is an unresolved suspense period. A second offer of the Kingdom of Heaven, and of Jesus as Messiah-King, was being made to Israel. It can be affirmed with almost categorical finality that the author was Luke, and it was completed about the year 63 A.D. at Rome; that is about the end of Paul's two years imprisonment there. The key thought in the Acts is that of WITNESS TO CHRIST, “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (1:8). In chapters 2-7 the witness is borne in Jerusalem; in chapters 8-12 it is borne in all Judea and Samaria. Finally, in chapter 13 to the end of the book it is borne to the “uttermost part of the earth.” As for its plan, this book of the Acts is in two parts.

Part I (1-12) ... Part II (13-28).

Jerusalem the center ... Antioch the center
Peter the chief figure ... Paul the chief figure
Reaching out to Samaria ... Reaching out to Rome
Word rejected by Jews of Homeland ... Word rejected by Jews of Dispersion
Peter imprisoned ... Paul imprisoned
Judgment on Herod ... Judgment on Jews
There is a parallel between Peter in the first part and Paul in the second which seems to be more than merely coincidental.

Peter ... Paul

First sermon (2) ... First sermon (13)
Lame man healed (3) ... Lame man healed (14)
Simon the sorcerer (8) ... Elymas the sorcerer (13)
Influence of shadow (5) ... Influence of handkerchief (19)
Laying on of hands (8) ... Laying on of hands (19)
Peter worshipped (10) ... Paul worshipped (14)
Tabitha raised (9) ... Eutychus raised (20)
Peter imprisoned (12) ... Paul imprisoned (28)

WHAT WAS THE APOSTOLIC WITNESS?

What was the NATURE AND CONTENT of the apostolic witness to our Lord Jesus Christ? What was uppermost in the thoughts of our Lord those final 40 days of His ministry on earth. It tells us in v.3 “He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of THE THINGS PERTAINING TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD.”

Language could not be plainer. During those 40 days the supreme and engrossing subject of conversation was “the kingdom of God.” This evoked a quite natural question on the part of the apostles, which says, “Lord, wilt Thou at this time RESTORE AGAIN THE KINGDOM TO ISRAEL?” Yet, strangely enough, most writers on the Acts fail to see this. Confounding “the kingdom of God” with the “Church” (and thus spiritualizing it, to say nothing of divorcing it from Old Testament prophecy) they charge the apostles with incorrigible unintelligence and self-centered ambitions.

What was it then, the apostles were commissioned to preach by the risen Christ? Clearly, it was something to do with “the kingdom of God,” for that was THE subject of consideration during the 40 days. They were to witness to Him (1) as being indeed the Messiah-King of Israel, the crucified but now risen Deliverer of His people, the predestined King of the long promised “kingdom of heaven”; and (2) as the personal Savior, from the guilt and power and eternal penalty of sin, of all who believe on Him, through His atoning death and resurrection. They were to present the offer of the King and the kingdom, just as the Lord Himself had done up to the time of His crucifixion; only now there was a wonderful new factor in the message – that of the cross, the atonement for “the sin of the world,” and the good news of personal salvation by faith on the Lord Jesus, the Christ of Israel and now the Savior of the world. Whatever other meanings may inhere in the Acts of the Apostles, the book is primarily THE RENEWED OFFER OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN TO THE NATION ISRAEL.

Specimen Apostolic Preachings

This renewed offer of the kingdom to Israel is the key to all the recorded proclamations of the apostles to the nation at and after Pentecost. Peter’s great sermon on the day of Pentecost (2:14-40) is addressed especially to the men of Israel (v.14,22,36). Next note, the Pentecostal effusion is said to be in fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32. Does it refer to the Church? No, but rather the nation Israel and in particular, the Messianic kingdom. Next, Peter charges home the responsibility for the crucifixion of the Messiah upon the nation Israel, reminding them of the “miracles and signs and wonders” which He had done among them. At this point, Peter breaks forth in the new message of the resurrection and exaltation of the crucified Jesus, showing it to be the fulfillment of Messianic prediction. Peter gives the crowning proof not only that this Jesus is indeed the Messiah, but that He is, in the unique and transcendent sense, the very Son of God. And then he finally adds, “For the promise [that of Joel], and the kingdom promise of Old Testament prophecy in general] is UNTO YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN, and [afterward] to all that are afar off [Gentiles], as many as the Lord our God shall call.”

As for Peter’s 2nd public address (3:12-26), there are two striking things about it. First, the admission that there was ignorance in the crucifying of Jesus; and second, the promise that the Lord Jesus would return THEN, if the people of Israel repented and received Him. The “times of RESTORATION” to which Peter here referred come without delay, along with our Lord’s return, if Israel would repent and receive. The apostles themselves had been thinking of this same “restoration” when they asked, “Lord, wilt Thou at this time RESTORE the kingdom to Israel?” The Old Testament prophets repeatedly foretell a restoration of dispersed Israel to the covenant land; a restoration of the theocracy under the coming Messiah; and a restoration to full privileges under the finally realized provisions of the Abrahamic covenant.

THREE PIVOTAL EVENTS – There are three pivotal events in the Acts – they are:

1. OUTRAGE AGAINST STEPHEN

In the outrage against Stephen, it will be seen in each of the earlier chapters of the Acts we have first miracle then witness. The miracles are meant to prepare the way for the message. They were the supernatural evidences, in accordance with Old Testament prophecies such as Joel’s, that the long-promised kingdom was really here in its beginnings, in its incipient stage; and the message was that if the nation, welcoming these evidences, repented and accepted the renewed offer of the Lord Jesus Christ, then Christ would return, and the kingdom be brought in fully. What is more, in these early chapters we see that in each case, after miracle and message, there is immediate opposition by the Jewish authorities.

Now all this is brought to a head in the outrage against Stephen. First, in the miracles, message and martyrdom of Stephen we have the FINAL TRIAL AND INDICTMENT OF THE NATION. More than a few readers, perhaps have wondered just what is the special point of Stephen's long address to the Sanhedrin.

To begin with, his review was an indictment. It was meant to show how, again and again, right through the national history, Israel had rejected the witness of God's Spirit, until at length, under the influence of their perverted leaders, the people had gone to the ugly extreme of murdering the Messiah Himself. Stephen's sorrowful purpose is to charge home intelligent and conscious guilt for the heinous dual sin, first of crucifying the Son of God, and now of resisting still further the graciously renewed witness of the Divine Spirit. On the cross Christ had said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"; and Peter had made allowance for this in his words to the crowd, "I know that in ignorance ye did it." But now ignorance may be pleaded no longer – the situation shall now be so clarified that the Jewish leaders will at once be seen to be acting in the full realization of what they are doing. No longer shall the words, "They know not what they do" be a covering for them. Wonders have been wrought. Witness has been given. Offer has been made. They have seen and heard and understood – and have resisted.

Certainly the miracles had been unmistakable and unanswerable. The leaders themselves had been forced to admit it. We see both their admission and their attitude to it in chapters 4:16-17 & 5:12,17-18. Their jealous rage and opposition would stop at nothing. Their knowing and willful resistance of the Holy Spirit was more and more uncloaked until its evil face was finally unmasked at the trial of Stephen: "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, YE DO ALWAYS RESIST THE HOLY GHOST." The nation was tried and found guilty. Second, the martyrdom of Stephen marked the OFFICIAL JEWISH REJECTION OF THE RENEWED OFFER OF THE KINGDOM. In these early chapters of the Acts there are two words used to describe the supernatural works wrought by the apostles – "signs" and "wonders." The apostolic miracles were "signs" that the kingdom, in offer, had indeed drawn near again in the renewed message through the lips of the apostles. As to their nature, these signs were "wonders," works so obviously supernatural as to make it quite certain that God Himself was at work among the people. The stoning of Stephen was the signal for a general uprising against the believers. Chapter 8:1 says, "And at that time there was a great persecution against the assembly which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad." Tradition tells us that over 2,000 were put to death in the Stephenic outbreak.

Third, the martyrdom of Stephen precipitated the FIRST OUTWARD MOVEMENT OF EVANGELISM FROM THE JEWISH CAPITAL. "They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."

Fourth, the outbreak against Stephen occasioned THE TRANSFERENCE TO A NEW CENTER, Antioch. From this point Antioch begins to take the lead in the Acts. Jerusalem still retains nominal leadership; it is still the center for authoritative decision and pronouncement, for the Twelve still remain there. There is still the uniqueness of the Judean capital arising from its sacred associations; and it remains for all time the history cradle for the new faith; yet IN STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE it is Antioch which now comes to the fore.

2. THE OUTCRY AGAINST PAUL

As in the first part of the book, the martyrdom of Stephen is the focus-point, the climax of what precedes it and the cause of what follows, so here in this second half of the book the

impassioned outburst of Jewish hostility described in chapter 22. It was not enough that the good news of the kingdom should be proclaimed only in the homeland. Hence the second part is taken up with the witness of the kingdom to the Jews of the Dispersion, and to the “uttermost part of the earth.” Here again we see strict adherence to the order, “the Jew first” and then “also to the Gentile.”

First Missionary Journey

What was the message which the two apostles preached on this first missionary expedition? “And when they had preached THE GOSPEL to that city, and had disciplined many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into THE KINGDOM OF GOD” (14:21-22). The message was that of Jesus as Messiah-King and personal Savior.

Thus we see that the Jews were more and more closing the door against the apostolic witness, and that at the same time the “door of faith” was being opened to the Gentiles (14:27). From the opening visit to Cyprus, it would seem as though the two evangelists had intended to go exclusively to the Jews. In Antioch and Iconium they are forced to recognize that they cannot go exclusively to the Jews, though they still go to the Jews primarily (13:46). When we see them as fugitives in Lyconia they had been fairly driven out to the Gentiles! On returning to their home base, they “rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” They could bear no glad report of Jewish repentance and receptiveness. The one bright relief was this opening of the door to the Gentiles. A great transition was taking place. More and more we see those other words assuming prominence, “And also the Gentiles.”

Second Missionary Journey

Place Method and Message Reaction and Result.

Phillipi To Jew 1st 1) Promised Unrecorded, On to
Messiah, a Lydia won Thessalonica
Thessalonica ” Sinbearer Some accept: Flight to Berea
opposition

Berea ” 2) Messiah is Many accept: Flight to
Jesus, crucified opposition Athens
Athens ” but risen No Jewish Out to the
response Gentiles

Corinth ” 3) Jesus now Bitter “Henceforth to
offered as King, opposition the Gentiles”
Ephesus ” Messiah, Not recorded Back to home
Savior. till later, base at Antioch

Jewish opposition seems to have reached a high-water mark in Corinth. In connection with this we have Paul’s last recorded word before returning to home base, “From henceforth I will go UNTO THE GENTILES.”

Third Missionary Journey

The method was again “to the Jew first.” The message was “the kingdom of God.” The reaction was largely unbelief and opposition on the part of the Jews. When Paul returns to Jerusalem after his 3rd missionary tour what does his report consist of? “He declared particularly what

things God had wrought AMONG THE GENTILES by his ministry" (21:19). It is of momentous significance, especially in the light of what now follows in Jerusalem.

Paul was at Jerusalem on the occasion of the annual Pentecost. There were present therefore at the Jewish capital Jews from all over the world, just as there had been when, some 27 years earlier, the Holy Spirit was first outpoured on the apostolic band, and when Peter had declared to the "devout men OUT OF EVERY NATION UNDER HEAVEN." The Jews of the Dispersion are well represented by the many who have come from the various parts of the Roman world to be present in Jerusalem for the celebration. Paul is now only too well known to them as a result of his three evangelistic expeditions. They are now about to utter their fierce, final repudiation of him and his message. Mark well that it is "the Jews WHICH WERE FROM ASIA" (21:27) who drag Paul into prominence and instigate the riot against him. And as Paul was delivering his speech there was a frantic outburst and a violent stampede at his words,

"AND HE [JESUS] SAID UNTO ME: DEPART, FOR I WILL
SEND THEE FAR HENCE UNTO THE GENTILES."

It was the representatives of the Jews of the Dispersion, united with the unbelieving Jews of the homeland, uttering their loud and final rejection of Jesus as their Christ and of the message of salvation to the Gentiles. This latter was intolerable to them. It infuriated and maddened them in their conceited bigotry. They would not themselves receive the kingdom, but they were determined that no semblance of privilege should be accorded to the Gentiles.

3. THE OUTGOING TO THE GENTILES

The final crisis-point in this book of the Acts is reached in chapter 28. Jewish leaders came to him for an interview, "And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him, into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified THE KINGDOM OF GOD, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning to evening." Even after the apostles discouraging experiences in Judea and throughout the empire, his approach is still "to the Jew first", and only afterward "also to the Gentile"; and the subject of his testimony is still "the kingdom." Then immediately following this, the final crisis point of the book is reached in the words:

"BE IT KNOWN THEREFORE UNTO YOU, THAT THE SALVATION OF GOD
IS SENT UNTO THE GENTILES AND THAT THEY SHALL HEAR IT." v.28

This book of Acts has reached its tragic goal, and fulfilled its intended purpose. The renewed offer of the kingdom of heaven to Israel has been made over a period of 30 years, first to the Jews of the homeland, then to the Jews of the Dispersion throughout the Roman world. THE JEWS HAVE SAID "NO" TO THE RENEWED OFFER OF JESUS AS ISRAEL'S CHRIST AND KING AND SAVIOR. THE "KINGDOM" IS NOW TO BE WITHDRAWN AND HELD IN ABEYANCE. FOR THIS PRESENT AGE THE NATION ISRAEL IS TO BE SET ASIDE AS GOD'S REPRESENTATIVE PEOPLE ON EARTH, AND A FAR-SURPASSING GOSPEL OF WORLD-EMBRACING DIVINE GRACE IS TO BE MADE KNOWN AMONG ALL THE NATIONS OF THE GENTILES.

It is only when we turn and read on through the Epistles that we find revealed to us the deeper movement of Divine purpose which was operating underneath and concurrently with the renewed rejection of Jesus and the kingdom by the Jews. Just as the awful deed of Calvary had been Divinely foreknown and overruled – indeed inasmuch as the crucifixion of the nation's Messiah had been sublimated into the atoning self-sacrifice of the world's Savior – so also this

further failure of the Jewish people had been Divinely anticipated and overruled. Under the sovereign operation of God these groups of believers scattered throughout the Roman world now became seen and known, through inspired eyes and pens, as the first assemblies of those blood-redeemed, Spirit-born human beings who constitute the spiritual CHURCH, the mystic body and bride and temple of the eternal Son.

Out from the ashes of Jewish unbelief there rises up this wonderful new spiritual building, the Church, of which these little groups are the first expression. Lo, an elect bride for the heavenly Isaac! A spiritual temple for the glorified Lord! A mystic body for Him who is "Head over all things"! A new age breaks. The kingdom twice refused by unbelieving Israel is now for the first time being held over; but the purpose of God moves on unthwarted. We stress the fact again, that only in the light of the Epistles do we perceive this deeper significance in these newly formed assemblies of believers scattered throughout the Roman world, as recorded in the Acts.

Also this book of the Acts is a CONTINUATION. Luke's opening words are, "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus BEGAN both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up..." The Acts is no mere chronicle of witness to an absent Christ. His ascension did not rob His followers of His presence. The lovely paradox is that He was never so really WITH them as after He had LEFT them. All the way through Acts Jesus is chief Actor, even MORE present now because physically invisible. This is the wonder epic of what the crucified, risen, ascended Jesus Himself CONTINUED to do by His Spirit through His chosen witnesses!

ADDENDUM: OUR LORD'S RETURN

If we rightly read the Scriptures, the second coming of Christ to this earth is not, so to speak an event fixed by calendar for a certain date, but rather an event which is CONTINGENT UPON certain other events. If the "day and hour" had been a date-fixture revealed to any man, how could a bona fide offer have been made to the Jews, as we have in the Acts. We can see why, when the disciples asked, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?", He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power." To have known the day in advance would have been to know Israel's reaction before ever the renewed offer of the kingdom was made. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world," and it is in the light of His perfect foreknowledge that He preadapts and prearranges and predetermines. Thus, while He never leaves His ultimate purposes at the mercy of human uncertainty, in the outworking of things to the predetermined end He recognizes the free-will of man all through, and prearranges according to His foreknowledge of what man will do. Thus it is that events are allowed in the main to take their natural course, while at the same time God foreknows and overrules all to the fulfillment of His ultimate purpose.

This has a bearing upon THE EPISTLES. The period covered by the Acts was a suspense period. So long as the kingdom was being re-offered to the nation the return of the Lord could have happened without any delay upon fulfillment of the conditions. The offer was real; the promise was true; the crucified but ascended Son of Man was indeed "standing at the right hand of God," ready to descend again in kingdom blessing. Would Israel respond, repent, receive? That was the suspense point. Now it is in those epistles which were written during this suspense-period of the Acts, when there was still hope of Israel's repentance, that we find the seeming imminence of the Lord's return. Of those epistles, the earliest were 1 & 2 Thessalonians (53 A.D.). Corinthians, Galatians and Romans were written 4-5 years later, when Jewish antipathy was becoming more firmly crystallized, but when to assemblies of believers all

over the Roman world the hope of Christ's return was still that which filled the immediate horizon. Yet when we turn over to Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Timothy and Titus, however there is a noticeable new emphasis. The grand prospect of the Lord's return is still there, and still as bright; but there is not the same sense of impendence. A great new conception swings into commanding prominence, taking the precedence for the time being, and claiming the soul's wonder – that is, the CHURCH as the mystic body and bride and temple of the eternal Son. THESE epistles were not written until 64 A.D. (or possibly later), after the culminating pronouncement of Acts 28:28.

Yet despite their imminence, these two second advent letters to the Thessalonians preserve a kind of sensitive poise between an encouraged expectancy on the one hand and a careful indefiniteness as to time on the other.

Is there not a real sense, also in which it is STILL CONTINGENT UPON AN EVENT? It is no longer contingent upon Israel's response to the apostolic message, nor has it been so since the hour of that solemn, final pronouncement. No, THAT contingency has forever passed. Yet it certainly seems as though the promised coming is now, in some real sense, made contingent upon a further historical development. Romans 11:25 says, "For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits; that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, UNTIL THE FULLNESS OF THE GENTILES BE COME IN." How then is the "fullness" of the Gentiles to be completed? Is it not by our own co-operation? In this same passage Paul asks, "How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

But there is another New Testament reference – II Peter 3:11-12: "LOOKING FOR AND HASTENING THE DAY OF GOD." So there it is, WE may hasten that day! How? By striving, as Paul did, to bring in "the fullness of the Gentiles"! That great "day" in some mysterious but real sense, has been made again contingent. Let us not be slow to believe and blameworthy as were the Jews, but rather as Paul says "BE DILIGENT" II Peter 3:14.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

ROMANS – THE GOSPEL, THE POWER OF GOD TO SALVATION

1:1 – 8:39 = DOCTRINAL: HOW THE GOSPEL SAVES THE SINNER

9:1 – 11:29 = NATIONAL: HOW THE GOSPEL RELATES TO ISRAEL

12:1 – 16:27 = PRACTICAL: HOW THE GOSPEL BEARS ON CONDUCT

What irony that the church to which this epistle was sent has erred most grievously from it. It stands first among these 'Church' epistles because the Holy Spirit designed it so, to be first ingested.

HOW THE GOSPEL SAVES THE SINNER.

1:1 – 3:20 = Gentile & Jewish Guilt

3:21 – 5:11 = Gospel's Answer for Sins

5:12 – 8:39 = Gospel's Answer for Sin

Present righteousness and final salvation through Christ by faith is the theme of Romans. There are two aspects: the judicial and the dynamic. Man needs a new 'standing' before God, judicial

righteousness, justification by the cross, where Christ our Substitute died FOR sins; and secondly identification, where Christ our Representative died TO sin, a new 'power' which can make a practical righteousness by the Spirit. This is God's good news. To obey God's good news, is simply to believe it. Paul is not establishing what is now called 'the Christian religion'. Utter uncompromising, abandonment of hope in man is the first prerequisite to understanding or preaching the gospel. If God asks of us to abandon all hope in man, can He, who thoroughly knows man, retain any expectations of him?

Romans is a 'court book.' God, who had judged all guilty under sin, gladly declares righteous and safe those who trust Him. Contrariwise, those who reject His mercy and grace are visited by the same Judge, even God, with wrath. Both the wrath in the one case, and the grace in the other, proceed from God's personal feeling, it is the Judge Himself who has been wronged. The Greek word for wrath is used 12x in this book. And shall God, in that Day, refuse to remember the agonies of His Son on the cross? Shall He change that holy hatred of sin, wherein He forsook Christ and spared Him not? If the blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses sinners 'from all sin'; then no sin has been left unjudged at the cross, and no sins will be unjudged upon the lost, at the Great White Throne. There is no wrath upon believers, and there is nothing but wrath for unbelievers. God's definition of sin is not transgression of law, but refusal to be controlled – self will (lawlessness). Regarding sin, there are three judgment days: 1) of the human RACE, in Eden, 2) of human SIN at the cross, and 3) of human REBELS, at the Great White Throne.

The Jews have a double conviction, they are not only sinners, but transgressors of the very Law they boasted in. They are brought in and are silent while God their Judge announces – astonishing thing! – that He has Himself already dealt with the world's sin upon a sin offering, Jesus, His Son. Keeping the Law is NOT God's way of salvation or of blessing. God's way with man has always been that of faith. For law was not given to a heavenly company, but an earthly nation. God, acting in righteousness, reckons righteous the ungodly man who trusts Him, because He places him in the full value of the infinite work of Christ on the cross, and transfers Him into Christ Risen, who becomes his righteousness. They having deserted all trust in themselves, they've transferred their faith and hope to Christ alone. In Christ we have complete deliverance from our former place in Adam. We have died with Christ and have no connection at all with Adam's responsibility to furnish a righteousness before God's tribunal.

Our relationship now to God is that of standing in the same acceptance as Christ; as we have the same Spirit of sonship. Justification is God's reckoning a man righteous who has no righteousness (ungodly), because God is operating wholly upon another basis, even the work of Christ. A believer's history ended at the cross, and is now wholly in a new creation. The righteousness of God is not put "upon" any one. It is not something bestowed upon us, but rather a Divine reckoning about us. It is God accounting a man (even as he is, "ungodly") righteous in His sight. Righteousness is a court word. Justification, or accounting righteous, is God's reckoning to one who believes. The word never means to make one righteous or holy, but to account one righteous. Justification is not a change wrought by God in us, but a change of our relation to God. We are justified freely, gratuitously – without a cause in us, its cause is in God. Even as condemnation is not the infusion of a habit of wickedness into him that is condemned, but the passing of a sentence upon a man with respect to his wickedness; so justification is not the change of a person from inherent unrighteousness by the infusion of a principle of grace, but a sentential declaration of him to be righteous.

When Abraham believed God, he did the one thing a man can do without doing anything. Abraham believed in his heart that God told the truth. There was no effort here. His faith was not an act, but an attitude. Even Divine ordinances like circumcision have nothing to do with righteousness. It is not the Gentile who must come to the Jew's circumcision for salvation, it is the Jew who must come to a Gentile faith, such faith as Abraham had long before he was circumcised. God saw that one day He would make Abraham as righteous in glory as He in the past day reckoned him in grace. In God's great kindness, He desires that all the seed of Abraham, Jewish and Gentile believers, might have security. Now if you introduce man's works you introduce an element of insecurity and uncertainty.

In Ch.6 we see the second part of Christ's work – our identification with His death. The old man was crucified with Christ, and all that belonged to "man in the flesh" was ended before God there on Christ's cross. The old man represents all we were federally in Adam. The flesh however, we find to be that manifestation of sin in our members with which we are in conscious inward conflict, against which only the Holy Spirit indwelling us effectively wars. The 'body of sin' refers to our bodies, yet unredeemed, and yet undelivered from sin's rule. Justified from sin is not sinless perfection, but something utterly different and infinitely beyond that! It does not refer to an experience of deliverance from sin, but a 'passing beyond', in death with Christ at the cross, the sphere where the former relationship to sin existed! We are justified, accounted wholly righteous, with respect to the thing sin itself! We are heavenly. Our old relationship to sin is over forever – justified from it. The question is one of relationship, not expiation. He wanted to get at what we were, not just what we had done. To reckon ourselves dead to sin while conscious of sin in our members, is faith indeed. Walking by the Spirit, who indwells us, takes for us today the place that observing the Law had with Israel (internal vs. external).

A new believer finds the joy of justification, but then later to find an evil nature, of which he had never become really conscious. The Lord permits this experience of the moral hideousness of our old self, and our powerlessness though regenerate, to deliver ourselves from the law of sin in our members. We are dependent on the Holy Spirit as our only spiritual power, just as on Christ as our only righteousness!

The Spirit now becomes the element in which the believer lives – in the Spirit – like water to the fish, or air to the bird, vital, supplying, protecting. Our bodies though now dead as regards any emotion toward God, will be one day given life by His Spirit (8:11). Not only will the saints behold Christ's glory, but beholding, they will share that glory, and be glorified with Him. God has left our bodies as the link with the 'groaning' creation. Thus the Christian becomes the true connection of groaning creation with God! He is redeemed, heavenly; but his body is unredeemed, earthly. As absolutely as righteousness is "not of works," so neither is election! God's elect, those who have believed, find themselves borne upon the irresistible tide of this Divine affection which "is in Christ," out into an eternity of bliss. God has given you an unheard of place, to be IN CHRIST, one with Him before God forever, loved as Christ is loved, seen in all the perfection and beauty of Christ Himself, glorified with Him, associated with Him as companions, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren. Those whose humble faith has received the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness; these shall reign as kings forever.

HOW THE GOSPEL RELATES TO ISRAEL.

9 = Does Not Annul God's Purpose with Israel

10 = It Fulfills the Promise to Israel

11 = Confirms the Prospect Before Israel

If Gentiles are now accepted, justified, given sonship and promise, on equal footing with the Jews, what about Israel's special covenant relationship with God? The present bypassing of Israel nationally is not inconsistent with the divine promises, because Israel's present sin and blindness nationally is overruled in blessing to both Jews and Gentiles as individuals and because 'all Israel shall yet be saved' at a postponed climax, inasmuch as the 'gifts and calling of God are irreversible.'

This section is about God's dealings with men and nations historically and dispensationally, and is NOT about individual salvation and destiny beyond the grave. God foreknows everything that every man will do; but He does not predetermine everything that they do. Because He knows, He anticipates and overrules their deeds to the fulfilling of His further purposes.

God's chosen nation is absolute and eternal. God's salvation promises were lodged in Abraham; His kingdom promises in David. 'The promises' pertain nationally to Israel, and to no other nation as such. The gospel is not a promise, but the announcement of a fact to be believed; it is not preached to nations as such, but to individuals. Jews and Gentiles come individually, upon believing, into a "heavenly" inheritance. God has not been unfaithful to His promises, but rather in Israel's own Scriptures He foretold of their temporary rejection, and the salvation of the Gentiles and the great future blessing to come upon Israel in God's sovereign mercy. For the Divine statement concerning His own election, and His providence that carries out that election, is very plainly NOT OF WORKS but of Himself, who gives the creature his calling. The favor of God to the children of promise (those whom He has given to Christ) is not procured by their response to God's grace, but contrariwise, their response to God's grace is because they have been given to Christ. But you will not dare say to God in that day, "I could not come because I was not of the elect"; for that will not be true. The reason you refused to come, will be found to be your 'love of sin', not your non-election! God says, "Whosoever will," and the door is open to ALL, absolutely ALL. God means "Whosoever"; and that is the word for you, sinner; and not election, which is God's business, not yours. If God did not elect, none would be saved. And men are not lost because they are hardened; they are hardened because they are lost. All that is of salvation is to be credited to God, all that is of damnation is to be credited to man, they fitted themselves for destruction. The Lord Jehovah is bringing Israel out from the nations, and cutting off the rebels among them – the rebels against the national Divine calling as a separate nation to Jehovah. The Jews will have no national friend or refuge whatever, except Palestine, and Jehovah will enter into judgment with them and do a quick work. At that time the remnant will be saved, the majority having been slain in the great tribulation.

The Law was given to the nation Israel ONLY. It was a temporary ministration ONLY, to reveal sin. Christ having come, the day of Law is over (He.7:18). There is now no distinction for the Jew – no difference in sinnership or availability of salvation. In Acts 28 God through Paul closed the door to the national offer of the gospel to the Jews, and they at present have no special place with God, but in a future day they will.

God never refers to the Church as a people or nation (I Pet.2:9), but saints. Israel is His people, His nation. The church is not earthly, nor national, nor Jewish; but a new body, and altogether heavenly. Every saved Israelite becomes a partaker of the heavenly calling, abandoning all Israelitish hopes. They as a nation won't believe until they see Him at His coming, for they must see to believe. The present saved remnant is a part of the Church. The rest of Israel has been

temporarily cut off, and one day Gentiledom will be cut off (the Gentile nations having been put into the place of Divine blessing where Israel once stood). The warnings here are addressed not to brethren in Christ, but as being of the Gentiles. Gentiles will be cut off from their place of Divine privilege which they now have, and Israel will be restored to that privileged place. Israel will be honored as the center and spring of Divine blessing on earth; the Gentiles again becoming subordinate to Israel, and having again to go up to Jerusalem to worship Jehovah. The Church, the fullness of the Gentiles, will of course have been translated to heaven before this order of things comes in. Two thirds of the nation shall be cut off and die, the third part will be left – refined as silver and tried as gold. God does not make Israelites out of Gentiles! He had a secret purpose kept from all the ages – of giving to His Son a bride composed of Jewish and Gentile believers who should be received as merely guilty sinners, on purely grace grounds; and should have the highest calling of any creature – to be MEMBERS OF CHRIST HIMSELF, a thing never promised to Israel. And so all Israel shall be saved, for the salvation of national Israel was impossible, except on purely grace lines. Christ's second coming will include 1) the Rapture of the Church, 2) the Judgment of the nations and 3) the Deliverance of Israel. The hope of Israel is not heaven, but rather THE LAND forever, and Jehovah dwelling with them in majesty; and complete and eternal deliverance there from all their enemies and from all their own iniquities. He comes to earth for the deliverance of Israel. It shall no longer be a conditional covenant as that of Sinai, but one of grace. Of course, both the Remnant and those of the nations who bow in real worship during the Millennium, will share spiritual life in Christ, for then will Pentecost be completely fulfilled. But it is not until the new heaven and the new earth, that even that nation will be fully on new creation ground, such as the Church, members of Christ. To emphasize that Ch.9-11 do not teach that the Church as such has succeeded the Jews in the place of blessing; but do show that Gentiledom has received the place of privilege and opportunity, and consequently of responsibility, that Israel once had.

HOW THE GOSPEL BEARS ON CONDUCT.

12 = Christian Life as to Social Aspects

13 = Christian Life as to Civil Aspects

14-15 = Christian Life as to Mutual Aspects

We are first instructed in justification, and then identification, all this before the call to consecration (12:1-2). The new man being a new creation in Christ, all the graces and beauties of Christ belong to us; just as before, the evil we inherited from the first Adam was ours, because we were federally connected with him. This new man is not Christ personally, any more than the old man was Adam personally. However we sustained such a relation to Adam that the old man was ours, as much as by nature we were Adam's children. So since we are in Christ, the new man belongs to us – being the sum total of the marvelous Divine graces and dispositions created for, and to be realized in, the believer in union with Christ. Note that believers HAVE 'put off' the old man, but are here told to 'put him away' – be not influenced by him. We are to enter into the will of Another, to be transformed into the image of Christ. We are the body of Christ. "Body" here is not an illustration, but an actuality. To be transformed into giving without any secret reluctance, serving with joyfulness of spirit, kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another. To love with infinite fervency, showing hospitality, paying back no wrongs. Love and not righteousness, is the active principle of Christianity. And lo, one loving, has wrought righteousness. Thus only those not under law show its fullness.

Here is our sphere of freedom, instead of being told what one must or must not do, he is freely exhorted to assure his own mind and heart fully, and walk as Christ's free man. Even the

sabbatical obligation to keep any day, whether seventh or first, was not recognized in apostolic times. That He might rule over us all, and we be not lords of each other; or of the faith of others. No place is left for `religious fussing.' There must not only be knowledge of Christian freedom, but heart and conscience persuasion. But the conscience cannot be commanded, it must be persuaded. The words here (Ro.14:17) are not righteousness in Christ – referring to our standing; but righteousness in the Holy Spirit referring to our WALK. The kingdom of God is altogether in the Holy Spirit. This leaves forms and ceremonies, days and seasons, and foods absolutely out. Such things are not Christian, they are Jewish or pagan now.

God had a sovereign purpose to take certain creatures INTO HIS OWN GLORY, to share in that Glory. And He desired also that these should know Him in His nature as Love, and be with Him, before Him, in that blissful atmosphere of pure love, forever. These happy creatures were not to be taken from among the elect angels, holy and blessed beings that they are. This is the mystery (16:25). Certain were to be brought, in Christ, into the Divine glory! They are to be manifested with Him in glory at His appearing. But that would be because they had entered into a glory never before given creatures. It was not given to angels, but to blood-bought sinners as MEMBERS OF CHRIST! Nor was such a union proposed to earthly Israel.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

I CORINTHIANS: JESUS CHRIST MADE UNTO US WISDOM

Introductory 1:1-9

1. REPROOF – CONCERNING SCHISMS (1-6)

(The Corinthians were factiously glorying in men 1:12)

Ch.1 Man-exalting schisms (v.10-17) wrong because salvation by the Cross sets aside man's wisdom altogether (v.18-31)

Ch.2 Man-exalting schisms wrong because the true wisdom imparted by the Spirit, not by man (v.5-13)

Ch.3 Man-exalting schisms wrong because human teachers are 4 only stewards: power is of God (3:5,6,21; 4:1)

Ch.5 Such "gloryings" (v.2) a mockery (v.6) while flagrant 6 evils are condoned – incest, law suits, impurity!

2. REPLIES – CONCERNING PROBLEMS (7-15)

(The Corinthians had written Paul about problems 7:1)

Ch.7 Reply concerning marriage and celibacy.

Ch.8 Reply regarding meats. The principle (8); Paul's example 9,10 (9); Scripture warning (10); the Issue (10:23-11:1)

Ch.11 Reply on sex propriety in the assembly (v.2-16) and general behavior at the Lord's table (v.17-34)

Ch.12 Reply regarding spiritual gifts. Dispensed by the Spirit 13,14 (12); poor without love (13); prophecy the best (14).

Ch.15 Reply concerning resurrection of the saints.

Relation to Christ's (v.1-19); the prospect (v.20-34); the body (v.35-49); the "mystery" (v.50-58)

Supplementary Ch.16

In the first trio of the Christian Church Epistles (Romans through Galatians) the emphasis is on Christ and the Cross. In Romans we find DOCTRINE, in Corinthians REPROOF, in Galatians CORRECTION. Reproof always has to do with wrong practice. Correction always has to do with wrong doctrine. The Romans epistle sets the NORM. The Corinthian epistles expose FAULT. The Galatian epistle counters ERROR.

Just as there is something solidly satisfying about the way things are doctrinally STATED in Romans, there is something thrillingly stirring about the way they are RELATED in Corinthians. In Romans evangelical truth is stated as doctrine to be learned and received. In Corinthians it is rather seen as truth already taught and departed from. In Romans we have the NORM; in Corinthians the SUB-norm; in Galatians the AB-norm. In this first Corinthian epistle there is reproof for divisions, envyings, contentions (1-4); unjudged sin (5); selfish litigation between Christian and Christian (6); inconsiderate liberties in doubtful practices (8); querulous querying of Paul's apostleship (9); errors in the use of spiritual gifts (14); wrong attitudes toward the coming resurrection (15).

Clearly chapter 7 indicates a new direction. It begins, "Now concerning the things WHEREOF YE WROTE ME ..." So from this point Paul is answering written questions. Three well known members of the Corinthian church had traveled to Ephesus, where Paul was laboring at the time, and from where he wrote his reply to Corinth (16:8-9). They were Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (v.17-18).

Human Leaders and Labels

Here we have four full chapters regretting and reproofing denominationalism. Unmistakably Paul keeps human leaders and teachers at the lowly level which alone is proper. In 3:5 they are but "servants;" it is the Lord who "gives to every man." In v.6 they are but "farm-hands"; it is God the "gives the growth." In v.10-15 they are "builders"; but Jesus is the "foundation." In 4:1 they are merely "subordinates"; while Christ is the Director; they are only "stewards"; the real treasure is "of God."

What wickedness it is today, the way that soundly evangelical preachers criticize each other! God save us from being mere men-pleasers! God save us from being carried away by congregational applause, or from being jealous of another's gifts! It is worst of all when they are put on such pedestals that Paul and Apollos and Peter are played off against each other; yet this is usually what develops from infatuation with the human. Let even the simplest among us learn not to lean unwisely on human leaders. They are meant to be learned from, not leaned on!

Let the ideal of every Christian evangelist and teacher be that preaching and practice shall maintain an equally high level. In this Paul is an illustrious example. See his exemplary:

1. Loyalty in message, method and motive, 2:1-5
2. Soundness in founding and building, 3:10-23
3. Fidelity as a trustee of saving truth, 4:1-6
4. Endurance of tribulations for Christ, 4:9-16
5. Considerateness of weaker brethren, 6:12; 8:13
6. Foregoing of proper rights and dues, 9:12-18
7. Self-denial for the saving of souls, 9:19-23
8. Self-discipline in body and behavior, 9:27; 10:33
9. Self-restraint in public assemblies, 14:18-20
10. Self-abnegation and active gratitude, 15:9-10

Paul the Pattern Preacher

There are two crises through which we must each pass, in one way or another, if we would be powerful and prevailing preachers. The first crisis is INTELLECTUAL, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God; for I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” Why did Paul renounce oratory and philosophy just at the place where they might have seemed most useful? It was because he was declaring “the testimony of GOD.” Either the Gospel is or is not a testimony of GOD. If it is, then to enhance it (supposedly) by display of human art or learning is like holding a candle aloft to help the sun. Notice Paul’s word “I determined.”

Second is the SPIRITUAL crisis, “And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling; and my speech and my preaching was not with persuasive words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” So it is not enough even to have the MESSAGE right – with all display excluded and Jesus supreme; the METHOD must be right as well. The Christ of Calvary must be preached in the power of Pentecost. No matter how true the sermon or how earnest the speaker, there is no spiritual effect in the hearer except by the Holy Spirit. Paul had come through both these crises – the intellectual and the spiritual. The one message was Christ crucified, the one power was the Holy Spirit. And what was the motive behind it all? It was, “That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

The Gospel and its Ministry

Paul gives us its five-fold course:

1. ITS FOOLISHNESS TO THE WORLDLY-WISE (1:18-31)

Foolishness of message (v.18-25)

Foolishness of advocates (v.19-31)

2. ITS OPERATION IN PREACHER AND HEARER (2:1-16)

Power through the preacher (v.1-8)

Revelation in the hearer (v.9-16)

3. ITS TEACHERS AND THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY (3:1-23)

Are fellow-workers for God (v.5-15)

Are gifts to the assembly (v.16-23)

4. ITS MINISTERS AS RESPONSIBLE TO GOD (4:1-21)

The true will be vindicated (v.1-7)

Some make costly sacrifice (v.8-21)

5. ITS DEMAND OF SANCTITY IN BELIEVERS (5-6)

The assembly must expel impurity (5)

No defrauding! No unchastity! (6)

Paul readily admits the seeming foolishness of the MESSAGE. The center point is the CROSS, which to human pride (Greek) and prejudice (Jew) is “foolishness.” They are foolishness because of their very simplicity; because they are equally free to the unlearned as to the highly sophisticated; because they abase self-righteous merit-works, thus offending religious pride; and because a shameful cross is such a sign of helpless weakness that it seems impossible for it to be the organ of Divine saving-power.

Equally “foolishness” to the worldly-wise are the Gospel PERSONNEL. “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; the weak things to confound the mighty; and base things, and things that are despised, yea, the things which are not, to bring to nought

things that are.” Such are the five ranks of the Gospel army: the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, the non-entities! This is not because God has no other choice. He prefers these; for thus all human boasting is excluded, and all the glory is Christ’s. The “fools” are the first rank. Paul gladly became one (2:2, 4:10), though naturally brilliant. The “weak” are the second rank. Have you been thinking you are too weak for Christian service and witness? You are just the recruit for this army! Step in here, behind the “fools” – who are such fools that they are not ashamed to be in the front rank! Or, if you are not good enough for this second rank, fall in with the “base” or the “despised” or the “nobodies”! What! Is this the laughable army which is ordered up to charge and break the enemy line? And is the cross their only weapon? Yes! for hidden within their contemptible exterior is the all-victorious presence of Christ and the irresistible power of the Holy Spirit.

Note in chapter 3 how factions frustrate the full operation of the truth. Observe also that true Christian evangelists and teachers are but SERVANTS of the Lord and His church (v.5-7); they are CO-WORKERS with God, not competitors (v.8-11); their work will be FINALLY TESTED, and either rewarded or exposed as reprobate (v.12-17); they are therefore not to be factiously gloried in, for all are THE CHURCH’S POSSESSION, not its possessors (v.18-23). Someone is sure to ask about Paul’s words in chapter 5:5, “To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

This verse is the direct grammatical continuation of the words “I have judged” in v.3. Paul was not asking THEM to judge but simply to carry out what he himself, an inspired apostle, had judged. The apostles were a group of authoritatively inspired men in a category all by themselves, required for a special season. They were no more intended to have “successors” than the now completed New Testament writings were meant to have apocryphal additions. They were uniquely authorized teachers with a conferred authority strictly peculiar to themselves. What Paul the apostle could do by that invested authority and supernatural insight, we cannot.

Furthermore, it was the BODY which was to be handed over – and for a mercifully corrective purpose, namely, “that the SPIRIT may be saved,” i.e. savingly disciplined through physical chastisement. The Greek word here translated as “destroyed” nowhere means annihilation. Chapters 5 and 6 emphasize that the Gospel of Christ tolerates absolutely no compromise with what is immoral or unworthy. Corinth was not an easy place in which to learn such lessons.

Corinth the Corrupt

The city had an infamous notoriety. Here vice was raised into a religion; and the “idolaters” of Corinth are fitly set between “fornicators” and “adulterers” (6:9). From the filthiest slough of sin Paul’s converts at Corinth were extracted (6:9-11). Not even at Antioch had he seen the condition of the Gentile world – its pride and power, its fancied wisdom, its utter depravity – displayed so vividly. Those converts must learn right away that the Gospel will not tolerate compromise. There must be a clean break. The Holy Spirit is grieved and thwarted in the assembly where sin is allowed a footing. “The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”

Some Problem-Points

Chapter 7:6 should read, “But this I say by way of CONCESSION ...” that is, he leaves the DETAILS of their lives, whether married or unmarried, to their individual consciences as Christians and will not COMMAND them this way or that.

In v.10 he says, "And unto the married I command, yet not I, BUT THE LORD ..." Two verses later he adds, "but to the rest speak I, NOT the Lord." He simply means that in the first case the rule for MARRIED persons had been uttered by our Lord Himself (Mat.5:31-32, 19:5-9; Mk.10:11; Lk.16:18), whereas in the latter case, i.e. Christian spouses whose partners were still heathen, no such word had been spoken. A similar instance occurs in v.25. Obviously there were many such incidents which our Lord could not touch upon but for which He made provision in the sending of the Holy Spirit who should afterward guide His followers.

This whole passage must be read in light of v.26, "This is good for THE PRESENT DISTRESS." The apostle had doubtless warned them of trouble ahead. The first of the awful anti-Christian persecutions under Nero was almost on them. In this 7th chapter then, we must be careful to distinguish between the temporary and the permanent, between the local and the general. ALL the apostle's counsels here are SYMPATHETIC in view of the "immanent distress," but SOME of them belong to the circumstances of a place and a time now gone.

Chapters 8-10 belong together and are a reply to the inquiry of the Corinthians concerning the permissibility of eating meats which had been offered to idols. In fact, all the different reply-sections are marked off by the word "Now."

- 7:1 "NOW concerning the things ..." (wedlock)
- 8:1 "NOW concerning things offered unto idols ..."
- 11:2 "NOW I praise you, brethren ..." (ordinances)
- 12:1 "NOW concerning spiritual gifts ..."
- 15:1 "NOW I declare to you ..." (resurrection)
- 16:1 "NOW concerning the collection ..."

This matter of meats offered to idols involves the whole question of CHRISTIAN LIBERTY in things doubtful and the next-door subject of SELF-SUBJUGATION.

It was a problem for the Gentile Christians, as well as the Jews. Much of the meats in their markets was the leftover of animals killed as sacrifices. So much was this so that it was generally impractical to distinguish with certainty between offered and non-offered meats. If then, it was wrong to buy the former, now mixed up with all the other meat stocks of the markets, a complicated problem indeed was created. Besides the problem in buying for one's own family, what about social meats with friends or relatives who were not Christians and who served meats which had perhaps been first offered to idols? What's more, the first Christian synod in Jerusalem a few years earlier had issued the resolution, "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you [Gentiles] no greater burden than these necessary things: That you abstain from MEATS OFFERED TO IDOLS ..."

Paul handles the question with obvious sympathy, sincerity and wisdom. While he assumes the Christian RIGHT, he also guards this liberty from ABUSE, lest it should become a stumbling-block to weaker believers who, having been idolaters all their lives hitherto, had not yet managed sufficiently to break free from their mental association of meats with idols (v.7-9). Paul enunciates the basic principle, "Wherefore, if what I eat stumbles my brother, I will not eat flesh while the age lasts, so that I do not cause my brother to stumble." Instead of a superior "I-know-better-than-you" attitude, which puffs up one's own self, LOVE triumphs in sympathetic considerateness and helps to build up the weaker brother or sister in the faith.

Five times in these 3 chapters the principle of considerateness for the weaker brother finds expression (8:9,13, 9:19-23, 10:24,29). It purifies and simplifies and unifies and amplifies and glorifies life!

Note 10:24, “They which run in the stadium run all, but only one receiveth the prize. So run that YE may win.” It might seem to suggest an each-for-himself competitiveness rather than considerateness for the weaker brother. But no – the pronoun “ye” is plural. “So run that YE ALL may obtain.”

Woman: The Lord’s Table

Let us learn once and for all, from this 11th chapter, (v.5) that women certainly did “prophesy” (i.e. preach and teach under impulse of the Holy Spirit) in that church of the first days. The words, “EVERY woman praying or prophesying” indicate that it was general. In this passage Paul’s concern is solely that what they WEAR in thus taking public part should conform to the preservation of true womanly dignity. The very “authority” which she was to wear on her head (some form of head-dress then in vogue as the proper thing), other than being meant to advertise inferiority and subjection, was that which protected her RIGHT to speak. To refer to it as a “veil” is not warranted by the context, though even the veil worn by women in some eastern parts can tell us the meaning of the head-dress to which Paul refers. Professor Ramsey says, “The teaching of 1 Corinthians 11:10 is that the wearing of the veil was the woman’s sign of authority in the church at Corinth to pray and prophesy.”

But then, what about 14:34-37, “Let your women keep silence in the churches”? Well, is it thinkable that Paul could so soon and so seriously contradict himself? Remember, he is here answering questions which the Corinthians had asked him by letter. Why had they raised the matter? In the early church there was a Judaising party agitating to graft rites and rules of Judaism upon the Christian faith. They held the usual Judaistic view of woman; and it is to THEIR STATEMENTS that Paul is replying in I Corinthians 14. The component sentences of v.34-35 are all from the Oral Law, Paul quotes them to REPUDIATE them. That is why he adds. “What! Did the word of God come from YOU? Or did it come only to YOU?” Would they set THAT teaching above his own? “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write unto you are the COMMANDMENTS OF THE LORD.” His handling of the HUSBAND’S HEADSHIP is as masterly as it is commonly misunderstood. He does not teach that the man is the head of the woman, but that the HUSBAND is the head of the WIFE – for that is what is meant by the words “man” and “woman” in v.3. The headship is matrimonial, but not in nature; for this he adds v.11.

Spiritual Gifts

With these three chapters, let us duly observe the following factors:

- 1) This short tract of Scripture is the only place in all the epistles, from Romans to Revelation, where the gift of tongues is mentioned – which indicates its RELATIVE value!
- 2) The only church to which Paul has to say “Ye are yet carnal” and “babes in Christ” is that which was making much ado about these more demonstrative gifts – which means that speaking in tongues can go with a POOR SPIRITUAL CONDITION!
- 3) Each time in his three lists of gifts (12:8-10, 27-28, 29-30) Paul puts speaking in tongues right at the end – which points to its LESSER IMPORTANCE among the gifts.
- 4) Chapter 12:8-10, 30 show that “tongues” are NOT MEANT FOR ALL.

5) In the passage where Paul particularly deals with speaking in tongues (14:1-28) it is notable that every single mention either compares it unfavorably with “prophecy” (speaking to edification in one’s own tongue) or attaches a cautionary word!

6) To the hankers after speaking in tongues he says, “Brethren, be not children” (v.20). Even when he agrees that it is for a “sign” to unbelievers (v.22) he warns of its impotency (v.21). In verse after verse he shows that it is of little or no benefit in the assembly. His highest commendation is merely a negative one, where, at the very end of the section, he concludes, “Wherefore, brethren, COVET to prophesy; and do not FORBID to speak with tongues” (v.40).

“Concerning Spiritual Gifts”

1. THE SPIRIT DIVIDES THEM AS HE WILL (12)

Diversity of gifts but one Spirit (v.4-11)

Diversity of members but one body (v.12-27)

Diversity of service but one church (v.28-31)

2. THEY ARE VALUELESS WITHOUT LOVE (13)

The utter necessity of love (v.1-3)

The moral excellency of love (v.4-7)

The abiding supremacy of love (v.8-13)

3. THE GREATEST OF THEM IS PROPHECY (14)

It most edifies the church (v.1-22)

It most convinces outsiders (v.23-28)

Its use should be orderly (v.29-40)

The Resurrection Chapter

At the end of this engrossing epistle, the longest chapter of all is devoted to the subject of the coming resurrection. It is, in fact, the longest passage on the subject in the Bible, and may be well called the church’s resurrection Magnificat.

First, notice that Paul’s Gospel begins with the CROSS (v.3-4). It is not Christ the perfect Example, merely, but a crucified Christ who alone is the SAVIOR.

Second, v.35-42 show us that there is no PHYSIOLOGICAL DIFFICULTY about the resurrection. What comes up is not the actual seed, yet it is something inseparably related to the seed which was buried. Our resurrection bodies will be similar in structure, but NOT IDENTICAL IN TEXTURE with these mortal bodies which we now possess. Neither burial nor cremation, neither severance of limbs nor complete disintegration of parts can present any problem to the all-knowing, almighty Lord who will then clothe His redeemed people with their resurrection bodies.

Third, mark the 7 transition-features of that coming resurrection:

It is sown: It is raised:

1. In “corruption” In “incorruption”
2. In “dishonor” In “honor”
3. In “weakness” In “power”
4. A “physical” body A “pneumatical” body
5. An “earthly” body A “heavenly” body
6. A “flesh and blood” body A “changed” body
7. A “mortal” body An “immortal” body

Fourth, notice the two “alls” in v.51. The second of the two surely cuts out the idea of a partial rapture. We believe that in this coming consummation ALL the blood-bought, Spirit-born members of Christ will have their part.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

II CORINTHIANS: CHRIST OUR COMFORT AMID TRIAL

Introductory 1:1-2

1. PAUL’S ACCOUNT OF HIS MINISTRY 1-5

(Explanation: Paul the Minister)

As to motive 1-2

As to the message 3-4

2. PAUL’S APPEAL TO HIS CONVERTS 6-9

(Exhortation: Paul the Father)

Concerning things spiritual 6-7

Concerning things material 8-9

3. PAUL’S ANSWER TO HIS CRITICS 10-13

(Vindication: Paul the Apostle)

The critics and their pretensions

The apostle and his credentials

Conclusion 13:11-14

Paul’s rebuke of Peter at Antioch was a momentous epoch in apostolic history. The whole future of Christianity was involved in it. Single as he stood, Paul resisted the entire force and weight of Jewish opinion. His remonstrance convicted Peter of “dissimulation,” and recalled him to his own better principles. But the error of the Jewish apostle, so openly committed and so well calculated to encourage the legalistic party, could not fail to have disastrous consequences.

They proceeded now to carry the war into the enemy’s country. They made their way to the Pauline churches, where doubtless they found sympathizers amongst their countrymen; and they brought into play all the arts they could command to undermine the authority of the Gentile apostle, to poison the minds of his converts, and to graft the principles of their own Judaism upon the faith that Gentile believers had received from his lips. Added to all his other dangers and trials, the apostle was now “in perils among false brethren.”

While others of Paul’s epistles may be more profound, this one contains more human passion than any other of his letters. As we have seen, Paul’s earlier letter to Corinth was written at Ephesus (I Co.16:8). He wrote this further letter presumably from Philippi.

Paul’s Hour of Darkness

His valued helper, Titus, was to have met him at Troas, with an anxiously awaited report on developments at Corinth, but he did not turn up (2:13), which accentuated the apostle’s concern. Disappointment, apprehensiveness, and physical illness now swooped in concerted

attack upon Paul to make this perhaps the darkest hour in his costly struggle for the propagation and preservation of the true Gospel. "When we were come into Macedonia," he writes, "our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Without were fightings; within were fears" (7:5). As G.G. Findlay says, "Corinth appeared to be in full revolt against him. Galatia was falling away to 'another Gospel.' He had narrowly escaped from the enraged populace of Ephesus – 'wild beasts' with whom he had long been fighting, and at whose mercy he had left his flock in that turbulent city."

The apostle's own comment is, "We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we spared even of life." He had been at death's door. His life and work, to all appearance, were coming to an end, and under circumstances of the most ominous nature. Together with his life, the fate of his mission and of Gentile Christianity trembled in the balance. Never had he felt himself so helpless, so beaten down and discomfited, as on that melancholy journey from Ephesus to Macedonia, and while he lay sick on his sick-bed (perhaps at Philippi), not knowing whether Titus or the messenger of death would reach him first.

The Report of Titus

Titus did eventually reach Paul in Macedonia (7:6). There had been an upsurge of grief, and a flaming out of new zeal, and a new expression of affection for Paul. So consoled the poorly apostle that he purposed to dictate this further letter and send it by the hand of Titus, who should return to Corinth and finish the good work which he had started there.

But, there were darker aspects of the situation at Corinth. His opponents hinted at his cowardice in not coming; his vacillation and insincerity in challenging him; the fact that he had no letters of commendation from Jerusalem; his dubious position as regards the Law. They insinuated doubts about his perfect honesty. They charged him with underhand guile, the fraudulent or self-interested designs with regard to the collection. They even ventured to hint at their doubt as to his perfect sanity. It became a duty and a necessity, however distasteful, to defend himself. The word "boasting" occurs no less than 29 times.

The Shifted Battle-Center

The first epistle deplores FOUR factions, and deals prominently with the Apollos party (that of personal admiration rather than doctrine). In this second epistle it is the Petrine party who are the much bigger danger. In chapter 2:6, "Sufficient to such a man is this censure by the MAJORITY"; and the very word emphasizes the presence of a hostile MINORITY, who doubtless dissented on the ground of Paul's supposed lack of real apostolic authority. This Petrine schism was becoming more determined in its hostility to Paul as it developed its Judaistic tendencies; and a point was now reached where a still-unsettled majority was imperiled by this strong, impressive minority.

They proposed that compared with themselves he was inferior, despite his pretensions (10:12-15); and what he preached was a poor edition of the Gospel (11:4); and the Corinthian church was a poor – grade church in so far as it was Pauline (11:7-9; 12:13). He was not truly an apostle (11:5; 12:11-12). He did not have the qualifications or credentials which THEY (from Jerusalem) could boast (11:22-8). Even in his refusing financial support there was a hidden simulation and an admission of inferiority (12:16-19).

They were dignified enough to take all the material benefit they could extract (11:20)! They were the Gospel aristocracy indeed, but as "ministers of Christ" what had they been prepared to

suffer? (11:22-23). They aimed at nothing short of his deposition from the apostleship and at bringing the churches founded by Paul under the direction of Jerusalem. The more deadly hurt was that under the cover of the PERSONAL there was an insinuating perversion of the DOCTRINAL. In the words of chapter 11:3-4, “ANOTHER Jesus...ANOTHER spirit...ANOTHER Gospel” were being speciously substituted for “the simplicity that is in Christ.”

To begin with, Paul is giving an ACCOUNT OF HIS MINISTRY, and in such a way as to clear himself against cruel misrepresentations. He is laying bare the genuineness of his MOTIVE (1-2), and defending the genuineness of his MESSAGE (3-5). Secondly, Paul launches out on an APPEAL TO HIS CONVERTS at Corinth in SPIRITUAL things (6-7), and the MATERIAL (8-9). Thirdly, Paul gives his all-out ANSWER TO HIS CRITICS; in all of which he hits at their PRETENSIONS, and shows his own CREDENTIALS.

The Two Covenants and Ministries

The key to this passage is 3:6, “God hath made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant.” Thereupon follows a 7-point contrast between the “ministration” of the Law and that of GRACE.

1. The “letter” engraved on stones vs. that of the Spirit.
2. A ministration of DEATH vs. that of LIFE.
3. One of CONDEMNATION vs. that of RIGHTEOUSNESS.
4. One was TRANSITORY the new is PERMANENT “that which remaineth.”
5. The old gathers round the face of MOSES, the new shines from the face of JESUS CHRIST.
6. The symbol of the old was a VEIL, that of the new is a MIRROR.
7. The old could not change HEART-HARDNESS, the new changes us “into the same image of the Lord.”

Running through these contrasts we find the “veil” mentioned again and again. The symbol of the old ministry is a “veil” hiding the face of MOSES. The symbol of the new is a “mirror” reflecting the face of JESUS (3:18).

Now in this passage Moses’ veil has four remarkable significances. First, it is a sign of TRANSITORINESS (v.13). The usual idea is that Moses wore that veil because the shining from his face was too bright for the Israelites to look upon, but here Paul says that he wore it so that they should not see its PASSING AWAY! Second, the veil becomes a symbol of JEWISH UNBELIEF (v.14). The end of v.14 should read “Which covenant (not veil) is done away in Christ.” The old covenant IS done away; but alas, the blinding veil remains. Third, and tragic beyond words, Moses’ veil becomes a figure of SATANIC DECEPTION (4:5). Here the veil is over the millions of unconverted, unregenerate, unsaved souls in Christendom, and is in the hand of Satan! That is why preaching is not enough, there must be wrestling in prayer. Fourth, Moses’ veil, by very contrast, sets off the very transforming GLORY-LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL, “But we all, with unveiled face, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image” (3:18). What a transformation! The receivers become reflectors of the glory and knowledge which saves! God shines IN that we may shine OUT.

Treasure in Earthen Vessels

Yes, what a message! Yet the writer is just up from a sick bed, and cannot help thinking how frail is the poor, earthen vessel which conveys such treasure, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels” (4:7). Paul’s inward crisis and bodily sickness left a deep mark on his thinking and

subsequent ministry. Up till now the PAROUSIA had been expected as imminent, but now an extended vista is seen stretching ahead, which affects all the apostle's future teaching. The various relations of the Gospel, and of the church, and of the individual Christian, to domestic and civil and other earthly concerns are discussed in suchwise as they could not have been while Paul lived in the daily expectation of our Lord's return.

The Heart of Pauline Theology

Paul completes this first part of his epistle by unveiling that which lay at the very heart of his ministry and message. It occupies chapter 5:14-21, "One died for all ... and rose again. Wherefore, henceforth know we no man after the flesh." If the One died for all, then all must be of equal fundamental value. We need to see humanity in the light of that cross. The cross levels all yet preserves each. It dignifies even while it humbles. When we see our human species in the light of Calvary, each member is a SOUL made in the image of God, and worth redeeming even though it costs the blood and passion of Heaven's incarnate Son.

"We know no man after the flesh." Why? Because "If One died for all, THEN ALL DIED." In His incarnation Christ became identified with the Adam creation. In Him the old order is positionally done away. When He died, ALL men died in the judicial reckoning of God; for the death penalty already overhanging the sinful Adamic creation was then executed. God now deals with the race on a new basis. It swings round a new Center-Man. Everything is now determined in relation to HIM. What matter whether a man be rich or poor or anything else? The vital thing is his relation to Christ. That is the deciding factor by which men are either saved or lost.

"We know no man after the flesh." We no longer even know Christ Himself in that way. We know Him now, not in the weakness of the flesh, but in the limitless dimensions of His resurrection and the new creation! A merely historic Christ can be but the object of MEMORY; whereas the risen Lord of the new creation is the object of FAITH and the communicator of spiritual LIFE.

The Apostle Paul Autobiographically

Here Paul is forced to "boast" about himself. We refer to just one of his such "boastings" – his "thorn in the flesh" (12:1-10). The chapter begins, "Fourteen years ago...caught up to paradise... abundance of revelations...Lest I should be exalted above measure... a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me..." The Greek word translated "thorn" comes from a verb which means to impale or crucify. Paul's thorn was not the sort with which we prick a finger. It was a STAKE on which so to speak, he was transfixed, even as his Lord had been transfixed to that beam and crossbar on Golgotha. Even more, as Paul was pinioned to this stake there was an ANGEL of Satan continually buffeting him. Weymouth translates it, "Lest I should be over-elated there has been sent to me, like the agony of an impalement, Satan's angel dealing blow after blow."

What depth of agony here – and dragging on for 14 years up to the time of Paul's writing! Three times he had pleaded with the Lord that He would end it, but the reply had been otherwise; so it seemed as if the inward crucifixion must continue to life's end!

Well, what can Paul do about it? Shall he complain to Christ that He is cruelly unfair? Shall he give up the unequal struggle, and escape to restful retirement? His own reply is, "He said unto me: My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in [thy] weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather GLORY IN MY INFIRMITIES THAT THE POWER OF CHRIST MAY REST UPON ME."

Final Benediction

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you ALL.”

How small in size, how big in meaning is that little word “all,” here! Hundreds of those long-ago Achaian believers owed their salvation to Paul, though some of them had later criticized him cruelly. His benediction includes them all. Yes, “with you ALL” – even with those who had spoken most bitterly against him. God give us a like spirit!

This benediction is in reality a PRAYER. But prayer is to be offered to God alone. Why then is it offered to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit equally with God the Father? If they are not equally God, why are They also and equally invoked in such a prayer? How strange for an inspired apostle to pray to a mere creature, and an impersonal influence along with the one true God!

If Christ be but exalted man or angel, how strange for Paul to solicit the “grace” of that man or angel as on the same level with the “love” of God Himself! And he even give the Son priority of mention. How strange that in such a considered and deliberate farewell-prayer Paul should place the name of mere man or even angel before that of the eternal God! And how strange, if Christ be a mere creature, that Paul should here pray to Him as having the God-like prerogative of conferring spiritual qualities! Yes, it is indeed very strange, if Christ be not “very God of very God”!

And if the Holy Spirit is merely an effluence or attribute, how strange that Paul should pray to such an impersonal concept in abstraction from the living Deity Himself, in and of whom are ALL such attributes and emanations! How COULD prayer be prayed to an attribute or influence? Yet here, in this benediction, the Holy Spirit is not only prayed to, but presumably is expected, as an intelligent, self-acting agent, to impart blessing distinct from that which the Father and the Lord Jesus confer. There is the same distinction here indicated as that which exists between Christ and the Father.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

GALATIANS: LIBERATION THROUGH THE GOSPEL

1. THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE GOSPEL (1-2)

(Personal Narrative)

Genuine as to its origin (1)

Genuine as to its nature (2)

2. THE SUPERIORITY OF THE GOSPEL (3-4)

(Doctrinal Argument)

In the new relation it effects (3)

In the privileges it releases (4)

3. THE TRUE LIBERTY OF THE GOSPEL (5-6)

(Practical Application)

Love-service ends law-bondage (5:1-15)

The Spirit ends flesh-bondage (5:16-6)

This Galatian epistle completes the first group of the nine “Church” epistles, which we have called the EVANGELICAL epistles. Read Romans to be GROUNDED in Christian doctrine; read Corinthians to be GUIDED in Christian practice; and read Galatians to be GUARDED against deceptive error.

Paul’s Visits to Galatia

It is generally agreed, from Paul’s words in 4:13, “I preached the Gospel unto you the first (or former) time” – that he had visited Galatia twice before he wrote there. The Book of the Acts corresponds with this. We are there told (16:6) that Paul went to Galatia on his second missionary tour; and that he paid a second visit there during his third missionary tour, some three years later (18:23). His earlier visit was occasioned through bodily illness. “Ye know that BECAUSE OF AN INFIRMITY OF THE FLESH I preached unto you the FIRST TIME” (4:13). It was to this sickness that the Galatians owed their knowledge of the Gospel. How God overrules seeming setbacks! And despite this bodily sickness and disfigurement, the Galatians had welcomed him with a warmth and responsiveness which were remarkable.

But Paul’s second visit had been far less reassuring to him. He had sensed a changed atmosphere. He had detected unhealthy symptoms among the Galatian believers which caused him uneasiness. He asks, “Am I become your enemy because of my speaking the truth to you?” (4:16).

The Galatian Error

Paul writes, “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for ANOTHER (heteros = another of a different kind) gospel; which is really not ANOTHER (allos = another of the same kind); only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the Gospel of Christ.” In reality these troublers of the Galatians were not giving them merely “another gospel of the same kind,” with supposedly superior features; they were twisting the ONE AND ONLY “Gospel of Christ,” and reversing its meaning into something which it never meant at all.

“I marvel that you are so quickly deserting Him that called you into the GRACE OF CHRIST, unto a different gospel.” They were erring from the ABSOLUTELY DISTINCTIVE doctrine of the one true Gospel, that the eternal salvation of the soul is altogether of Divine GRACE in Christ, apart from religious observances and human merit-works of every kind. They were overlaying the simplicity and spirituality of the Gospel with Judaistic observances; and indeed it would seem that a fairly thorough conformity to the Law of Moses was becoming insisted on among them (4:21). It was not that the Gospel was being directly denied; but their minds were becoming inoculated with legalistic and ritualistic ideas which destroyed its vital doctrines.

The mischief-makers in Galatia appear to have been a group of Galatian believers themselves (6:13). But it also seems that the movement had originated from outside interference. “O foolish Galatians, WHO DID BEWITCH YOU?” (3:1). “Ye [all of you] were running well; WHO DID HINDER YOU?” (5:7).

To Paul the issue was as vivid as it was absolutely vital – the very Cross of Christ itself was imperiled by this plausible legalism of the Judaisers; for “IF RIGHTEOUSNESS COMES BY THE LAW, THEN CHRIST DIED IN VAIN.” Gal.2:21).

Contents

Fourteen years after his 1st visit to Jerusalem he had gone there again to authenticate the genuineness of the Gospel; and there had been thorough concurrence between himself and the other apostles. So complete had been their agreement and mutual understanding as regards the central doctrine of salvation solely and wholly by GRACE, that when Peter and others, on a later occasion at Antioch, had lapsed into Judaistic behavior Paul had been able to rebuke him on the very basis of that common understanding (2:11-21); so that the circumstantial difference between them had really been turned into another evidence of the UNDERLYING AGREEMENT which existed as to the true nature of the Gospel.

In chapters 3-4 Paul is showing the SUPERIORITY of the Gospel over Judaism; of “the Spirit” over “the flesh”, of “faith” over “works”, of being “justified” over being held by law, of being “blessed” over being “cursed”, of the “promise” in Abraham over the commandment through Moses, of maturity over tutelage, of sonship over bondmanship, of “adoption” (adult status and privilege) over legal infancy, with its inability to inherit, of liberty over bondage. What superiority indeed is all this! And what strange folly to lapse into legalism again!

So the emphasis in the 3rd chapter is on SONSHIP. It was by FAITH that the Holy Spirit had been received; and that was the unarguable evidence of sonship. “Ye are all SONS OF GOD through faith in Christ Jesus ... If ye are Christ’s, then are ye ABRAHAM’S SEED” (v.26, 29). Here the Gospel demonstrates the superior new RELATIONSHIP into which it brings us. In chapter 4 the emphasis is on the PRIVILEGES of this sonship. Paul now stresses that to be a son is also to be an HEIR. Two words here sum up the believer’s sonship privileges – “adoption” and “inheritance.” Adoption refers to adult sonship, to the coming of legal age, and the privileges which it confers. The public attestation of the sonship of believers is yet to be (Rom.8:18-23), but already we enter into the privileges of adult sonship in a spiritual sense, “God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba Father; so that thou art no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God” (v.6-7). Paul is amazed that the Galatians could listen to a “different” Gospel which would cheat them of these privileges. Chapters 5-6 concern our liberty in Christ in its practical application to life and conduct. First, in 5:1-15 it is the liberty of a LOVE-SERVICE instead of a law-bondage. Second, this liberty of the Gospel is the liberty of “THE SPIRIT” in the place of bondage to “the flesh.”

The key running through this Galatians epistle is LIBERATION THROUGH THE GOSPEL. The word liberty in different forms (i.e. free) comes some 10 times in the epistle. “STAND FAST, THEREFORE IN THE LIBERTY WHEREWITH CHRIST HATH LIBERATED US.”

From first to last faith is the condition of salvation, and the Cross the all sufficient ground of it. From first to last it is faith apart from works, grace apart from merit, Christ apart from Moses, and the Cross apart from ordinances. This Galatians epistle is Paul’s most impassioned defense of the true Gospel. His supreme purpose, in his own words is, “THAT THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL MIGHT CONTINUE WITH YOU” (2:5).

The Galatian epistle was written to groups of believers scattered through a rural area, in which most of the people were agricultural workers, as many were slaves. In keeping with the mentality and circumstances of the Galatians, Paul uses language and metaphors which are especially appropriate to them. There were four kinds of “bearing” with which the Galatians were familiar above all else.

FRUIT BEARING: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience,

etc.” 5:22-23

BURDEN BEARING: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” 6:2

SEED BEARING: “Whatsoever a man soweth ... Let us not grow weary in well-doing, for we shall reap...” 6:7, 9

BRAND BEARING: “I bear in my body the marks [brands] of the Lord Jesus” 6:17

In making contact with souls for Christ, we should stand on their own ground with them, as far as possible, talking to them in terms which are familiar and appropriate to them. Paul was a master of this art. But, of course, the great lesson to take to heart is that we ourselves are to be fruit-bearers, burden-bearers, seed-bearers, and brand-bearers for our dear Lord’s sake.

The Fruit of the Spirit

Paul speaks of the graces which the Holy Spirit produces in the life of the consecrated believer. He calls them the “fruit” of the Spirit. There are nine virtues enumerated. These nine go in three groups of three each. The first three – “love, joy, peace” – are states which I experience in my own heart; i.e. they directly concern MYSELF. The next three – “longsuffering, gentleness, goodness” – are dispositions which I am to reveal toward others; i.e. they look out toward MY NEIGHBOR. The third three – “faith, meekness, self-control” – are attitudes which I am to maintain as the very essentials to godliness; they have special reference toward God. So these three trios respectively express the Christian life as concerns myself, my neighbor, and my Maker; or in other words, the first three look INWARD, the next three look OUTWARD, and the third three look UPWARD.

These three trios cover all the relationships of life. They tell us that a life under the control of the Holy Spirit is one of full-orbed beauty. They indicate, also, that the true beauty of the Christian life consists in qualities of the heart rather than outward doings. They stress the fact that what we ARE determines the value of what we DO. Only the Holy Spirit can produce these qualities in the heart and life. There are close imitations; but in reality this love-life can only be a product of the indwelling and sanctifying Spirit. Nor ought we to miss the comfort of the truth that these inward, outward, and upward attitudes of the heart are spoken of as “fruit”, i.e. they come by growth, not merely self-effort. Moreover, fruit comes gradually. Here is hope for some of us who have to lament many failures in the past and much weakness in the present. Christian virtues are “fruit”; they are growth from an inward life, and this growth is progressive. Would we know in experience this “fruit of the Spirit”? Then the secret is UTTER MONOPOLY OF THE HEART by the Spirit.

Here, the first-mentioned of the three virtues is the foundation of the other two. So, first comes “love”; then comes “joy,” which is love EXULTING, and then comes “peace,” which is love REPOSING. Take the second trio; the first-mentioned is the foundation of the other two. So, first comes “longsuffering”; then comes “gentleness,” which is longsuffering in its PASSIVE expression; and then comes “goodness,” which is longsuffering in its ACTIVE expression. Take the third trio. Again the first-mentioned is the foundation of the following two. So, first comes “faith”; then comes “meekness,” which is the expression of faith TOWARD GOD; and then comes “self-control,” which is the expression of faith IN THE LIFE.

Note the two admonitions concerning the LIBERTY of the Gospel, both necessary and each balancing the other. We are to hold it fast and never let it go (6:1), yet to use it in love and never to abuse it (6:13).

Note the two admonitions concerning our Christian “walk”, to walk carefully in our demeanor, settled habits and general conduct (5:16), and to “keep step” (a military term) in all the details of our life we are to keep step with the Holy Spirit!

Postscript

“From henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the brands of the Lord Jesus.” There were five classes of persons who were branded: 1) SLAVES, as a mark of ownership; 2) SOLDIERS, as a mark of allegiance; 3) DEVOTEES, as a mark of consecration; 4) CRIMINALS, as a mark of exposure; 5) and the ABHORRED, as a mark of reproach. The “marks” of the Lord Jesus in the body of Paul were all these five in one! And what were they? They are seen in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. Paul had been battered and bruised in ways which could not but leave permanent memorials in his poor body. Could he, for instance, have undergone that stoning at Lystra, after which he was dragged outside the city and left for dead, without bearing life-long effects? We do not know whether the five Jewish whippings would leave any abiding marks; but the three floggings by the Roman soldiers would plow lines which would remain for life. And besides these, there were those more barbarous violences which he suffered by the brutality of the mobs, the ambush of enemies, and the assaults of robbers.

But why does the apostle mention these brands at the end of his Galatian letter? One reason is indicated by the fact that the “I” is emphatic: “I bear in my body the brands of the Lord Jesus.” Paul here draws a contrast between himself and the Judaizing teachers who were subverting the Galatian believers. These men were mouthing great pretensions; but did THEY bear the brand-marks of the Lord Jesus in their persons as did Paul? No, like most shouters, they were shirkers. They were swell preachers but poor sufferers. They were fine platform figures, but they had a profound regard for the safety of their own skin.

A second reason why Paul mentions these brand-marks here is found on his emphasis on the fact that they are “the brand-marks of THE LORD JESUS.” He is drawing a contrast between the marks of Jesus, and the mark of Moses (circumcision – see v.12-15). Circumcision speaks of servitude to a legal system. “The marks of the Lord Jesus” are those of a glad, free, voluntary self-sacrificing service.

A third reason of these brand-marks is found in the words, “From henceforth let no man trouble me.” There is something of touching appeal, seeing that he has now suffered so much for the sake of his message. And what do these brand-marks of Paul say to ourselves? Let us never be ashamed of bearing suffering or reproach for Jesus sake.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

EPHESIANS : OUR HEAVENLY POSITION IN CHRIST

1. OUR WEALTH IN CHRIST 1-3

Praise for spiritual possession 1:3-14

Prayer for spiritual perception 1:15-23

Our new condition in Christ 2:1-10
Our new relation in Christ 2:11-22
Revealing of the Divine mystery 3:1-12
Receiving of the Divine fullness 3:13-21

2. OUR WALK IN CHRIST 4-6

As regards the Church corporately 4:1-16
As regards believers individually 4:17-5:2
As regards sensual-living outsiders 5:3-21
As regards special relationships 5:22-6:9
As regards Satanic spirit-powers 6:10-20

The Galatian and Roman epistles emphasis the truths of personal Christianity; the very thought of justification is dominant in them. These later epistles emphasis a yet grander concept, that of the Holy Universal Church. The central idea is of Christ the Head, and the whole collective Church as His body. He is conceived not solely or mainly as the Savior of each individual soul, but rather as “gathering up” all humanity, or even all created being, “in Himself.”

The first half of this epistle is DOCTRINAL, the second half is PRACTICAL. In both parts the apostle has hung the key, so to speak, right in front of the door which is to be unlocked, for the key verse in both parts is the first verse. The opening verse after the salutation reads, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath BLESSED US WITH ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST.” Then in part 2, which describes the believers true walk in Christ, the opening verse reads, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye WALK WORTHY OF THE VOCATION WHEREWITH YOU ARE CALLED.”

OUR WEALTH IN CHRIST

Here we see something of the wonderful, spiritual, heavenly, eternal riches which are ours, through grace, in our Lord Jesus Christ. We pick out six tremendous items in Paul’s praise for spiritual possession.

1. Pre-mundane Election – “He hath CHOSEN us in Him before the foundation of the earth, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” Think of it – chosen OUT OF the world, ONCE FOR ALL, to be God’s OWN as a peculiar treasure! And we were chosen before the earth was! And we were chosen to be holy, not because we were holy, but to be holy. Note also that the holiness to which we are called here and now is “without blame before Him in love.” We cannot yet have faultless powers, but we may have blameless motives, if our hearts are filled with His love.

2. Predestination – “Having PREDESTINED us to the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to Himself.” Already we are the “sons of God” by a new birth, though as such the world does not know us; but at the reappearing of Christ in glory the “adoption” or public attestation of our sonship will be given, and we shall enter upon its full privileges and heavenly blessedness.

3. Redemption – “In whom we have REDEMPTION through His blood.” He bought us, oh, at what cost to Himself! To “redeem” is to buy back, to release by ransom. We have been “redeemed from the curse of the Law,” from the death penalty due to our guilt. We have been “bought with a price” from the slavery of inherited bondage through hereditary depravity. We are now HIS, by costliest payment, even “through His blood.”

4. Revelation – “He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having MADE KNOWN UNTO US THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL...” What a revelation! Well may we long for that inexpressible daybreak!

5. Inheritance – “In whom also we have obtained an INHERITANCE, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.” Never was such an endowment heard of before! It is those two little words “in whom” which give it such limitless significance. It is “in Him” who is Heir to the whole universe that we have OUR inheritance! And note that we are “PREDESTINED” to it by “Him who worketh ALL things after the counsel of HIS OWN WILL”; so that not all the powers of darkness can overthrow the Divine purpose or rob us of our inheritance!

6. Sealing by the Spirit – “After ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.” So first the inheritance is made sure to God’s elect, and then the elect are sealed secure for the inheritance. The two predominant ideas in sealing are ownership and security. We are HIS, and we are SAFE. Many seals have been broken as was Pilate’s, but who shall break THIS one?

PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

It is a prayer that we may “KNOW”; and there are three things which Paul prays we may know: (1) what is the hope of His calling; (2) the riches of His inheritance in the saints; (3) the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.

The Hope of the Divine Calling

Careful examination of the many places where the word “calling” appears in our New Testament shows that it means the effectual work of God’s grace in our hearts by which we were brought into saving union with the Son of God. It refers to our CONVERSION. “Election” and “predestination” refer to what was in the mind of God way back in eternity, but this word “called” refers to something which happened since we ourselves were born, something that has taken place in our own experience.

But what is this “HOPE” of His calling? The word carries our minds away into the future. There is a prize, an ultimate fulfillment of our heavenly calling. A collation of the New Testament references reveals that there are four superlative prospects in it: (1) resurrection and immortality, (2) joint-reign with Christ in His coming kingdom, (3) eternal inheritance in heaven, (4) perfect transformation into the image of Christ. This fourfold hope centers in Christ and will burst into fulfillment at His return. What a hope! It baffles the imagination and overwhelms the mind. It thrills and yet humbles the heart. It sanctifies the life. It prostrates us before God in adoring gratitude.

God’s Inheritance in the Saints

Paul’s prayer that we may “know” now moves on to “the riches of the glory of HIS [God’s] inheritance in the saints.” Does this seem rather staggering? Does it seem surpassingly strange that the infinite One should find an inheritance in US?

What are the greatest values in God’s universe? Are they stars or souls? The biggest of the stars is blind. It can be seen but cannot see. It can be weighed and analyzed, but it cannot know or feel. It may be admired, but it cannot love. What are the most immense stellar systems compared with a soul which has the capacity for God, for holiness and fellowship and worship and service and adoration and love? And are there any intelligent beings throughout the universe who can mean more to God by way of gratitude, adoration, love and fellowship, than those whom He has redeemed by the precious blood of His own Son, whom He has sanctified and glorified and lifted up into the highest of all intimacies with Himself? Oh, what adoring gratitude, what fellowship of worshipping LOVE will God inherit in the saints through the coming ages!

The Divine Power toward Us

But still further Paul prays that we may “know” what is “the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.” Notice carefully that the gauge of this power is “according to” what God did in Christ. Then observe that this power did not only raise Christ from the dead; there are three things altogether: (1) resurrection, (2) transformation, (3) exaltation. It is in the three together that we see the full display of this mighty power. First God raised that dead body to life again. Then He further showed it by transubstantiating it into one of super-mundane superiority. Then, having fitted that resurrected body for heavenly as well as earthly habitation, He lifted it away from the earth, through the terrestrial air-space, through the stellar spaces, to that place that Solomon calls “the heaven of heavens,” and Paul calls “the third heaven,” and our Lord calls the “Father’s house,” that place, whatever and wherever it is, in which the presence of God is localized as nowhere else in the universe. And God did all this over against all the exhausted weight of Satanic opposition and resistance, against the full combine of “principality and power and might and dominion” (v.21). THAT is the New Testament standard of God’s “power toward us who believe.”

In chapter 2 Paul shows us the operation of that power in believers – quickening us, raising us, and making us to “sit together in heavenly places,” sharing our Lord’s victory over all the power of the enemy. But how far removed it seems from the actual experience of most Christians! Well, that is just why Paul prays that we might “KNOW” these things. They must be known by a SPIRITUAL KNOWING; and it is the special function of the Holy Spirit to make them luminously significant within us, so that we inwardly see them and live in the power of them.

OUR NEW CONDITION IN CHRIST

Our Past ... Our Present

Spiritual Death ... Quickened

Subjection to Satan ... Raised

Flesh-bound affections ... In the heavenlies

Under Divine Condemnation ... Objects of superlative favor

Verses 4-10 express what we now are through our saving union with Christ. Our new condition is set forth in four particulars which stand out in marked contrast over against the four unhappy characteristics of our former life apart from Christ.

QUICKENED – Over against “dead in trespasses and sins” we now have: “Even when we were dead in sins, He hath QUICKENED us together with Christ.” It is a marvel of Divine POWER, for when our condition was such who COULD have done it but God? And it is a marvel of Divine GRACE, who WOULD have done it but God? This is the first operation of God’s power toward us, a renewal to spiritual aliveness in Christ.

RAISED – Over against subjection to Satan we now read that God has “RAISED US UP TOGETHER” with Christ. Our Lord Jesus Himself was not merely quickened; He was “RAISED” and visibly brought forth from the grave, which demonstrated His victory over Satan and His entrance upon a higher form of life. So also, we are not only given new life; we are freed from bondage! We are raised with One who has Satan beneath His feet!

IN THE HEAVENLIES – Over against flesh-bound affections we now find: “And made us to SIT TOGETHER IN HEAVENLY PLACES, IN CHRIST JESUS.” Our eyes are opened to heavenly realities, and our minds moved by heavenly desires, and our hearts satisfied with heavenly joys.

That is where we are NOW in the sense of spiritual privilege. We ought to be living there daily in spiritual experience.

OBJECTS OF SUPERLATIVE FAVOR – Over against “children of wrath” we now find: “That in the ages to come, He [God] might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His KINDNESS TOWARD US through Christ Jesus.” What language – “exceeding riches of grace” ... “ages to come”! Who shall even sense the plethora of pure blessedness which the words pledge to us? No wonder Paul twice in this passage exclaims: “By grace are you saved!” and emphasizes it by: “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Divine grace, not human merit, must have all the praise.

OUR NEW RELATION IN CHRIST

Just as v.1-10 draw a contrast between our new **CONDITION** in Christ and what we were before, so these further v.11-22 draw a contrast between our new **RELATION** in Christ and what it was before.

At that time ye were... (11-12) – Five things are here said of our past: (1) at that time we were “**WITHOUT CHRIST**,” having no title right as Gentiles to the Messianic expectations of Israel; (2) we were “**ALIENS** from the commonwealth of Israel,” having no part or lot in the inheritance of the chosen people; (3) we were “**STRANGERS** from the covenants of [the] promise,” having no share by birth in the provisions of the covenant with Israel; (4) we had “**NO HOPE**,” for apart from this Messiah-Savior there was no hope either for man in general or men as individuals; and (5) we were “**WITHOUT GOD** in the world,” being without the true knowledge of God.

But now in Christ Jesus... (13-18) – The “But now” marks a break. This section shows how the situation has been completely transformed by the Calvary work of our Lord Jesus. The five big barriers between Jew and Gentile have been swept away: (1) He has destroyed **DISTANCE**, for in v.13 the “far off are made **NIGH**”; (2) He has destroyed **DISUNION**, for in v.14 “He is our peace, who hath made both [Jew and Gentile] **ONE**”; (3) He has destroyed **DIVISION**, for in v.15 down goes the “middle wall of partition”; (4) He has destroyed **DISSENSION**, for in v.15 He has “abolished the enmity ... so making **PEACE**”; (5) He has destroyed all **DISTINCTION**, for as v.15 again says, He makes “of the two [Jew and Gentile] **ONE NEW MAN**.”

Now therefore ye are... (19-22) – Here the contrast between what we were and what we now are is consummated; and our new relationship is set forth in five striking particulars. First, we are all “fellow-citizens” of the one heavenly city (v.19). Second, we are all members of the one heavenly household (v.19). Third, we are all built on the one imperishable foundation (v.20). Forth, we are all living stones in the one spiritual building (v.21). Fifth, we are all indwelt by the one renewing Spirit (v.22). What a salvation it is which has brought us from such plight to such privilege, from such poverty to such riches, from such shame to such honor, from ruin to such glory!

THE REVEALING OF THE DIVINE MYSTERY

This third chapter brings the doctrinal part of Efesians to its climax. There is not a profounder passage in the Bible. Here we view the topmost peaks and sound the deepest depths. The first part of the chapter is all about the **REVEALING OF THE DIVINE MYSTERY**. What is the “mystery” (or previously hidden Divine secret) which is now divulged? “The mystery hid in God” was the Divine purpose to make of Jew and Gentile a wholly new thing – ‘the Church which is His [Christ’s] body,’ formed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit and in which the earthly

distinction of Jew and Gentile disappears. The revelation of this mystery, which was foretold but not explained by Christ (Mt.16:18), was committed to Paul. In his writings alone we find the doctrine, position, walk, and destiny of the Church.

To put it more fully, the “mystery” or revealed secret is that Christ, instead of immediately taking over the “kingdom” when He came to this earth, should, after His rejection, crucifixion and resurrection, completely disappear from this earthly scene, should be exalted in heaven to the right hand of God, high over every power and sphere, should be given the administration of the entire universe both now and in the age to come (not merely the throne of David and the kingdom under the whole heaven as promised in the O.T.); and that during the present age an elect people, the Church, should be gathered out, irrespective of nationality – an elect people who should be brought collectively into such an intimate union of life and love and eternal glory with Him as can only be expressed by saying that the Church is His “body” (life), and His “bride” (love), and His “temple” (glory)! Such is the mystery of Ephesians 3:4-10.

THE RECEIVING OF THE DIVINE FULLNESS

The prayer in chapter 1 was that we might “KNOW.” This prayer in chapter 3 is that we might “HAVE,” and it’s threefold: (1) that we may be “strengthened with power by His Spirit”; (2) that we may be “rooted and grounded in love”; and (3) that we may be “filled with all the fullness of God.”

The climax of the prayer is: “That ye might be FILLED WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD.” Christ is the fullness (1:22, Col.1:19, 2:9). “[God] put all things under HIS [Christ’s] feet, and gave HIM to be head over all things to the Church which is His body, even HIM who is the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.” To be “filled with all the fullness of God” is to be filled with Christ. “In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and ye are FILLED FULL in Him.”

The preposition “with” should be “unto.” We are to be “filled UNTO” – a certain point indicated by the little word “all” which follows and signifies entirety or completeness. So, it is not a question as to whether these poor little selves of ours can hold all the fullness of God; the reference is simply to our CAPACITY TO HOLD. We are to be filled “unto” our utmost capacity – completely possessed, pervaded, permeated by Him who is “the fullness of God.” What a prayer! This is entire sanctification in its highest, purest, richest, deepest aspect – utter absorption of and into the love-life of Christ. Oh, that we may more fully prove it in our own experience!

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church, by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, age without end.”

Our Walk in Christ

This second half of the epistle answers like an echo to the first. The doctrines in part one now echo back on us in exhortations to corresponding PRACTICE. In passage after passage this ethical rebound meets us; and it is highly profitable to match up the counterparts. For instance, in part one we are told doctrinally of the “good WORKS which God hath before ordained that we should WALK in them” (2:10); and now in part two, we are told in detail what the walk and works are. In chapter 1:13 we are taught doctrinally that the Holy Spirit SEALS believers; and now, in 4:30 we are exhorted, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed.”

Another feature which is sure to catch the eye is that after WEALTH in the first three chapters, and WALK in the ensuing chapters, the end bit is about spiritual WAR. “We wrestle ... against principalities.” Do you think Satan is going to let such wealth and walk go uncontested? Nay, there is a need to wrestle. The center – point of the struggle, and of prevailing, is PRAYER. “Praying always ... and sticking at it with steady tenacity.”

Notice also those verses referring to the believer’s walk. “Walk worthy of the vocation...” “Walk in love.” Walk as children of light.” “See that you walk circumspectly.” Pick out the twelve references of the Holy Spirit, noting that all those in part one tell us what the Holy Spirit is and does toward the believer, while all those in part two tell us what we are to be and do toward Him.

Last but not least, there are the wonderful passages which unfold to us the mystery of the true, spiritual CHURCH. Follow them through to their climax in chapter 5:25-33. See the three tenses of our Lord’s love-work for the Church: (past) “Christ loved the Church”; (present) “That He might sanctify it”; (future) “That He might present it to Himself ...”

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

PHILIPPIANS: THE MIND OF CHRIST

SALUTATION: “GRACE BE UNTO YOU” 1:1-2

PAUL’S CONCERN FOR THE PHILIPPIANS 1:3-26

EXHORTATION: EXAMPLE OF CHRIST 1:27-2:16

EXAMPLE OF TIMOTHY 2:19-24

EXAMPLE OF EPAPHRAS 2:25-30

EXHORTATION: EXAMPLE OF PAUL 3:1-4:9

THE PHILIPPIAN’S CONCERN FOR PAUL 4:10-20

SALUTATION: “GRACE BE WITH YOU” 4:21-23

In its social setup Philippi was a kind of Rome in miniature. Its inhabitants called themselves Romans (Acts 16:21). Few Jews lived at Philippi, doubtless because it was a “military colony” rather than a “mercantile city.” That is why there was no synagogue, but only the “prayer place,” outside the walls, by the river Gangites (Acts 16:13).

The first Christian Church at Philippi has an interest all its own. The first convert in Europe was an Asiatic woman from Thiatira, and was then visiting Philippi as a seller of crimson fabrics. Paul’s only-recorded miracle, at Philippi, was upon another female, the expelling of a demon from a slave-girl. The rescued young fortune-teller, and commercial-traveler Lydia, along with any of those riverside women who believed, and the Roman jailer converted in the midnight earthquake, were the first potential of that church which soon afterwards became the dearest to Paul of all his children in the faith.

See his references to them in this epistle. His relationship with them had never been hurt by distrusts and defaults like those of other groups. “From the first day until now” their fellowship with him in his mighty enterprise had been undeviating, cooperative, sympathetic. They had made his labors and afflictions their own, sending sustenance to him at different places. They

were the first, so it seems, to seize the privilege of supporting Paul in his apostolic labors. The church at Philippi was already an organized society (two orders of ministry are mentioned by name, i.e. “overseers” and “deacons.”

We ourselves are convinced that it was written from Rome. The references to the praetorium in v.1:13, and the reference to “Caesar’s household” in v.4:22 indicates Rome; as also does the account of the “preaching” (1:14-18) and Paul’s expectation of a speedy release (1:19, 2:24). Learning of Paul’s imprisonment, they had sent Epaphroditus, who may well have been their chief pastor, to convey their gifts to him, with assurances of their unchanged love and pledges of prayer (4:18). In sending Epaphroditus back he takes occasion to send this epistle with him.

The Epistle Itself

This short epistle is simply a letter of Christian appreciation and exhortation. The faults which it corrects were, fortunately only incipient rather than developed – strife, vainglory, wrong self-esteem, disunity, murmurings, disputings – all of which are very human besetments. Paul knows how hard the lessons are; the Philippians need more than precept; they need a high, constraining example.

The Fourfold Christ

Here is a wonderful fourfold presentation of Christ in relation to the experience of the individual believer. Once this fourfold Christ of Philippians is seen, the little epistle gleams with altogether new luster – it becomes a gem precious beyond all words.

We find a key verse, expressing a key idea in each chapter. In the first chapter the key thought is expressed in verse 21, “To me to live is Christ.” Everything in this first chapter centers in the thought that Christ is the believer’s LIFE.

In the second chapter the key thought is expressed in verse 5, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” The whole of this second chapter gathers round the thought that Christ is the believer’s MIND.

In the third chapter the key thought is expressed in verse 10, “That I may know Him.” Here everything centers in the truth that Christ is the believer’s GOAL.

In the fourth chapter the key thought is the enabling power of Christ, as expressed in verse 13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” In this chapter the apostle’s thought is gathered up in the truth that Christ is the believer’s STRENGTH.

If Christ be truly our life, as in chapter 1, His life will express itself in and through our mental activity, as in chapter 2. Then, the mind being thus suffused with His life, the desires will become more and more toward Christ as the perfect ideal, the sum of objective perfection and subjective satisfaction, the supreme goal of desire, as in chapter 3; while finally, as in chapter 4, Christ Himself is the strength by which the ideal becomes the actual, and by which the objective reality becomes subjectively realized in experience. In these four Philippian chapters, we therefore observe clear progress and completeness.

Chapter I: Christ our Life

In this chapter we find seven remarkable expressions of the truth that Christ is the believer’s true life. Verse 8 tells us that the Christ-filled believer has the FEELINGS OF CHRIST – “I long after you in the very affections of Christ.” Christ’s heart had, as it were, become Paul’s, and was

beating anew in the apostle's bosom. As Dean Alford says, "The great love with which He loved us lives and yearns in all who are vitally united to Him."

Second, the believer has THE SAME INTERESTS AS CHRIST – "The things which happened to me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel ... Christ is preached, and therein I do rejoice."

Third, the very SPIRIT OF CHRIST is imparted to the believer (v.19). "I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." As in human nature, the spirit is the inmost and deepest, so the "supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ" implies the imparting of His inmost life, His own motives and aims becoming ours! Christ Himself becomes the believer's SUPREME CONCERN. As a man will give up friends, wealth and all things rather than life itself, because life is the supreme possession, so, because Christ is the very LIFE of the believer, He will be the supreme possession and concern (v.20). Christ is UNSPEAKABLY DEAR. He becomes the object of longing desire. Read verse 23, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire [a strong desire or longing] to depart and to be with Christ which is far better."

If Christ is the believer's life, this will clearly DETERMINE CONDUCT. "Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ" (v.27). If Christ be our life, He will express Himself in the way we live.

Finally, it follows that if Christ is our life, suffusing the heart and revealing Himself through the whole of our activity, this will greatly affect THE ATTITUDE OF OTHERS TOWARD US; for the kind of life we live inevitably determines the reaction of those around us – whether friendly or hostile. This is what we find in v.27-30, where we read of "adversaries" and or "suffering" for Christ's sake.

Chapter 2: Christ our Mind

Christ is the believer's MIND – the true mind within his mind. In verses 1-2 we find Paul's EXHORTATION to the believer to have the mind of Christ, "If there be therefore any EXHORTATION in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender emotions and compassions, fulfill ye my joy that ye be LIKE-MINDED [i.e. with HIM], having the same love [as HIS], being of one accord, of one mind [with each other]."

Second, in verses 3-4 Paul shows the true EXHIBITION of the mind of Christ through the believer. These two verses simply run on from v.1-2 as the natural exhibition of the Christ-mind, thus, "...nothing being done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself, not looking each of you to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." Such is the natural, inevitable expression of the mind of Christ through the believer in whom His life is not obstructed.

In verses 5-8 Paul gives an EXPOSITION of the mind of Christ. Here we see our Lord's self-humbling. God ... man ... slave ... criminal! In time or eternity, on earth or throughout the universe, this is the supreme expression of self-sacrificing otherism. Here is the supreme example. "Let THIS mind be in YOU." "So, then, my beloved, even as YE have always obeyed [i.e. have become obedient to God as Christ became so], work out [as Christ worked out by obedience] your OWN salvation [in the sense of similar final vindication] with fear and trembling; for [while YOU are working it OUT] it is GOD which worketh IN you, both to will and to work His

good pleasure [as He willed and worked out His good pleasure in Christ]. Do all things without murmuring [against God] and disputings [with men], that ye may be blameless [before God] and harmless [among men] the SONS OF GOD [as Christ in the supreme sense was the Son of God].”

Finally, in verses 19-30 Paul gives an EXEMPLIFICATION of Christ-mindedness in Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Chapter 3: Christ our Goal

“That I may know Him.” Christ is the goal of all our faith and love and hope. See how the chapter begins with a renunciation of all other glorying but in Him, “We glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” In v.5-6 he lists the things which had been His former glory, and which he had once for all renounced at his conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In outward ground of confidence no man could surpass Paul. And now, looking back he writes – using the past tense – “What things were gains to me, those I COUNTED loss for Christ.”

Those things however, were far from being the only things which Paul renounced for His Lord’s sake. His renunciation increased as time elapsed, until now, at the time of his writing, he says – using now the present tense – “I count ALL things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” Now, why all this renunciation? Here is the answer, “That I may gain CHRIST.”

So Paul puts down loss after loss on the one side, while on the other there is but the one solitary item – “CHRIST JESUS MY LORD.” He has parted with the things dear to him as life itself. But now he has found more than all he has lost, and thrills to know that, having given up so much, he is the more fully Christ’s, and Christ is the more fully his own. How true it is that those who give up most for Christ love Him most dearly and possess Him most satisfyingly! Mark the focal passage in this chapter, with its recurrent expression “that I may”:

“That I may gain” (v.8)

“That I may know” (v.10)

“That I may attain” (v.11)

“That I may apprehend ...” (v.12)

The recurrence of this expression shows the outreaching of the apostle’s soul towards the great goal on which his desire was eagerly set. The whole of the man is gathered up in this one all-absorbing quest; and the focus-point of all is in the words of v.10, “THAT I MAY KNOW HIM.” Christ Himself is the supreme object of the believer’s desire, the true goal of our whole life and being. See how in this third chapter Christ is the believer’s goal in a threefold way:

The goal of our FAITH – v.9

The goal of our LOVE – v.10

The goal of our HOPE – v.11-14

He is the goal of our faith for a heavenly RIGHTEOUSNESS. He is the goal of our love for a heavenly FELLOWSHIP. He is the goal of our hope for a heavenly BLESSEDNESS.

Chapter 4: Christ our Strength

Here the prevailing emphasis is that Christ is the believer's STRENGTH, as in v.13, "I can do all things THROUGH CHRIST WHICH STRENGTHENETH ME." This short final section rightly begins at v.5, "Let your forbearance be known unto all men (however much they persecute you) for "THE LORD IS AT HAND" (i.e. with you to strengthen you).

Next we find, "In nothing be anxious." Does it seem beyond realization? Well, in answer to prayerfulness even "the peace of God shall garrison your hearts and minds THROUGH CHRIST JESUS."

Crowningly, in v.13, we have, "I can do all things THROUGH CHRIST WHICH STRENGTHENETH ME." Strictly, the word "do" does not occur in the Greek. The verb "ischuo" means, "I am able", but whether it means able to BE, or to BEAR, or to DO, or to DARE, must be decided by the context. Ferrar Fenton perfectly hits the sense in translating it, "I am equal to anything ..." As Weymouth renders it, "I have strength for anything ..." See now the secret: "THROUGH CHRIST." The Greek preposition is "in" which expresses our oneness with Christ even more than our English translation "through." It is when we are most truly living IN HIM that we can most fully realize Himself in and through US. Note that the word "strengtheneth" is in the present tense, indicating a continuing inward replenishment moment by moment and hour by hour, unseen by human eyes but sustaining indeed in the secret consciousness of the believer.

Here then, in chapter 4 is Christ the Christian's secret of quiet forbearance (v.5), confident tranquillity (v.6-7) and victorious enablement for "all things" (v.12-13).

Such are the four chapters of Philippians. And such is the wonderful fourfold Christ who is ours – always and evermore sufficient! They who trust Him wholly find Him never failing. If we really let Him, He will change every plaintive "I can't" into a gladsome "I can!" What a triumphant little document this Philippian epistle is! Chains are clanking on the writer's wrists and ankles, but he makes them sound like bells of heaven! In the very first paragraph he speaks of "grace," "peace," "joy," "love," "glory," "praise"! And the bells ring right through all four chapters until they give a triumphant final peal in the last paragraph, "But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." What more need be said after THAT? All that is needed is a doxology; and that is just what Paul adds,

"NOW UNTO OUR GOD AND FATHER BE GLORY
UNTO THE AGES OF THE AGES. AMEN."

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

COLOSSIANS: CHRIST THE FULLNESS OF GOD TO US

INTRODUCTORY THANKSGIVING 1:1-8

OPENING PRAYER FOR FULLNESS & WORTHY WALK 1:9-14

1. DOCTRINAL – "THAT YE MAY BE FILLED" (1-2)

Christ the fullness of God in the creation 1:15-18

Christ the fullness of God in redemption 1:19-23

Christ the fullness of God in the Church 1:24-2:7

Christ the fullness of God versus heresy 2:8-23

2. PRACTICAL – "THAT YE WALK WORTHY" (3-4)

The new life – and believers individually 3:1-11

The new life – and believers reciprocally 3:12-17

The new life – and domestic relationships 3:18-21
The new life – and employment obligations 3:22-4:1
The new life – and “them that are without” 4:1-6
PERSONAL ADDENDA 4:7-18

Colossians is the end epistle of the middle trio, that is, it is the epistle with correction of doctrine, the doctrine of “Christ and the Church” which was spelled out in the book of Ephesians. We need to see cardinal evangelical doctrine sharply silhouetted against its specious counterfeit. This middle trio of epistles, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, belong together in DATE as well as in aspect, that of Paul’s first imprisonment at Rome. Ephesians set forth the glorious MYSTERY, even “the Church which is His body.” Christ is the Head, the Church is the body, individual believers are members of His body, and therefore members one of another. The incipient fault at Philippi was disjointedness of the MEMBERS. The incipient Gnosticism at Colosse was a “not holding the HEAD,” which was a default far more serious.

City and Church of the Colossians

Colosse was a city in the province of Asia Minor, in the valley of the river Lycus. It was noted for their manufacture of dyes, especially crimson, and their pasturage for sheep and the resultant trade in wool. At that time in history the city was in decline. Not long afterward, the city became finally disintegrated in a violent earthquake which shook those parts.

Paul never visited Colosse, but had only heard about their faith and love. But the prime evangelist to Colosse had been a certain Epaphras (1:7), who was himself a Colossian (4:12), and who seems to have carried the witness to Laodicea and Hieropolis as well (4:13). Presumably he had been converted while visiting Ephesus. Thereafter he had carried on his testimony under Paul’s guidance, and had proved faithful ever since in his message and ministering. It is probable that the new church at Colosse first met in the house of Philemon, for it was to Colosse that Paul returned Philemon’s runaway slave Onesimus (4:9); and the little epistle to Philemon speaks of the “church in thy house”. Paul has nothing but grateful endorsements for the teaching and labors of Epaphras.

Now however, about six years later, Epaphras has traveled to Rome to visit Paul in his imprisonment. He has to confess anxiously that certain heresies, evidently in eloquence and influence, had appeared among them, propagating a specious and deceptively attractive false doctrine (2:8-23) which was gravely endangering the fellowship. Paul at once enters into this apprehensiveness of his loyal Epaphras, and sends back this “Epistle to the Colossians” by the hand of Tychicus (4:7).

The Error of the Colossians

A peculiar form of heresy, singularly compounded of Jewish ritualism and Oriental mysticism – two elements as hard to blend in the foundation of a system as the heterogeneous iron and clay on which the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream stood unstably – had appeared among them, and though at present confined to a few, was being vigorously preached. The characteristic Eastern dogma, was that matter is evil. For if matter be the source of all evil, then the fountain of each man’s sin is to be found, not in his own perverted will, but in his body, and the cure of it is to be reached, not by faith which plants a new life in a sinful spirit, but simply by ascetic mortification of the flesh.

They miss the Christ who is the One and only but all-sufficient incarnate manifestation of the Creator; in whom alone is effected true union of the Divine Spirit with the material creation; the one God-man who spans the gulf between a holy God and sinful man, laying His hand on both, so that there is neither need nor place for a “misty crowd of angelic beings or shadowy abstractions” to graduate the measureless vast across which His incarnation “flings its single solid arch.” The Christ whose coming in flesh and blood has dignified the human body into a temple of the Highest, and whose mighty work of reconciliation on the Cross excludes all further need either for “ascetic mortification” or “Jewish scrupulosities.”

The Letter to Colosse

The first two of its four chapters are doctrinal; Paul is combating the semi-Judaistic mysticism and asceticism. Its dominant theme is the fullness and pre-eminence of Christ, and the full completeness of Christian believers in Him, as against the mysticisms and asceticisms enjoined by the philosophies and traditions of men.

In chapter 1:9 he prays that they “may be FILLED” with spiritual knowledge – which is his subject in the first half of the epistle. In verse 10 he prays that they might “WALK WORTHILY” of the Lord – which is the subject of the second half. However superior the heretical theosophy and Judaism and asceticism may have seemed outwardly, its actual effect was to depose Christ from His solitary all-supremacy and all-sufficiency as Lord and Savior.

The Person of Christ

In chapter 1:15-18 Paul gives his glorious full-length portrait of the REAL Christ who became our Savior.

1. “The visible form of the invisible God.”
2. “The Prior-Heir of all creation.”
3. “In Him the universe was created.”
4. “He IS before the universe.”
5. “In Him the universe coheres.”
6. “The Head of the body, the Church.”
7. “The Firstborn from among the dead.”

Where are His equals or rivals? Why, all the others were made BY Him and FOR Him – “thrones, angelic lords, celestial powers and rulers”! Who else could even PRETEND this absolute sovereignty over the whole universe?

The Fullness, the Cross, the Mystery

This seven-fold identification of the true Christ is followed up by three simply tremendous aspects of His person, passion and purpose. Verse 19 says, “For in Him THE WHOLE FULLNESS of the Godhead was pleased to dwell.” There is no vague distribution of it among numberless shadowy spirit-beings such as the new mystics were presuming to have discerned by their secret insight! This wonderful Christ is the concentrated Pleroma, the infinite Plenipotentiary!

Next in verse 20, “And having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself ... whether things on the earth or THINGS IN THE HEAVENS.” So His Cross has both a cosmic and a UNIVERSAL comprehensiveness! Why then toy about with recondite notions of secretly finding some mysterious peace through prying into the unseen realm of spirits?

Next, see v.24-27, "His body ... the Church ... the mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations, but is now made manifest to His saints ... the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." What were all the petty "mysteries" of the new theosophisers compared with this glorious mystery which spans all the ages?

First, the "fullness" of Christ comprehends the whole Godhead. Second, the "Cross" of Christ comprehends the whole universe. Third, the "mystery" of Christ comprehends all the ages. See now the wonderful seven-fold salvation the FATHER has effected for us through this incomparable One, "the Son of His love":

1. INHERITANCE – "Partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (v.12).
2. DELIVERANCE – "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness" (v.13).
3. TRANSLATION – "Translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (v.13).
4. REDEMPTION – "In whom we have redemption through His blood" (v.14).
5. FORGIVENESS – "Even the forgiveness of sins" (v.14).
6. RECONCILIATION – "And you hath He reconciled" (v.21).
7. TRANSFIGURATION – "To present you holy and unblameable in His sight" (v.22).

The Doctrine of Fullness

The core of this Colossian letter is its doctrine of the PLEROMA or fullness. There are two sides to it, the Divine and the human. The two great truths we are meant to learn are: (1) all the fullness of God is in Christ; (2) all the fullness of Christ is for us.

The Gnostic bewitchers at Colosse were insinuating that their own new inner knowledge added completion to the Gospel: (a) a fullness or completion to the truth as it is in Christ; (b) a complete inner knowing of Divine realities; (c) a superior "wisdom" or "spiritual understanding."

Chapter 1:19 says, "It was the good pleasure [i.e. of God the Father] that in Him ALL the fullness should dwell." In chapter 2:3 we read, "In whom [Christ as the mystery of God] are ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge HIDDEN." In chapter 2:9, "In Him dwelleth ALL the fullness of the Godhead BODILY." In the first of these three statements the "fullness" dwells in Him as the qualification for all – sufficient Saviorhood. In the second it is "hidden" in Him that we may have the intellectual pleasure of ever-growing search and new discovery. In the third it resides in Him "bodily" that it may come to us spiritually through the Divine-human love and Spirit of One whom we can see and know and trust and love and lay hold of as JESUS.

And now comes the statement "In Him dwelleth all the FULLNESS of the Godhead bodily; and ye are FILLED FULL in Him." That is the one final reply which was needed. If He is the very fullness of the Godhead bodily, then nothing can be added to Him; and if the believer is in "Him," what can be added which the believer doesn't already possess in Him?

If ye then be risen with Christ

As our analysis indicates, the second part of this epistle is practical. Such is always the order of teaching in the New Testament – doctrine first, then practice. How you live is always determined by what you believe. Doctrine is the basis of practice.

Paul characteristically begins by lifting up Christ again as the highest of all inspirations to sanctity of conduct: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things which are ABOVE ... mortify your members ON EARTH." Notice the three tenses of the believers union with Christ:

Past – “If ye then were RAISED with Christ.”

Present – “Your life IS HID with Christ in God.”

Future – “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear WITH HIM IN GLORY.”

Going with these three tenses are two admonitions: “Seek those things which are above”; “set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” Oh, that we increasingly become heavenly minded in the sense of prayerful, practical Christlike godliness – until we appear with Him in glory!

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

FIRST THESSALONIANS: CHRIST OUR HOPE

LOOKING BACK: HOW THEY WERE SAVED (1 – 3)

(A) EXEMPLARY CONVERSION (1)

Knew Gospel power(5), examples(6-7), witnesses(8-10)

(B) EXEMPLARY EVANGELISM (2)

In motive(1-6), conduct(7-12), message(13-16)

(C) EXEMPLARY AFTER-CARE (3)

Concern(1-5), follow-up(6-8), fervent prayer(9-13)

LOOKING ON: HOW THEY SHOULD LIVE (4 – 5)

(A) CONDUCT AND CALLING (4:1-12)

In the light of the Father’s will

(B) COMFORT AND CHALLENGE (4:13-5:11)

In prospect of the Lord’s return

(C) CONCORD AND CONSTANCY (5:12-28)

In keeping with Christian fellowship

The apostle wrote to these people because he could not go again to see them. As the mission field spread to Europe it included two continents. From this time it was impossible for him to superintend the churches he had founded, without the aid of messengers and letters. It is generally agreed that the two epistles to the Thessalonians were the earliest written of Paul’s epistles. Most probably they were written from Corinth in A.D. 53 (Act.17:1-16, 18:1-5). The occasion of Paul’s writing the first of these two little epistles is given in chapter 3:6. His brief but wonderfully fruitful visit to Thessalonica had been abruptly aborted by violent opposition from unbelieving Jews who set the whole city in an uproar, charging Paul and his attendants with sedition because they preached “another king, one Jesus” (Act.17:7). Paul had been compelled to flee, and had gone to Berea, only to be pursued by Thessalonian Jews, and obliged to move on again, this time to Athens. From there, and with a heart of longing solicitude for his beloved Thessalonian converts, he had sent Timothy to Thessalonica to inquire concerning their well-being and to confirm them in their faith. Timothy had returned to Paul (now in Corinth) a little later with a most disheartening report (3:6), whereupon Paul wrote his first letter to them.

1st and 2nd Thessalonians a Culmination

The two epistles naturally link themselves together, as they are alike in their main subject, which is the second coming of Christ. As we've mentioned previously the nine Christian Church epistles consist of a quartet with its emphasis on THE CROSS, of a trio with its emphasis on THE CHURCH, and a pair with its emphasis on THE COMING. In the first four FAITH looks back and is strengthened, in the middle three LOVE looks up to the heavenly Bridegroom and is deepened, and in the final two HOPE looks on to the consummation and is brightened.

This threefold order is the Holy Spirit's way of indicating the order in which we are to instruct Christian truth. The sinner's first need is neither the doctrine of the Church nor that of the second advent, but the Christ of Calvary, as in the four evangelical epistles. Next we are to show how individual salvation through Christ the Savior introduces the blood-bought, Spirit-regenerated believer into a wonderful fellowship, an indissoluble spiritual oneness with all other true believers, in heaven and on earth, who in their totality compose the body and bride and temple of God's eternal Son. Then we are to crown the instruction by pointing on to the sublime climax when the glorious Lord shall return for His completed Church, and the resurrected saints, translated into His likeness, shall together be "forever with the Lord." Here in Thessalonians this wonderful prospect of the Lord's return is elucidated in relation to His Church as nowhere else in the New Testament.

First Thessalonians

There is a pleasing, straightforward orderliness about the epistle. Our English version breaks it into five short chapters, each of which ends with a reference to the Lord's return. This tells us at once that everything here is being viewed in the light of that coming climax. We find that although everything is thus viewed futuristically, the first three chapters are REMINISCENT. Then in chapter four Paul turns from looking backward to looking forward. His subject is then characteristically practical.

The Glorious Hope

As Paul opens the first letter to his beloved Thessalonians he is "remembering without ceasing" their "work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope, in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Verse 3 Verse 9, 10

"Your work of faith." "Ye turned to God from idols."

"And labor of love." "To serve the living and true God."

"And patience of hope." "And to wait for His Son from heaven."

This comparison also confirms that the letter was sent to a church mainly Gentile, in which most of the converts had been only recently won from idolatry. Although strong in enthusiasm, it was young in experience. It is a significant fact, all in itself, that to such a church, and to such young converts, Paul unhesitatingly unfolded the splendid truth of our Lord's future coming and kingdom.

Our Lord DID refer to a second and VISIBLE coming to this earth for His own.

John 14:3 I Thessalonians 4:16, 17

"I will come again." "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven"

"And receive you unto "Then we...shall be caught up...to meet the

Myself” Lord in the air.”

“That where I am, there “And so shall we ever be with the Lord.”
you may be also.”

Just as this Thessalonian passage flashes backward on John 14:3, so there is a passage in Matthew 24:30-31 which flashes forward upon this same passage, lighting it up by comparison and deciding whether it is a “SECRET rapture” of the Church or not.

“And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven;
and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; and they
shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven,
with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels
with a great sound [lit. voice] of a trumpet, and they shall
gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end
of heaven to the other.”

These words, spoken by our Lord Himself, pre-describe a return which in the most glorious, overawing and spectacular sense is VISIBLE AND PUBLIC. See the passages side by side.

Matthew 24 | Thessalonians 4

“They shall see the Son “The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven.”
of Man coming.”

“His ANGELS, with a “With the VOICE of the archANGEL.”
great voice.”

“With a great TRUMPET.” “With the TRUMPET of God.”

“They shall GATHER TOGETHER “Caught up TOGETHER with them.”
His elect.”

“In the CLOUDS of heaven.” “In the CLOUDS to meet the Lord.”

Mark well the parallels here – angels, voice, trumpet, congregating, clouds. All are agreed that Matthew 24 teaches the splendid outward, public coming. Of course there are details in the Thessalonian paragraph which do not appear in Matthew 24, simply because our Lord could not divulge such Church doctrine beforehand (Jn.14:12-13); and in any case no one passage has a monopoly of all the details about any given topic.

Note again the three arresting features in this Thessalonian passage: “shout” – “voice” – “trumpet.” Each has its special relevance. The “shout” is given by “the Lord.” The “voice” is that of the “archangel.” The “trumpet” is the “trumpet of God.” The Lord’s shout is His resurrection-call to the CHURCH (only once elsewhere do we read of His giving a shout, i.e. John 11 where He raises Lazarus). The archangel is Michael (Scripture reveals many angels, but only the one archangel) who has special connection with ISRAEL (Dan.10:21, 12:1). The trumpet has to do with judgment, and that relates to the NATIONS (Rev.8). Thus the “shout,” the “voice,” the “trumpet” have reference respectively to the Church, bringing resurrection, to Israel, which effects regathering, and to the nations, the trumpet sounds for judgment. Such a dramatic, stupendous, Divine interruption of history utterly baffles imagination. It will end the present age, and introduce our Lord’s millennial empire over the nations. Here in I Thessalonians however, it is the Lord’s coming in relation to the CHURCH which is especially in view. Oh, what a precious hope and peerless prospect it is! Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

SECOND THESSALONIANS: PATIENT WAITING, WATCHING, WORKING

COMFORT – FROM THE HOPE OF CHRIST'S RETURN (1)

The consolation of it in the present (1:3-7)

The compensation by it in the future (1:8-12)

CAUTION – ON THE TIME OF CHRIST'S RETURN (2)

The when and the how of the coming (2:1-12)

The why and the how of the waiting (2:13-17)

COMMAND – IN THE LIGHT OF CHRIST'S RETURN (3)

Basis of command: appeal, confidence (3:1-5)

Nature of command: must work as we wait (3:6-15)

It is generally agreed that this second letter to the Thessalonians was written within a few months of the first, while Paul was still at Corinth. Certain evils mentioned in the first letter had further developed by the second. There were those who presumed to declare that "the day of the Lord" was "at hand" or even then "present"; and there is a hint that some spurious letter or message, purporting to come from Paul himself had found its way among them, by which they had been "shaken in mind." The agitation which had resulted was showing rather fanatical tendencies in some.

Assuming that the Lord's return was almost immediately upon them, they were leaving their employment, thus bringing the burden of their maintenance on the fellowship. It was surprising, that such misguided ones were falling prey to the temptation to become "busy bodies", and that thus the peace of the Christian brotherhood was being impaired. The gentler and more guarded reproof of the first letter, therefore now gives place to sterner words.

But we must not overstate that side of things, for there was far more on the other side of the scale, calling for overflowing gratitude and praise to God. Speaking of the Thessalonian assembly in the main, their faith was "growing exceedingly," their mutual love "abounded," their "faith and patience" amid persecutions was an example to the Lord's people everywhere. This second letter is one of exultation, explanation and exhortation.

The contents of this little epistle fall into clear order and division. In chapter 1 the great hope of the Lord's second coming is set before the Thessalonians as their great CONSOLATION amid the tribulations which they were having to endure for Christ's sake. Next, in chapter 2 the apostle furnishes them with authoritative CORRECTION concerning the time and the way of Christ's return. Finally, in chapter 3 there is the apostle's COUNTERACTION of practical error concerning present duty in the waiting time till Christ returns. In this final chapter the word "command" occurs four times (v.4, 6, 10, 12), and the section ends with, "And if any man OBEY not our word in this epistle, note that man."

The Second Chapter

The first plain intention is that the "man of sin" is one individual PERSON – not a system, nor a succession of men.

The second thing which stands out plainly is that "the day of the Lord" does not come until two things happen: (1) the "apostasy," and (2) the revealing of the "man of sin."

The third thing that stands out unmistakably are references to the “coming” and the “day” which here mean most definitely the STILL FUTURE return of our Lord.

Also, there is a RESTRAINT UPON SATAN in this present age (v.6). Thank God the devil cannot do just as he likes; the strong man’s house has been spoiled by the Stronger! What this sin-cursed world would have been like by now if Jesus had not come, and if Satan were not so greatly restrained in consequence, imagination cannot picture.

During the Millennium, Satan will be completely bound, out of action, and in the abyss of Hades, but during the end-epoch of this present age and restraint upon him is to be relaxed; and then, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Rev.12:12). It is then that he will fling off all disguise, and appear as the morally ugly archfiend that he really is, no longer going about only as “an angel of light” cunningly seeking whom he may deceive (II Co.11:14), but “as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (I Pet.5:8)! It is then that he will appear as “the beast out of the sea” and the “other beast out of the earth,” which latter is the “man” whose number is 666 (Rev.13). He will enter and possess this human being in a way never known before, and with wide powers he will exercise an awful tyranny over millions – first deceiving and then enslaving them.

But why should this have to happen? It is because this is the only way that Christ-rejecting men and nations will learn. They shall be allowed a final and culminating lesson in which to learn by bitterest experience what is the ultimate alternative to the grace and government of “our God and His Christ.” But just as it looks as though 666 is to dominate all flesh, God’s great SEVEN, the glorious Prince and Savior, shall suddenly appear in flaming splendor from the skies, and shall utterly consume “that wicked one” with the breath of His mouth!

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

I TIMOTHY: A CHARGE, GUARD THE DEPOSIT

Preliminary explanation (1:1-17)

The “Charge” introduced (1:18-20)

1. THE ASSEMBLY AND ITS CONDUCT (2-3)

(a) CONCERNING ORDER (2)

The men and public prayer (1-8)

The women and public mien (9-15)

(b) CONCERNING OFFICE (3)

Qualifications of elders (1-7)

Qualifications of deacons (8-14)

2. THE MINISTER AND HIS CONDUCT (4-6)

(a) TO THE ASSEMBLY IN GENERAL (4)

A “good minister” in faithful teaching (1-11)

A “good minister” in exemplary living (12-16)

(b) TOWARD PARTICULAR CLASSES (5-6)

Older and younger (1-2), widows (3-6)

Elders (17-25), servants (6:1-8), rich (9-19)

Timothy was pastor of the Christian “assembly” at Ephesus (1:3). That he was a comparatively young man is made clear by expressions in both letters to him. The two letters are a “charge” from Paul to Timothy. The charge is that Timothy shall “guard” something which Paul is committing to him. Paul calls it the “deposit.” Paul says, “I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to guard THE DEPOSIT until that day” (2Ti.1:12). The deposit is a trust which CHRIST had committed to Paul. Paul’s two letters to Timothy, written in the knowledge that soon he himself must pass beyond, are a charge that the younger man shall bravely and faithfully “guard” the sacred “deposit” in the days to come. Paul specifically states the nature of the deposit in I Timothy 1:11 as “the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.”

Looking particularly at the FIRST of these two epistles we soon see that its over-all subject is the local “church” or “assembly” of Christian believers and the pastor-in-charge.

The first seventeen verses in chapter 1 give a preliminary explanation why the letter has been written, and end with a doxology, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever, Amen.” In the remaining three verses (18-20), with a touch of solemn formality, the great apostle introduces his “charge” to “son Timothy.”

The “charge” itself begins at vs. 2:1, and thereafter the letter breaks into two clear parts.

Chapter two and three concern the ASSEMBLY and its conduct; chapters four and five concern the MINISTER and his conduct.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

II TIMOTHY: A CHALLENGE TO FORTITUDE & FAITHFULNESS

THE TRUE PASTOR AND PRESENT TESTING

THE TRUE PERSONAL REACTION (1:3-2:13)

Challenge – “Stir up,” “be not ashamed,” “endure,” etc.

Incentive – “Remember,” Paul’s example

THE TRUE PASTORAL REACTION (2:14-26)

Challenge – “Charge,” “study,” “shun,” “refuse,” etc.

Incentive – “Foundation sure,” souls rescued.

THE TRUE PASTOR AND AGE-END TROUBLES

THE TRUE PERSONAL REACTION (3)

Challenge – “Perilous times” “continue thou”

Incentive – Paul’s example, Scripture

THE TRUE PASTORAL REACTION (4)

Challenge – “Preach the Word,” “do work of evangelist”

Incentive – The coming kingdom, the coming crown

This second letter to Timothy, like the first, is occupied with the exercise of the ministry within the local church. It was written soon after the first letter. Paul was in prison in Rome; and he did not expect (as he did in the earlier letter) to be freed again (except by his “departure” to be with Christ). This second letter to Timothy is the last writing of Paul preserved to us. Never does the apostle shine in nobler light. His passion for the great work to which his whole energy has been devoted is strong as ever upon him.

If as we have seen, the first epistle to Timothy is a “charge,” this second one develops into a “challenge.” It is a challenge to fortitude and faithfulness in face of PRESENT testings and of FURTHER testings which were yet to come. It is equally orderly as the first. The four chapters break into two pairs. Chapter 1-2 are about the Christian pastor and his true reactions to PRESENT testings. Chapters 3-4, commencing “This know, also, that in the last days perilous times shall come,” concern the pastor’s reaction to AGE-END troubles. In each section there is a challenge and incentive.

1st & 2nd Timothy a “Charge”

The time of Paul’s own “departure” is at hand. As he looks back over the years he can say, “I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have HELD INTACT the faith.” But what of the future? He must give this solemn, written “charge” to his dearest son in the faith. With a new sense of responsibility Timothy is now to “guard” this priceless, vital “deposit” of Christian truth: he is to preserve it, protect it, proclaim it. This then is the order:

- (1) The “glorious Gospel of the blessed God” is entrusted to Paul (1Ti.1:11).
- (2) Paul now “deposits” it in (and as) a special “charge” to Timothy (1:18).
- (3) Paul exhorts Timothy, “O Timothy, GUARD the DEPOSIT” (4:20).
- (4) Paul knows Whom he has believed, and is persuaded HE will “guard the deposit” (2Ti.1:12).
- (5) Timothy is further to “deposit” the treasure of truth to other faithful trustees who are “able to teach others also (2:2).

“The Faith”

Because these two epistles are a charge concerning the guardianship of this sacred deposit of truth that we find in them certain expressions occurring in almost every paragraph. This expression “the faith,” seems to have been commonly used to sum up Christian truth and practice viewed together as a religion.

- “Some have made shipwreck as regards THE FAITH” (1Ti.1:19).
- “Holding the mystery of THE FAITH in a pure conscience” (3:9).
- “A good standing and great boldness in THE FAITH” (3:13).
- “In the latter times some shall depart from THE FAITH” (4:1).
- “A good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of THE FAITH” (4:6).
- “If any provide not for ... his own house, he hath denied THE FAITH” (5:8).
- “Some reaching after [money] have erred from THE FAITH” (6:10).
- “Fight the good fight of THE FAITH, lay hold on eternal life” (6:12).
- “Science, falsely so called, which some professing have erred from THE FAITH” (6:21)
- “Men of corrupt minds, reprobate as regards THE FAITH” (2Ti.3:8).
- “Wise unto salvation through THE FAITH which is in Christ Jesus” (3:15).
- “I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept THE FAITH” (5:7)

“The Doctrine”

We find, also, a lot about “teaching” and “doctrine” (14x) in these two epistles. It carries with it the solemn implication that the sacred “deposit” is to be guarded DOCTRINALLY. Again and again we meet here the expression “the doctrine,” which sums up the whole Christian system from a doctrinal standpoint.

- “Law is made...for the lawless...any other thing contrary to sound DOCTRINE” (1:9-10)

“Nourished in the words of the faith and of the good DOCTRINE” (4:6).
“Give heed to reading, to exhortation, to the DOCTRINE” (4:13).
“Take heed to thyself and to the DOCTRINE” (4:16).
“That the name of God and of the DOCTRINE be not blasphemed” (6:1).
“The words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the according-to-piety DOCTRINE” (6:3).
“But thou hast closely followed the DOCTRINE of mine (2Ti.3:10).

“Teachers” Wanted

The leaders whom Timothy is to gather around him must be men who are “able to teach.”
“The overseer, therefore, must be without reproach ... apt to TEACH” (1Ti.3:2).
“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the Word and in TEACHING” (5:17).
“And the things which thou hast heard from me ... commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to TEACH others also” (2Ti.2:2).
“Every Scripture is God-inspired and profitable for TEACHING” (3:16).
“Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and TEACHING” (4:2).

But why all this emphasis on “the doctrine” and the urgent necessity of “teaching” it?

“That thou mightest charge certain men not to teach a DIFFERENT doctrine” (1Ti.1:3).
“Some having turned aside unto VAIN TALKING, desiring to be teachers of the Law” (1:7).
“In the latter times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and TEACHINGS OF DEMONS” (4:1).
“If any man teacheth HETERODOX doctrine, and consenteth not to sound words” (6:3).
“For the time will come when they WILL NOT ENDURE the sound teaching” (2Ti.4:3).
“But having itching ears will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts ... and TURN ASIDE UNTO FABLES” (4:3-4).

“The Godliness”

Once again we find the word “godliness” noticeably recurring. Just as “the faith” and “the doctrine,” sum up the Gospel in its religious and doctrinal aspects, so “the godliness” sums it up on the PRACTICAL side. This seems certain from comparing “the mystery of the faith” in 3:9 with “the mystery of the godliness” in 3:16. The three terms were evidently “current coinage” in the phraseology of original Christianity and should be duly noted. They sum up the Christian system, respectively, as (1) a religious WORSHIP, (2) a body of TRUTH, (3) a way of LIFE.

“And without controversy, great is the mystery of THE GODLINESS” (1Ti.3:16).
“Bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but THE GODLINESS is profitable for all things” (4:8).
“Men corrupted in mind and bereft of the truth, supposing that THE GODLINESS is a way of gain” (6:5).
“But THE GODLINESS with contentment is great gain” (6:6).
But why this emphasis on “The godliness”? The answer is found in the second epistle, chapter 3:5, “... holding a [mere] FORM of godliness, but having denied the POWER thereof.”

The Crucial Significance

When we perceive clearly what the significance really is we realize at once what a solemn voice these two letters have for our own time.

Think back for a moment to the opening paragraph of the first letter, where we find the primary purpose of Paul's charge to Timothy, i.e. "That thou mightest charge SOME not to teach heterodox doctrine" (1:3). Remember too, "But the Spirit saith expressly that in the later times SOME shall fall away from the faith" (4:1). Then with the repeated "SOME" in mind, recall the five sad, disturbing instances in this first epistle where it tells of apostasy:

"SOME have turned aside" (1:6).

"SOME have made shipwreck" (1:19).

"SOME are turned after Satan" (5:15).

"SOME have been led astray" (6:10).

"SOME have missed the mark" (6:21).

In the second epistle the "SOME" has become "ALL." At the beginning of it we find, "This thou knowest, that ALL that are in Asia have turned away from me" (1:15). Then again at the end we find, "At my first defense, no one took my part, but ALL forsook me" (4:16). THAT is why these two letters were written so urgently to Timothy. They strike a crisis point. They are a critical challenge. The first marks a break-AWAY, the second marks a break-DOWN.

In this, are these two Timothy epistles latently prophetic? Coming, as they do, just at the end of the nine Christian Church Epistles, do they throw on the screen as advance picture of tragic break-away and break-down which are to characterize organized Christianity at the end of this present Church-age? We know, of course, that the end times certainly were in Paul's mind as he wrote, even though he apparently had no knowledge that a long trail of twenty centuries would unwind before the Lord's return. In referring to the end-times which he thought were THEN drawing on, was not Paul so guided that his words, like prophetic arrows, find their divinely intended distant target in our 20th century, when at long last the final days really are upon us? In the first letter he speaks of himself and his ministry as a "pattern" or "delineation" or "intimation of posterity" (1:16). In chapter 4:1 he tells us what the Holy Spirit says "expressly" about the latter days; and again, in the second letter (3:1) he refers to the "last days" speaking of them as "grievous times."

Yes, undoubtedly Paul is directly thinking about these eventualities; but the further point which we are here making is that perhaps in a way which he himself did not suspect, his two Timothy letters AS A WHOLE give a PROPHETIC PHOTOGRAPH of our 20th century Chistendom. If this is so, how carefully the Lord's Timothies ought to be studying them, and praying over them again today!

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

TITUS: A CAUTION – "MAINTAIN GOOD WORKS"

1. AS TO THE ELDERS IN THE ASSEMBLY (1)

As to the office – eldership (v.5)

As to the men – blameless (v.6-9)

As to the need – gainsayers (v.10-16)

2. AS TO CLASSES IN PARTICULAR (2)

The older men and women (v.2-3)

The younger men and women (v.4-8)

Those in service to masters (v.9-14)

3. AS TO THE MEMBERS IN GENERAL (3)

Good works of every kind (v.1-2)

The supreme inspiration (v.3-8)

Avoid the unprofitable (v.9-11)

Judging from the allusions to Titus in Paul's epistles he seems to have been the ablest and most reliable of all the friends whom the apostle had about him in his later years. We find him figuring prominently when the strife and confusion in the Corinthian Church threatened to destroy Paul's influence. His remarkable success in the difficult mission then assigned to him, which called for the exercise of combined firmness and tact, and from which Apollos appears to have shrunk (1 Co.16:12), marked him out as an able and trustworthy delegate, and explains his selection ten years later for the important and difficult position which he temporarily held in Crete when this letter was addressed to him.

The same kind of urgent interest clings around this letter to Titus as we have found in the two letters to Timothy. The Lord's return is in view. The little epistle was written about the same time as I Timothy. It has much in common with the two epistles to Timothy, but it strikes a different emphasis. In I and II Timothy the emphasis is on DOCTRINE: in Titus it is on GOOD WORKS. First Timothy is a CHARGE, Second Timothy is a CHALLENGE, Titus is a CAUTION – a strong and urgent reminder that sound faith must be accompanied by good works. The doctrine must be adorned by doing. These three "Pastoral" epistles are really a trinity in unity, exhorting us to "guard" the precious "deposit" of the Gospel. In I Timothy we are to PROTECT it, in II Timothy we are to PROCLAIM it, in Titus we are to PRACTICE it.

Read Titus again, noting the emphasis all through on good works as the necessary evidence of salvation. It will leave no doubt as to the key theme. Perhaps the key verse is v.3:8, "Be careful to maintain good works." The very last word before the parting salutation is again, "Maintain good works."

Chapter 1: "Put things in order"

It is a significant fact that although the New Testament gives directions as to the organizing of local Christian assemblies it nowhere even hints of any central board of administration such as those which have developed with such wide powers today. The argument of expediency may be used to vindicate these latter, but they certainly have no Scriptural warrant. So far as New Testament indications go, each local church was meant to be autonomous. Such an elaborate hierarchical pyramid as the Roman Catholic system is utterly foreign to the New Testament; so also are all central executives which exercise a governmental control over combines of churches.

We may also learn from this letter to Titus that there is meant to be adequate, even though simple, organization. Titus was to "set in order" the things that were lacking in the local assemblies of Crete. Local autonomy is never meant to be haphazard disorderliness. There is to be pastoral oversight, such as that of Timothy and Titus. There are to be elders and deacons to oversee, respectively, the spiritual and economic aspects of the fellowship. In the very nature of things there must be leadership as well as membership in such corporate fellowships.

Another thing which must surely catch our eye is that in the appointment of office-bearers spiritual CHARACTER takes precedence over natural gifts. The elder must have a three-fold blamelessness: first, domestically (1:6), second, personally (1:7-8), third, doctrinally (1:9).

Chapter 2: “Adorn the Doctrine”

Whereas chapter 1 concerns the elders, chapter 2 widens out to different classes of members. The ideal set before them is to “adorn the doctrine” in all things. The incentives given are three: the grace of God (v.11), the Lord’s appearing (v.13), His death to redeem (v.14).

Shining like a resplendent alpha-star in this second chapter is the “blessed hope” of the “glorious appearing.” The reference to it occurs quite incidentally, yet it is set in one of the most notable little epitomes of saving truth anywhere in the New Testament.

Past: “The grace of God which bringeth salvation appeared” (v.11).

Present: “Teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts” (v.12).

Future: “The blessed hope ... the appearing of our great God and Savior” (v.13).

The word “appearing” in v.11-13 is the Greek “epiphany” a shining forth. The first is the epiphany of grace, the other is the epiphany of glory. Between the two, we are to live “soberly ... looking for the blessed hope” – so to be looking for the second “appearing” is one of the sober things!

Chapter 3: “Maintain good works”

After “appoint” in chapter 1, and “adorn” in chapter 2, comes “maintain” in chapter 3. “Be careful to maintain good works.” “Learn to maintain good works.” All through these epistles, Christian doctrine comes to us linked with highest ideals of conduct. High doctrine with low conduct is intolerable to New Testament Christianity. Notice the threefold incentive in this chapter – first a reminder of what we once were (v.3), second, the wonder of our conversion (v.4-6), third, our now being “heirs of eternal life” (v.7).

Somehow, as we ponder this short but weighty note to Titus, we have an uneasy feeling that all too many of us modern Christians live far below its simply worded but searching standards. Remember again, our Savior “gave HIMSELF for us” on awful Calvary, “that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS.” How the sinnings of Christians must hurt Him! Thank God, if its final injunction is “Maintain good works”, its final benediction shows how to do it: “GRACE be with you all.”

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

PHILEMON: THE GOSPEL WAY OF SALVATION

Salutation v.1-3

PAUL’S PRAISE OF PHILEMON (V.4-7)

PAUL’S PLEA FOR ONESIMUS (V.8-17)

PAUL’S PLEDGE AND ASSURANCE (V.18-22)

Benediction: v.23-25

Even in the best art galleries there is always a space for choice miniatures. This personal note from Paul to Philemon is such a graceful masterpiece of “fine courtesy, exquisite tact, and even playfulness of wit,” and withal it has such distinct spiritual values.

Paul must have written numerous short letters, besides his “epistles.” This is the only private letter that has survived to us. It attempts no grandiose phraseology, but it is a perfect model of “tact, delicacy and good feeling” in connection with a sensitive, master-verses-slave situation. It is a revealing little window into the private contacts and disposition of the apostle. It provides a unique practical illustration of Christian principle applied to social relationship. It says by EXAMPLE what Galatians and Colossians say in precept, as to the “nullity of worldly rank” in the Church, i.e. “There is neither slave nor freeman in Christ.” One only needs to know the helpless abjection of slaves under Roman law to realize the height which Paul scales when he asks the slave-owner to receive back the runaway thief-slave as a “brother-beloved.”

The Persons Concerned

Paul addresses Philemon as “our dearly beloved and fellow – laborer.” This seems at once to imply not only first-hand contact, but an already formed friendship; and this is confirmed by v.19-21, which imply that he was one of Paul’s own converts. A comparison of the letter with Colossians 4:9 shows that Philemon lived at Colosse, to which city Onesimus was now being returned. Philemon was a freeman, a slave-owner, presumably of the higher class socially, and a local Christian leader, for Paul speaks of “the church in thy house.” The “beloved Apphia” and “Archippus our fellow-soldier” are assumed to have been, respectively, his wife and son. Archippus seems to have been pastor either at Colosse or at Laodicea (Co.4:17).

As for Onesimus, he was one of Philemon’s slaves. When the epistle to the Colossians was dispatched from Rome, per the hand of Tichicus, Onesimus accompanied him. The two of them also carried this private note to Philemon.

The Background Story

Onesimus, who was probably a domestic slave of Philemon, had absconded, and v.18 would seem to indicate that he had stolen money from his master, by which to effect his get-away. He made his flight right out of “Asia,” overseas across the Aegean and Adriatic, to Rome, that populous haven of concealment to which many another such fugitive had fled. He little thought that he would ever see Colosse again, but there, in Rome, he came under the influence of Paul, was truly converted, and later returned to Colosse a changed man. As Paul was then in prison in Rome, it seems the more remarkable that they met. But at that very time, Epaphras had come all the way from Colosse, on a visit to Paul; and it seems a likely coincidence, as well as an overruling providence, that he saw and recognized Onesimus in Rome.

Onesimus quickly “grew in grace,” and endeared himself to Paul, proving so serviceable that Paul would gratefully have detained him in Rome. But no, Onesimus belonged to Philemon; so the apostle took opportunity to send him back.

The Letter

But what shall Paul say to the master who has been so outraged? Terrible punishments were sanctioned by Roman law for such offenses, even to the inflicting of death. Bishop Lightfoot comments, “The slave was absolutely at his master’s disposal; for the smallest offense he might be scourged, mutilated, crucified, thrown to the wild beasts.” But Philemon was himself a Christian brother, which fact put a kindlier complexion on the situation and gave Paul his basis of appeal. So the little letter was composed and sent on its delicate errand.

Smith’s Bible Dictionary gives us the following eulogy. “The epistle to Philemon ... has been admired deservedly as a model of delicacy and skill in the department of composition to which it

belongs. The writer had peculiar difficulties to overcome. He was the common friend of the parties at variance. He must conciliate a man who supposed that he had good reason to be offended. He must commend the offender, and yet neither deny nor aggravate the imputed fault. He must assert the new ideas of Christian equality in the face of a system that hardly recognized the humanity of the enslaved. He could have placed the question on the ground of his own personal rights, and yet must waive them in order to secure an act of spontaneous kindness. His success must be a triumph of love, and nothing be demanded for the sake of the justice which could have claimed everything. He limits his request to a forgiveness of the alleged wrong, and a restoration of favor and the enjoyment of future sympathy and affection, and yet would so guard his words as to leave scope for all the generosity which benevolence might prompt towards one whose condition admitted of so much alleviation."

See that v.1-7 are about Philemon, v.8-17 are about Onesimus, v.18-22 are about Paul. In the first group of verses Paul's affectionately diplomatic approach to his intercession for Onesimus consists of sincere PRAISE for Philemon. In the next group of verses Paul deftly presents his lovely PLEA on behalf of thief-runaway but now converted Onesimus. In the third group Paul gives his solemn PLEDGE to repay whatever Onesimus has stolen.

Here is a lovely touch in v.19, where Paul in giving his "I.O.U." to Philemon, quickly adds his "U.O.Me." Is there a guileless, sly humor in the deliberately adopted solemnity, "I, Paul, write it WITH MY OWN HAND, I will repay it"?

This short letter can preach powerful truths to us. First, SOCIAL EVILS ARE SOONEST CHANGED BY TRANSFORMED LIVES. How simple was the Philemon-Onesimus matter compared with the complicated master-vs.-worker problems of modern industry! Yet here is the open secret which can solve every social and industrial dispute, to the well-being of men and the honor of God, i.e. the application of Christian principles by Christian men.

Again, true conversion to Christ will always cause a man to put PRINCIPLE BEFORE MERE EXPEDIENCY. To some it would have been a question as to whether Onesimus really needed to go back now. His conversion more than made up for his having stolen and run away. Philemon would appreciate this and excuse Onesimus for what he had done in his "unconverted days." But is that how Paul reasoned? Did he say, "Perhaps the best thing now is just to say nothing about it"? Is that how Onesimus himself viewed it? No, Onesimus just as much as Paul knew what was the right thing, the Christian thing, and resolved to do it, cost what it might, for the Savior's sake.

And again, see in this letter THE VALUE OF A THIEVING, RUNAWAY SLAVE! There was a providential overruling in the life of Onesimus just as truly as we see in the Book of Esther. God was watching, loving, guiding. See the dignity which Christianity puts on the brow of a slave, making him a brother and spiritual equal in Christ! Need we marvel that such teaching eventually abolished slavery, emancipated woman, and claimed social justice for all men as human equals?

Just once more, we cannot help seeing a kind of profile analogy between this Philemon letter and THE GOSPEL WAY OF SALVATION. Under Roman law, a slave had no right of asylum. If he absconded and was caught, his owner had full right to disfigure or lame or even kill him. But the slave was conceded at least one right, that of appeal to his master's friend, to whom he could flee, not for concealment, but for advocacy. The slave owner was still absolute master, but

he might be pleaded with through his friend to whom the slave had appealed, and would listen for his friend-and-equal's sake if not for the poor slave's. This was the more likely if the friend was a PARTNER of the owner. Moreover, the slave who thus fled to such an intercessor did not incur the guilt and penalty of an ordinary escapade. Moreover, a slave could be freed, as faithful slaves sometimes were, by ADOPTION into the owner's family.

What a parallel we have with the Gospel way of salvation. As human beings you and I are God's property, but as sinners we have robbed Him and are fugitives. Our guilt is great and our penalty heavy. The Law condemns us. Conscience hunts us down. But if the Law condemns us, grace concedes us the right to appeal. As Onesimus found refuge with Paul, so we find refuge with Jesus, who, besides being the sinner's Friend, is the co-equal Friend and Partner of the One whose property we are. In Jesus we find both a PRECATOR (intercessor) and a GENITOR (begetting father), just as Onesimus found in Paul the one who not only interceded for him to Philemon but led him into the secret of a new life (v.10). Moreover, just as Paul contracted Onesimus debt, saying to Philemon, "Put that to mine account," so has our Lord Jesus graciously contracted upon Himself all OUR debt and demerit, wiping it out once for all. And now, just as Onesimus became reconciled in heart to Philemon and voluntarily returned to his owner, so have we become "reconciled to God" and of our own free will, have gratefully returned to Him, no longer rebels, or even servile slaves, but gladly to be "received" by Him "forever" (v.15).

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

HEBREWS – CHRIST, THE NEW AND LIVING WAY

1:1 – 7:28 = Jesus – The New and Better Deliverer

8:1 – 10:18 = Calvary – The New and Better Covenant

10:19 – 13:25 = Faith – The New and Better Principle

The book begins, 'At the END of these days'; plainly Old Testament days. All earthly 'religion' therefore is superseded – even Levitical. Although God had given these Hebrews a 'religion' the book of HEBREWS sees God taking it all away. Aaron disappears, Moses disappears, the Law is disannulled – the priesthood being changed; the scene is changed from earth to Heaven. They have become partakers of a Heavenly calling. In short the object of HEBREWS is to call a people who are heavenly by calling (state of being), to a heavenly worship. From now on, their place is to be without the camp and WITHIN THE VEIL. Those once divine institutions – earthly ordinances, tabernacle and priesthood are now done away.

Many dear saints who delight in the Word of God insist on the study of O.T. types as setting forth fully and accurately the things of Grace we are now enjoying, and the good things to come when the Lord returns. Indeed, we have known some beloved teachers so governed by O.T. typology as to permit no entrance of N.T. truth except as explained by O.T. types. Now the Law had 'only' SHADOWS. One who tries to turn these shadows into images finds himself presently under their spell. Reversing things, he judges facts by shadows. That which was once a pattern, a type and shadow of the Christ, was not to be enlarged upon and followed. Moreoften than not, they are a bright contrast of the NEW which has come.

In order for these Hebrews to be born again and break away from their religious system they needed to be shown, by vivid comparison and contrast, the superiority of the Gospel. It is a superlative fulfillment, of absolute perfection and of Divine finality; that there could be no going beyond it, no adding to it and no mixing with it. A key word 'better' appears 12x, and 'perfect' 12x.

THE SUPERIORITY OF OUR HIGH PRIEST

He is 'by so much better' than the angels. This comparative phrase used 4x in Hebrews sets forth infinity. The measure in each case is beyond measure. In Ch.1 He is seen as Deity – The Son, Heir of all, Firstborn, God and Lord. From Ch.2 on His humanity is emphasized. As such, He is better than Moses, Joshua, quickly skipping over them to consider Aaron and the priesthood. He is 'another' Priest, of a different order, preceding Abraham and never-ending. In Ch.6 an entirely new idea is expressed. Jesus is called the 'forerunner'. The Levitical high priest did not enter the sanctuary as a forerunner, but only as the people's representative. He entered a place into which none might follow; in the people's stead, but not as their pioneer. In the new economy Christ as High Priest goes nowhere that His people cannot follow Him.

Like Melchizedek Christ, whose right to the priesthood lay in no earthly birth, but in His being the Son of God from eternity to eternity. As the Greater One, He came with a two-fold purpose, 1) to bless, and 2) to lead our praise to God. Preceding and superseding Aaron and all the Levitical economy, his place is exceeding high. He is King-Priest; King before Priest. He has no successor; He comes on the scene as a 'continual' priest, without earthly or human connection. Melchizedek does not appear in Scripture as one who dies, and whose office passes to another. So Christ is inexpressibly greater than Aaron.

As a contrast, the Levitical priesthood had many priests, with our Great High Priest-One. With those priests, continual yearly offerings; oft-repeated sacrifices; with Christ, that which accomplished eternal redemption. This High Priest is seated in God's presence, for His work fulfilled all that the priests before Him could not. "For by one Offering, He has perfected forever, them that are sanctified" Heb. 10:14. Our wonderful JESUS completely fulfills, and therefore supersedes the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices. With human priests, sin, failure, and final death; Christ, sinless, and through suffering 'perfected forevermore'. Those priests had no power in themselves; our Great High Priest has all authority. Earthly high priests lacked full sympathy and understanding. He offered up Himself, this no high priest was asked to do. Christ entered Heaven 'by His own blood'. Not by His perfect character, not by His keeping the Law, nor by His personal worthiness as the Son, but by His own blood. Not that He got in by that means, but He went in 'in that way.' Christ is in the Holiest on the basis of having been the Sin-offering. He entered Heaven not, as He came, as One that had no sin; but as One that had borne sin, and put sin away by the pouring out of His blood on the Cross. That was the character in which He entered, and continually abides, a High Priest forever!

Christ's priesthood is NOT making propitiation for us, but is acting on the basis of propitiation already made. Our Priest does not stand between us and God; but He is Head over the house of God – in the midst of the saints He leads our worship. On that one day, the day of atonement, our Priest fully dealt with our sins. From then on He is attending to the things that pertain to God – our first-fruits, gifts and thank-offerings of worship. Redemption having been accomplished, 'He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself', He is now 1) making continual intercession for us as we pass through this world on our way to glory. 2) He is ever leading us in worship, on throughout eternity into an ever deeper knowledge of the infinite blessedness of God.

Not as a prophet, telling us our duty, but as a Priest, representing not God, but us. To put it reverently, He is not on God's side, but ours! He is called 'Our' Great High Priest; prophets were called God's prophets. God had him pass through all temptations and trial in order that, when exalted to keep sympathizing with us in understanding tenderness that knows no bounds. It is the MAN, Christ Jesus, that is our High Priest. It is the Father's yearning that we not only have assurance of our eternal safety, as we find in Romans; not only a heavenly calling and members of the body of Christ; but that we come into an unbroken experience of the hourly tenderness of infinite Divine love; and this is brought about by the work of Him who `ever lives to make intercession for us'.

7-Fold Contrast

- 1) Christ entered Heaven itself.
- 2) Christ had a personal right to enter.
- 3) Christ offered Himself.
- 4) Christ entered through His own blood.
- 5) Christ entered once for all.
- 6) Christ abides a Priest forever.
- 7) Christ was after another order.

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW COVENANT

The Law was put away because it was weak and unprofitable, Christ's intercession is both powerful and profitable to bring us to perfection. Thus the temporary things have given way to the eternal – Christ's work, to be received by simple faith, unmixed with human effort. A humbling process, indeed! For man must go out of the righteous-producing business, and rest wholly and forever on the work of Another. The putting away of the Law is as absolute as the putting away of sin (7:18).

In the first tabernacle there was no drawing near, but a standing without the veil. Drawing near is the constant desire of God's infinite love. Chapter 8 contrasts the O.T. tabernacle with the `true' tabernacle, that which the Lord pitched, not man, the reality in heaven, contrasted with the earthly pattern. The way into God's presence was once closed, but now it's open. The distinction of the work of Christ is our access into the Holiest in Heaven, even continual access and worship described in HEBREWS as full growth.

The covenant made with the Levitical priests, was without an oath, signifying a transitory office of imperfection and decay. An oath is something final and determinative in its nature. In Jesus, God has won the end of all His counsel; God now has a man to whom He has committed Himself forever. In this new covenant God does everything. There is no "If ye...", but rather "I will..." This new covenant is based upon the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son (13:20). They are the contracting parties and we receive all the benefits. We as Christians now benefit from this covenant, but as it is described in HEBREWS it is a covenant God is yet to establish with the earthly nation Israel in the millennium, who are presently out of covenant with God. For the Hebrew nation had and continues to have an earthly calling. Their future blessing, even in the millennium, is earthly. However, the Hebrews to whom this epistle was addressed, were partakers of the heavenly calling – neither Jew nor Gentile, but a new creation in Christ. Christians are not covenanters, but objects of grace, the heavenly church. The gospel is not a covenant, but the proclamation of news of the finished work of Christ. This covenant is unconditional, and its announced result is the removal of transgressions and iniquities. It does

not appeal to the will, but announces God's sovereign mercy. It's not conditioned on obedience, but uncaused mercy. And it's results are eternal. God's covenant with Abraham was neither the first nor the second, but both find their basis from it.

The old covenant was the legal covenant of Sinai, made with Israel. This first covenant is OFF. It could make nothing perfect, it was 'disannulled', because of its weakness and unprofitableness.

The future new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah is to be made at our Lord's return, and it will be all grace – God's operation without their response. This covenant is NOT YET ON. Therefore Israel and Judah are out of all covenant relationship with the Lord at present.

But there is an 'eternal covenant' detailed in Heb.13:20, of which Paul was addressing the Hebrew believers of his day. This new covenant is the eternal agreement between the God of peace and our Lord Jesus in which all the conditions are already and eternally fulfilled and available to all, Hebrews or Gentiles. This is ON FOREVER. The terms of the covenant were 1) The God of peace requested the Son to come to earth to 'give His life a ransom for many', and 2) The divine promise was made to Him that, He having done so, God would bring Him again from among the dead. In this covenant He keeps, perfects and presents us before God. And what is our part? To hear the good news, hearken and believe.

THE SUPERIORITY OF FAITH

This faith produces love for others and worship for God. We need provoke one another unto love. How? By loving others, constantly and tenderly. They will find it out, and will be provoked to return love and good works. To show love to strangers, and to continue to love the brethren at any cost.

God now invites us into His presence. Come near, enter boldly, today. And not as the Levitical priests, for a brief while of prescribed worship, but to abide forever.

In Ch.11, He shows how many were distinguished by their faith and rejected because of it. Faith separates us from the world and causes the world to turn upon us in persecution. Be ready, O man of faith for such a path of banishment. Yet FAITH is victorious under all circumstances. In Christ we have been cut off (at the cross) from the world, and belong in Heaven. We are not come to Mt. Sinai, but we are come to the heavenly Mt. Zion, no longer an infinite distance between Holy God and sinful man, but citizens of Heaven. Now God has revealed Himself 'fully' in His Son, and is now acting wholly according to Himself, which the cross set Him free to do. In the O.T. He was not fully revealed, but hidden behind the tabernacle veil. It was one thing for Jehovah to descend to Mt. Sinai and speak to an earthly nation about morality on earth – the Ten Commandments. But it was quite another thing when in His infinite love God sent His Son to be born of a humble human virgin; and to walk the path of loving care and tenderness for men, and submission to the Father's will at every step, and to bear our sins in His own body on the cross.

We are 'WITHIN THE VEIL' that is our heavenly position, and as a result 'WITHOUT THE CAMP' that is our earthly condition, outside all religion. The subject of HEBREWS is not our justification, but our having been brought near to God and our worship. So we who know the true gospel will bear His reproach. Let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually. The chief disobedience in HEBREWS will be to stay out of that worship, whether through neglect, unbelief, slothfulness, or shrinking from bearing Christ's reproach by staying in the camp.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

JAMES : THE PROOFS OF FAITH

PROOF 1 – ENDURANCE OF TEMPTATION (1)

PROOF 2 – IMPARTIAL BENEVOLENCE (2)

PROOF 3 – CONTROL OF THE TONGUE (3)

PROOF 4 – GODLINESS IN ALL THINGS (4-5:6)

Final encouragements (5:7-20)

How interesting is the order in which these nine Hebrew Christian writings occur. Right through the group they strike a careful balance. Is there not a significant appropriateness that Hebrews, which stresses FAITH, should be seconded by James, insisting on good works? – that I Peter, the epistle of future HOPE, should be followed by II Peter, which is all about present GROWTH in grace? – that the epistles of John, with their emphasis on LOVE, should be balanced by Jude, with its call to CONTEND for the faith? And is it not an obvious perfective finale, that this progressive lesson should be crowned by the characteristic promise of the Apocalypse – “TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH”?

About James Himself

The name “James” occurs 40 times in our New Testament. Collation restricts these to (1) James the son of Zebedee, the brother of the apostle John, (2) James the son of Alphaeus, (3) James the brother of our Lord. The first of these was martyred by Herod (Acts 12:2) about 42 A.D. The writer of our epistle was that James who figures so largely in the Acts of the Apostles as a kind of chairman or leader of the Christian elders and assembly at Jerusalem. In Acts 12, when Peter was miraculously delivered from Herod’s prison his instruction to the prayer-group was, “Go, show these things to James and the brethren” – which is a first clue to the latter’s prominence among the leaders. Later in chapter 15 we find him occupying a position of chairmanship and giving a president’s judgment (v13-21). In chapter 21 Paul came to Jerusalem after his third missionary tour and “went in unto James; and the elders were present.”

Outlook

There is what might seem to us a strange mixture of true faith in Christ with ardent veneration of the Mosaic law. Both in the Acts and in his epistle the Gospel bell rings clearly, the individual salvation is by faith in Christ; that the Gentiles are under no obligation to “keep the Law”; but there is no demarcation between Jewish Christian faith and the observance of the Mosaic economy. This, presumably, arises from the peculiarity of the transition period covered by the book of Acts. There is a “being zealous for the Law,” and a tender considerateness not to offend “the many thousands of Jews which believe.” There seems to have been in James a clear thinking astuteness blended with a strong tendency to religious rigidity. There may not be the dash and originality about such types, but they often make strong, wise chairmen, guiding with practical good sense, and often restraining from rashness. It is characteristic that in the Jerusalem council it is Peter who stands up and PROPOSES Gentile freedom from the legal yoke and chairman James who shapes the RESTRICTIVE clauses.

Eusebius preserves an interesting sketch of James by Hegesippus, a writer of the early second century. “James the brother of our Lord was surnamed the Just by all from the days of our Lord

until now, received the government of the Church with the apostles. He drank neither wine nor strong drink, and abstained from animal food. A razor never came upon his head; he never anointed himself with oil; and never used a bath. He never wore woolen, but only fine linen garments. He was in the habit of entering into the temple alone, and was often found upon his bended knees, asking for the forgiveness of the people; so that his knees became hard like a camel's knees in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before God. And indeed on account of his exceeding righteousness he was called the Just, also Oblias, which in the Greek is 'Bulwark of the people,' as the prophets declare concerning him.

First-Intended Readers

The late principal E.C.S. Gibson wrote, "We cannot understand the epistle aright unless we remember that those to whom it is addressed, in becoming Christians, HAD NOT CEASED TO BE JEWS. We are probably prone to exaggerate the gulf which existed between Jews and Christians in the early days of the Church. At first the preaching of the apostles was 'rather purification than a contradiction of the popular doctrine.' Those who were present on the day of Pentecost must have carried home little more than the fact of the Messiahship of Jesus and the barest rudiments of Christianity. The Gospel preached by 'those who were scattered abroad upon the persecution which arose about Stephen' would be somewhat fuller, though still incomplete. It was preached 'to none but Jews only,' but it spread the new faith over a wide region – 'as far as Phenice and Cyprus and Antioch.' Thus Christian communities would be founded in the Jewish quarters in most large cities; but it must have been years before they ceased to be 'Jews' and were entirely separated from the synagogues, with a definite and complete organization of their own."

"It is to such as these that James is writing; not perhaps to a definitely organized and MIXED Christian Church, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, but rather to those synagogues which, like that at Berea, had embraced Christianity. To these he writes in the style of the old prophets. Their synagogue was still open to all Jews. These communities of Jewish Christians, in the mind of James, stood in the position of Israel of old, and required just the same treatment at the hands of Christian teachers and prophets as Judea and Samaria had received from the prophets of the old covenant."

About the Epistle Itself

The epistle is addressed to "THE TWELVE TRIBES SCATTERED ABROAD." These were Jews of the Dispersion, Jews in places other than Palestine. James writes to them as president of the Christian assembly at Jerusalem.

The main purpose of the epistle may be gathered from its opening and closing words. It begins, "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you fall into manifold trials." The closing paragraph says, "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord is at hand." It was written to comfort and exhort Christian brethren undergoing trials, testings and penalties which were already coming because of their Christian faith.

The probable DATE of this epistle is of peculiar importance. The indications are that it is the earliest-written of all the New Testament documents. The "very slight line" which appears to exist between Judaism and Christianity; the absence of definite Christian phraseology; the sparseness of specifically Christian doctrine; the non-reference to Gentile Christianity – all these considerations are suggested as indicating its early date. According with this is the circumstance that in the oldest manuscripts it stands first of these Hebrew Christian epistles, which precede

the Pauline group. Assuming then, this early date, how empty then is the suggestion of some, that the epistle of James is an adverse reply to Paul's writings – which were not yet written!

Argument and Theme

The argument of the epistle is that true Christian faith must express itself in practical goodness. Hence, all the way through, the epistle is on good works. And this is surely a very necessary emphasis. There is no contradiction between Paul, with his primary emphasis on faith, and James, with his insistence on good works. James is not arguing for good works as a MEANS to salvation, but as a PRODUCT of salvation.

Take the first chapter with its wise and weighty words on temptation. Verses 2-12 show us the right REACTION to it. Verses 13-20 tell us the true ORIGIN of it. Verses 21-27 give us the best ANTIDOTE to it. For the right reaction he says, "My brothers, count it all joy." But why would James have us "count it all joy"? Because temptation may be transfigured into a ministry of spiritual blessing, "The trying of your faith worketh patience; and let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." How can temptation be transformed? By (1) pray v.5-8, (2) accept providential orderings gratefully v.9-11, (3) be assured that for patient enduring there is a final crowning v.12.

The REAL ORIGIN of temptation. James would have us settle three things firmly in our minds. (1) Temptation in the sense of solicitation to evil is never from God v.13. (2) It comes by us allowing inward desire to draw us into enticement v.14-15. (3) Only "good and perfect" things come to us "from above" v.16-17.

The best ANTIDOTE to temptation. James has just said that God "begat" us, or "brought us forth" by the WORD of truth, and that therefore every man should be "swift to hear". He now follows with, "Therefore ... receive with meekness the implanted WORD which is able to save your souls." "Be ye doers of the WORD, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves. For if anyone is a hearer of the WORD, and not a doer..." Ah, this is the safest build-up against temptation – God's WORD within, enlightening the mind, purifying the heart, checking the inclinations, and bracing the will! It is this which, when honestly received and faithfully obeyed, proves to be "the perfect law of LIBERTY v.25!

James and Paul

We know well enough that in Romans 4 Paul says that Abraham was justified by FAITH, whereas James asks, "Was not Abraham our father justified by WORKS, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" But the very reference to Isaac should guard us from any misunderstanding. Abraham's justification by FAITH was even before the seal of circumcision. His offering up of Isaac was 20 YEARS LATER; so that the man who was now justified by WORKS had already been justified by FAITH for 20 years! If James had been conscious of the slightest contradiction, would he have quoted just afterwards the very verse (Gen.15:6) which tells of Abraham's justification by FAITH? Surely the twofold position is: Faith justifies the man; works justify the faith.

Parting Words

Every part of this epistle is of tireless interest, but the closing references to the Lord's return, to Job and Elijah, to sickness and soul winning, are especially so. The reference to supernatural healing of the body claims comment. There is often a gracious ministry in suffering. Before ever we think of "claiming" healing we should ascertain whether it is an ordinary sickness, brought

about by natural causes, or an “affliction,” implying some Divinely imposed measure of correction, with which we are dealing. James makes this distinction. “Is any SICK among you? let him call for the elders of the assembly; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith shall save the sick.” “Is any among you AFFLICTED? let him pray” (v.14,15,13). Healing is not promised for “affliction.” The only prescription is “Pray.” To be claiming deliverance from something which God Himself has purposefully imposed or permitted is to be at cross-purposes with the will of God.

With the last few strokes of his pen James has a parting encouragement for soul-winners. It is noteworthy that this was the last thing on his mind. “Let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” There is a tender considerateness in the words “Let him know.” Mark it well, the Holy Spirit would have the soul-winner “know.” But is that surprising when we consider the fateful issues – “shall save a soul from death”? Oh, the ghastly depth of that word “death”! As used here, it means that deeper death in the Beyond, which the Bible calls “the second death.” The tenses of the verb indicate so; for whereas the word “converteth” is a present tense, denoting something which happens here and now, the verb “shall save” is future, indicating a salvation which extends away forward into eternity. Note that James speaks in the singular – “a sinner,” “a soul.” See here the importance of one soul, of ANY soul! To save one soul from such a “death” is more than a whole life given to outward “social reform.” The soul-winner is both anonymous and singular – “he which converteth”; no mention of theologians, preachers, evangelists. Despite the most circumscribed circumstances need any of us be entirely debarred from witnessing to others with a view to their salvation in Christ? Oh, to win more living gems for His crown! It fulfills the highest of all functions to our fellow – creatures; it obeys our Savior’s last command; it receives the highest reward.

“Let him know that he which converteth the sinner
from the error of his way shall save a soul from
death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

I PETER: CHRIST OUR HOPE AND EXAMPLE AMID TRIAL

THE LIVING HOPE – AND WHAT GOES WITH IT 1:3-2:10

The “Living Hope” and our reaction thereto 1:3-21

The “Living Word” and our reaction thereto 1:22-2:3

The “Living Stone” and our relation thereto 2:4-10

THE PILGRIM LIFE – AND HOW TO LIVE IT 2:11-4:11

As citizens, servants, married 2:12-3:7

As regards outsiders, and enduring suffering 3:8-4:6

As regards other believers, and mutual service 4:7-11

THE “FIERY TRIAL” – AND HOW TO BEAR IT 4:12-5:11

“Rejoice” and “commit”: the Lord’s return is near 4:12-19

Elders are to be examples in view of His return 5:1-4

All are to be humble and vigilant – glory beyond! 5:5-11

This first epistle was written to “the sojourners of the Dispersion”. That expression, “the Dispersion,” was the common Jewish term for those many thousands of Jews who from the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities recorded in the Old Testament had been scattered throughout the regions over which the Assyrian and Babylonian powers had once reigned. Clearly, then, Peter is writing primarily, even though not exclusively, to HEBREW Christians. Its evident purpose is that of encouraging and strengthening those Jewish believers during a time of acute trial.

Chapter 4:11 obviously marks an intended major break, i.e. “That God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Up to that point Peter has been speaking about trials which were already present; but after that “amen” he speaks of a “fiery trial” yet to come, i.e. “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is [yet] to try you.” Incidentally, notice the form of address, “Beloved.” Its only other occurrence is in chapter 2:11, where similarly, it seems to mark the beginning of a new section.

Immediately after his opening salutation Peter commences with a grateful doxology (v.3) for the great mercy of God in having “begotten us again unto a LIVING HOPE, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance ...” The thought of this wonderful hope is expanded in the ensuing verses. In fact a further glance will show that all the verses up to the twelfth DECLARE the hope, and v.13-21 show the right REACTION to it, “Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind,” etc.

How interesting it now is to find that at verse 22 Peter slants off to talk about the “LIVING WORD”! – “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit ... love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” The “wherefore” with which chapter 2 opens shows us our true reaction to that “living word”.

Still more interesting it is to find that the next sub-section (2:4-10) is all about the “LIVING STONE”! To whom coming, a LIVING STONE, rejected indeed of men, but elect of God, and precious.” Verses 5-10 tell us our relation thereto, “Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices.”

The Living Hope

That which is pre-eminent throughout this first section is the “LIVING HOPE” which is ours in Christ. The “living Word” and the “living Stone” are the pledge and base which make our “living hope” imperishable and indestructible.

The Pilgrim Life

Peter is telling us about the pilgrim life and how to live it. “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” Consequently we are told how to live the pilgrim life as CITIZENS, as EMPLOYEES, as MARRIED PERSONS; next in relation to OUTSIDERS and the enduring of SUFFERING, then finally in relation to other BELIEVERS and the rendering of mutual service.

There is not much of the pilgrim pattern about many professing Christians. The strong tendency today is to live as settlers rather than pilgrims, as owners rather than stewards, and according to

human standards of citizenship, employment, and wedlock, rather than according to the Divine ideals here set forth.

The constant and supreme purpose of the true pilgrim life is to glorify God in all things – as subjects, employees, wives, husbands, in our social contacts, in suffering, in our fellowship with other believers. “That God in all things may be glorified, through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

The Fiery Trial

Peter is evidently much concerned about a tribulation which was yet future but which was surely coming for Christian believers. He begins, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing had happened unto you.” He was thinking of what is often called “the great tribulation,” which is predicted to occur at the end of the present age. The passage on the “fiery trial” is Peter’s parallel with the teaching of Paul and John, that the second coming of Christ is to be preceded by a brief but fiery period of excessive tribulation for godly souls on earth.

Mark that age-end picture of Satan, “Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” How surely it parallels with Revelation 12:12, and its apocalyptic representation of Satan at the same latter-day crisis epoch, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time”! The masquerading “angel of light” will then fling away all disguise, and appear as the soul-murdering fiend that he really is, clawing and tearing and savagely ravaging as the “roaring lion” and the “great red dragon.”

It is when the troubles of the “fiery trial,” the “great tribulation,” begin to break loose at the end of this age that godly hearts will most fully prove the triumphant thrill of this advance – reassurance, “Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.” WHATEVER may be coming to us in the days ahead, we need have no fear. He has anticipated it all. “Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you”! If you had gone to Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego after their burning “fiery furnace” exploit, and had expressed sympathy that they should ever have had to endure such an ordeal, what do you think they would have replied? They would have politely disclaimed all right to your sympathy and have assured you that the trial by fire was the greatest experience of their lives, for it was there, in the seven-times-heated furnace, that they suddenly found Christ Himself walking with them amid the flames and transforming the “burning fiery furnace” into a dew-kissed garden of Eden!

Have no fear about the future, Christian believer. “He careth for you.” He has pledged Himself to you in advance. “Cast all your care upon Him.” This is the message which comes to you from Peter’s final section about the “fiery trial.”

And thereafter Peter brings his letter to a close with a final assurance and doxology, “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory, by Christ Jesus, AFTER THAT YOU HAVE SUFFERED AWHILE, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To Him be glory and dominion unto the ages of the ages. Amen.” Let us daily seek grace to live that pilgrim life. Let us banish all dread of the “fiery trial,” for even the “fiery trial” leads to the final triumph.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

II PETER: THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE AND THE SURE HOPE

THE TRUE “KNOWLEDGE” – IN WHICH TO GROW (1)

How “these things” are to be “abounded” in 2-11

Why “these things” are to be “remembered” 12-21

THE FALSE “TEACHERS” – WHO WERE TO COME (2)

Their havoc and their own destruction 1-9

Their excesses and peril to believers 10-22

THE SURE “PROMISE” – FOR AGE-END DAYS (3)

The promise upheld against scoffers 1-9

The promise a challenge to believers 10-18

To Whom Written, Why and When

Chapter 3 begins, “This second epistle, beloved I now write unto you, in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.” So it would seem that it was addressed to the same people as the first. A comparison of the opening salutation of the first epistle with that of the second, suggests that perhaps Peter may have had a rather wider range in mind when he wrote the second – and for a very real reason, namely, the appearance of a new peril to believers, in the form of FALSE DOCTRINE.

In his first epistle he has written to encourage them to patient hope amid the trials which were coming to them by way of persecution for their faith, but these spiritual perils to which they were now exposed were far more to be dreaded, and called far more for warning than any merely physical tribulation! There is no mention in the first epistle of any such doctrinal apostasy and libertinism among believers themselves; but here, the deep concern is to rescue those early Jewish Christian assemblies and their members from the wiley errors and corrupting influence of false teachers who were bringing in “destructive heresies.”

There must have been deep sadness in Peter’s heart about this disturbing development, increased no doubt by his having apparently been apprised that his own martyrdom was near at hand; “I must shortly put off this tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me.”

The Epistle Itself

So then, the purpose of this short epistle is, by REMINDER and RE-EMPHASIS, to ground its readers more firmly in the “full knowledge” of saving truth as it is in Christ Jesus; and thereby to reinforce their faith against the imperiling counterfeits of that time. But the warning also reaches down through the centuries, to our own times, to the “scoffers” at the end-days who deride the “promise” of our Lord’s return. The tone is much graver than that of the first epistle; yet throughout it there is the same note of triumphant certainty and hope in Christ. The primal facts are well attested. The final outcome is sure.

Whereas the emphasis in the first epistle is on HOPE amid trial, the emphasis running through this second one is on GROWTH in the true knowledge; though here again the Lord’s return is also prominent. The dual emphasis of the epistle is , the “true knowledge” and the “sure hope”, that just as true knowledge and sure hope are inseparably linked together, so are false doctrine and final destruction! What is more, just as true doctrine and holy living are linked together, so are false doctrine and unholy living! Second Peter rings the warning, “Danger inside the Church!” There are always two tests of Christian genuineness. The doctrinal test is, “What is the

attitude to the person and work of Christ?" The practical test is, "What is the resultant character and conduct?" Both tests appear in second Peter.

THE TRUE "KNOWLEDGE"

Note the two dangers indicated in that first chapter. There is the danger of life without GROWTH (v.3-8); and there is the danger of knowledge without PRACTICE (v.9-14). Life never remains static, it either goes forward or backward. Life without growth becomes atrophy. Similarly, knowledge without practice becomes blindness instead of vision v.9. It is vital to be members of the progressive party!

THE FALSE "TEACHERS"

The word translated as "beguiling" and "allure" ("entice") in the Greek is literally to TAKE WITH A BAIT – a relic from Peter's fishing days. "Beware," says Peter in effect, "your most dangerous deceivers are those who come with a tasty bait and a concealed hook!" Let this second chapter convince us that wherever there is a Divine truth which saves, there will be a Satanic counterfeit which damns.

There can be no tolerance of that which, inside the very Church itself, dishonors Christ and ruins souls! There can be no "dainty handling" of false teachers! A viper can be a gorgeous creature to look at, but once let its poison fang get you, or its strangle-coils enwrap you ...! Peter sees the issue with Spirit anointed clearness. There can be no compromise. When easy-going kindness lounges in the place of righteous indignation, and allows Christ-dishonoring false doctrine to play havoc inside the Church, kindness has ceased to be Christian, it has become disguised loyalty, camouflaged cowardice, or a moral-wasting disease.

THE SURE "PROMISE"

How up to date does the brag and pooh-poohing of these third chapter "scoffers" sound! Verse 12 runs on, "Looking for and HASTENING the coming of the day." There is a cooperativeness between God's purposes and His people's responses. There is a certain contingency about our Lord's return. Paul mentions one aspect of this in Romans 11:25, when he uses the expression "until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." But how can WE hasten that day? There are three ways, (1) by daily longing for His appearing, remembering that He is coming to them who "love His appearing" (2Ti.4:8); (2) by daily PRAYING for His appearing, remembering that the last prayer of the Bible is, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus"; (3) by daily seeking to win souls, until the "election of grace" and "the fullness of the Gentiles" complete the bride of the coming Bridegroom. Thus may future hope and present growth go hand in hand!

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

I JOHN: TRUTH VS. ERROR; HOW TO "KNOW" AND "ABIDE"

SEVEN CONTRASTS

1. The Light vs. the Darkness 1:5-2:11
2. The Father vs. the World 2:12-2:17
3. Christ vs. the Antichrist 2:18-2:28
4. Good Works vs. Evil Works 2:29-3:24
5. The Holy Spirit vs. Error 4:1-4:6
6. Love vs. Pious Pretense 4:7-4:21
7. The God-born vs. Others 5:1-5:21

This is probably the last apostolic message to the whole Church. If the second and third epistles were written later, they were to individuals. This letter is universal in the fullest sense of the word, being addressed to no particular church or district, and dealing with the fundamental question of the life which is the true bond of the Church's unity.

A comparison of John 20:31 and I John 5:13 will show the Gospel and epistle to be complimentary. The Gospel was written that men might have life, the epistle that believers might know they have life. In the former we had Divine life as revealed in Christ; in the latter the same life as realized in the Christian. The Gospel declares the way of life through the incarnate Son; the epistle unfolds the nature of that life as possessed by the children of God.

John's three epistles naturally cohere. The first of them opens up some of the deepest realities of the spiritual life, while the second and third ILLUSTRATE the truths which it teaches. The first, also, has a spacious universal outlook, though it rightly belongs here, in this ninefold group of Hebrew Christian Epistles, for its approach and implicit background are kindred with the others. Verse 7 in the third epistle clearly indicates a Hebrew standpoint.

It seems to be the general opinion of scholars that this first epistle of John was written about 90 A.D. At that time John would be the only surviving apostle, and would be a great age. In keeping with this the tone of the epistle is PATERNAL both in the fatherly affection and in the fatherly authority which characterize it.

How different is John's form of thought and expression from that of Paul! John is contemplative rather than argumentative. He presents truths as they come by intuitive perception rather than by reasoned conclusion. He is mystical rather than logical. He sees the confirmation of truth in one's EXPERIENCE of it rather than in demonstration by argument. It is an epistle of recurrent ideas rather than of hard-and-fast divisions. These divisions are not such as to break certain CHAINS of thought which run right through the epistle. Of these chain themes the main ones are:

MUTUAL CHRISTIAN LOVE.
ABIDING IN CHRIST AND GOD.
HOW TO KNOW TRUTH FROM ERROR.
THE TRAITS OF THE BORN-AGAIN.
THE BELIEVER AND THE WORLD.

Seven Successive Contrasts

This first epistle of John runs in a series of SEVEN SUCCESSIVE CONTRASTS which throw up into sharp relief the central idea of the epistle, and the dominant concern in the aged apostle's mind. They set off in vivid antagonism, truth and error in their most vital aspects, and in relation to the Christian believer. They are accompanied all the way through, by the significantly recurrent little clause, "Hereby ye know," or "Hereby ye shall know," or "By this we know." The seven striking contrasts which make up this epistle, and these significantly recurring clauses, leave us in no doubt as to the dominant, urgent, intense and unspeakably vital PURPOSE of the epistle. It is written in order that we may "KNOW" AND DISTINGUISH, IN THEIR MOST VITAL ASPECTS, CHRISTIAN TRUTH FROM ERROR, AND CHRISTIAN LOVE FROM ITS COUNTERFEITS, and that thus being able to "know" the true we may "ABIDE" in it. We would point out that in these seven contrasts we have seven searching TESTS. Taking them in their

order, we have the acid “test” of: (1) profession, (2) desire, (3) doctrine, (4) conduct, (5) discernment, (6) motive, (7) new birth.

There seems to be no good reason why we should reject the common tradition that all the apostles were martyred except the Apostle John. God had special purposes in preserving John alive upon the earth. One of these purposes finds its expression in the apocalyptic visions which were given to him on the lonely isle of Patmos, and which have been transmitted to us by pen in the last book of the Bible. But another purpose we may well suppose was that John should live long enough to see not only the Satanic inoculation of Christian doctrine with the virus of “antichrist” heresy but its process and principal characteristics, so that he might write this first epistle of John for the future guidance of the Lord’s people. Let us be deeply grateful for this epistle of the seven contrasts. May we learn it thoroughly and heed it constantly!

All the way through this epistle there is a clear-seeing demarcation between the true and the false, and a clean-cutting incisiveness in dealing with them. John’s pen is a surgeon’s knife, not a philosopher’s quill. There is a downright spiritual simplicity which sees things as they really are. White is white and black is black; and they cannot be compromised into a middle grey. This moral clear-sightedness is always a mark of real spiritual maturity. No need for circuitous windings of arguments; the Spirit-illuminated inner eye sees vital moral distinctions immediately – often causing much annoyance to those who profess more loudly but see more dimly. What hazy seeing and pious parleyings with questionable practices there are among Christian believers today! Mark well the significant fact that this epistle which is distinctively that of Christian LOVE is at the same time the epistle of NO COMPROMISE!

Spiritual Fundamentals

All the way through this epistle we are meeting with pronouncements on profound spiritual fundamentals.

The all-inclusive commandments are two: that we believe on the Lord Jesus and that we love one another (3:23).

A profession of love for others, without active ministry to their needs is false (3:17-18).

The Father’s sacrificing the Son is Love’s last word: and that, if nothing else, should move us to “love one another” (4:10-11).

The true blessedness is a heart at rest before God. The secret is: “Perfect love casteth out fear” (4:18).

Such are found from beginning to end of the epistle; and they ceaselessly insist that we face up to the simple ultimates, to the really decisive choices and issues. In these five short chapters God’s Isaacs may find spacious fields for sanctifying meditation.

Incipient Gnosticism – and Today

There can be little doubt that throughout this epistle John is combating certain errorists, even though he leaves them unnamed. He so writes that his expounding of truth is an exposing of its counterfeits. Whether the errorists were early Gnostics cannot be conclusively deduced. The usual sect or local group of Gnostics supposedly possessed some special “revelation” superior to that of normal Christianity, handed down mystically from Christ or other great ones but known only to the inner circle of the initiated.

This invariably led to a seriously defective view of Christ. In Gnosticism the old Greek philosophical dualism had assumed a religious form. The philosophical distinction between the realm of reality and that of sense-appearance now took a new form as GOD (the Light) and MATTER (the evil) in ceaseless antagonism. Therefore Jesus as pure Spirit could not really have had a material body. He had not really “come in the FLESH” (4:3). His body was only “docetic” or phantasmal. Or, if the body was real, then it was only the body of JESUS the man, but not of the pure Christ-Spirit: the Christ entered Jesus at his water baptism, but left Him just before His crucifixion, as it was impossible for the Christ-Spirit to undergo crucifixion in an evil material body. In other words, He came “by WATER” (the baptism) – but NOT also by “BLOOD” (the Cross) as John says in v.5:6. On either of these views the Calvary work of our Lord is utterly nullified.

John strikes back at this, swiftly and powerfully, though without naming it, in the very first sentence of his epistle. “That which was from the beginning, which we have HEARD, which we HAVE SEEN WITH OUR EYES, which we have CLOSELY OBSERVED, and which OUR HANDS HAVE HANDLED, of the Word of life; for the life was manifested, and we HAVE SEEN ... That which we have SEEN AND HEARD declare we unto you.”

Here is no recondite, clandestine mystery-mongering, with its head in the clouds and its feet swinging in space, but first-hand witness to well proven facts! Jesus was no mere phantom. Nor was He merely human. He was the “Word” and the “Life” – as John had testified to them in his earlier writing (i.e. his Gospel) and as he now testifies again: “We have SEEN and do TESTIFY that the Father sent the SON to be the SAVIOR of the world” (4:14).

But besides this, those early Gnostic subtleties led to LOWERED STANDARDS OF CONDUCT. There was an idea that the secret super-revelation possessed by the initiated elite lifted them above obligation to Gospel standards of conduct into a superior “liberty.” John also answers that. Over against the very idea of inner circles and secret divinings he proclaims at the outset, “God is LIGHT, and in Him is no darkness at all” (1:5). Everything about the real Gospel is frank and open. There are no dark rooms or curtains of mystery. The real truth is a light which shines out upon all. Over against the idea of some secret “illumination” he says, “These things have I written unto you concerning them that would lead you astray. And as for you, the ANOINTING which ye have received of Him (i.e. the Holy Spirit) ABIDETH in you, and ye NEED NOT THAT ANYONE TEACH YOU; but His anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie” (2:27). “Ye have an ANOINTING from the Holy One, and ye know all things” (2:20). Over against the proud imagining of a superior “liberty” in conduct, he writes, “If we say we have fellowship with Him [the Light], and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1:6). Indeed, all through the epistle this last-mentioned error is counteracted. Profession without practical godliness of conduct is either hypocrisy or self-delusion.

Heretical break-aways have always been either: (a) those which have said that Christ was too Divine to be really human, or (b) those which have said He was too human to be really Divine. Christian Science today ranks with the first; Unitarian cults rank with the second. Let us learn well that any tampering with the PERSON of Christ at once jeopardizes the true doctrine of His atoning death. Let us also learn that false doctrine, however superior sounding, always results, sooner or later, in lowered standards of conduct.

The Seven Tests

Following up our remark that this is an epistle of guiding TESTS, we would urge again that its several chain themes be carefully traced and studied – the seven distinguishing traits of the

born-again (2:29,3:9,4:7,5:1,5:4,5:18); the seven reasons why the epistle was written (1:3,1:4,2:1,2:13-17,2:21-24,2:26,5:13); the seven tests of Christian genuineness (1:6,1:8,1:10,2:4,2:6,2:9, 4:20). Perhaps it may be useful to set out the last mentioned a little more fully. Seven times there is an "If we say," or "He that saith"; and each time it marks a test by which falsity is exposed. They are seven of honesty and reality. They search us. They penetrate like a white flame. They expose hypocrisy.

1:6 "If we say
that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie."
False fellowship.
1:8 "If we say
that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."
False sanctity.
1:10 "If we say
we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."
False righteousness.
2:4 "He that saith
I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar."
False allegiance.
2:6 "He that saith
he abideth in Him ought to walk even as He walked."
False behavior.
2:9 "He that saith
he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the darkness."
False spirituality.
4:20 "If a man say
I love God; and hateth His brother, he is a liar."

False love to God

In the first the religious professionalist is not honest with OTHERS. In the second he is not honest with HIMSELF. In the third he is not honest with GOD. In the fourth he is not honest with CHRIST. In the fifth he is not honest with the WORLD. In the sixth he is not honest with his CHRISTIAN BROTHER. In the seventh he is by implication (ponder it and see) false to ALL. We have already mentioned the seven places in this epistle where John states his purpose in writing. The first (1:3) casts its significance, of course, over the whole epistle, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have FELLOWSHIP with us, and truly our FELLOWSHIP is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ." Who can help but realize that the underlying purpose all through is that by avoiding the false and abiding in the truth we should know the pure joy of an unclouded FELLOWSHIP with God? It would not be inappropriate to write over this epistle as a whole, "THE GATEWAY TO FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD."

Oh, gift of gifts! oh, grace of grace!
That God should condescend
To make my heart His dwelling place,
And be my closest Friend!

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

II JOHN: CONTINUANCE IN THE TRUTH

PRACTICAL ASPECT: WALK IN LOVE (1-6)

(Love to the brethren is the center-test of Christian practice.)

The Divine insistence on love v.5

The human expression of love v.6

DOCTRINAL ASPECT: WATCH AGAINST ERROR (7-13)

(The person of Christ is the center-test of Christian doctrine.)

Warning against false teaching v.7-9

Warning against false charity v.10-11

An Apostle's Letter to a Mother

This second epistle of John is addressed to an "elect lady and her children." Some would have us believe that this lady and her children were really a CHURCH AND ITS MEMBERS; but v.5, 10 and 12 convince us that such an idea is far-fetched and artificially imported. We are glad that at least one little epistle in our New Testament is addressed to a Christian MOTHER.

What is the little letter about? Well, look at the opening lines and note that the word "TRUTH" comes no less than five times. Next, read again the exhortation which begins at v.4 and note that John is not writing any new commandment but is emphasizing the need of CONTINUING in what has been commanded "FROM THE BEGINNING." Twice we have that expression, "from the beginning" (v.5, 6). Quite clearly John is here exhorting continuance in "truth" which had been "received" right "from the beginning." Here then is the purpose of this little personal letter to the elect mother and her children. It is an exhortation to CONTINUANCE IN THE TRUTH.

The exhortation occupies v.4-11 and is in two parts. In verses 4-6 we have the PRACTICAL aspect of continuing in the truth: we are to "walk in love." Then in verses 7-11 we have the DOCTRINAL aspect of continuing in the truth: we are to "watch against error."

That which directly EVOKED this brief but concentrated note of affectionate greeting and warning was the unhappy circumstance referred to in v.7, "Many deceivers are gone forth into the world." All that precedes in the letter is quite plainly a lead-up to this.

The particular seducers before John's mind are certain who "confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh." Just as the expression "love not" in I John 3:10, 14 is the practical equivalent of hate in 3:15, 4:20, so here the expression "confess not" equals "deny." Of such denial John does not hesitate to say, "This is the deceiver and the antichrist" – very plain speaking which should not be overlooked. These misleaders are here said to have denied "Jesus Christ AS COMING in the flesh"; or (as the Greek could mean) "Jesus AS CHRIST COMING in the flesh." The Jew denied that the Christ HAD come in the flesh. The Gnostic denied that Christ COULD come in the flesh. Some in the present-day church deny that He ever can or will come AGAIN in the flesh.

It is the incipient Gnostic position which John thinks of in this letter to the elect lady, with its denial that the Divine Spirit COULD come in material form. Our remarks in connection with John's first epistle will have indicated how specious this superior – sounding religious philosophy could be, especially when plausible lips and clever reverence were allied with it.

“LOOK TO YOURSELVES!” That is the concentration point of the letter (v.8). The deceivers are beckoning you on; but the red light is against you! Pull up! “Whosoever abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, HATH NOT GOD” (v.9). It is this which brings John to write, “If there come any unto you and bring not this [the true, apostolic] doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed” (.10). There is a superficial sentimentalism today which recoils from John’s words as uncharitable. But do we castigate the doctor for being intolerant with DISEASE? Ask any of his patients! Would any of us knowingly welcome deadly virus into our bodies? We all have to mix with people of different views and beliefs, and as Christian believers we are truly to love their souls; but to FELLOWSHIP CO-OPERATIVELY with them in Christ-dishonoring propaganda of any kind is a betrayal of our love to the Lord who bought us.

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

III JOHN: TRUTH AND LOVE VS. PRIDE AND STRIFE

GAIUS – SERVICE IN TRUTH AND LOVE 2-8

“Brethren ... witness to the truth” v.3

“Brethren ... witness to thy love” v.6

DIOTREPHES – EVIL BY PRIDE AND STRIFE 9-11

“Who loveth to have the pre-eminence” v.9

“And casteth them out of the church” v.10

Commendation of one, Demetrius v.12

This third epistle of John is addressed to Gaius. As this name was just about as common in the Roman world as the name John Smith is in the British Isles today, it would be rather rash without any further data to infer that the Gaius whom John here addresses is the same as others of that name who are mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament.

Let all who open their homes and give hospitality to our Lord’s ministering servants see from this letter to the hospitable Gaius how the Lord Himself regards their kindness. They are “FELLOW – HELPERS OF THE TRUTH.” The providing of such hospitality can sometimes be very tiring. Had Gaius been generously overdoing it? Had he overtaxed himself, giving cause for John’s solicitous concern as to his health?

Alas, over against the unselfish Gaius was the selfish Diotrephes, who cuts a sorry contrast. His tongue and temper are deplored in v.10. Dr. Campbell Morgan well says, “The whole truth about this man is seen in one of those illuminative sentences in which the character of a man is so often revealed in the Scriptures. ‘Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence.’ That is the essential violation of love, for ‘love ... seeketh not her own.’ This is an instance of heterodoxy of spirit or temper, rather than of intellect. There is no evidence that this man was teaching false doctrine, but he was not submissive to authority. As is always the case, the unsubmissive one becomes the greatest tyrant, and thus by disobedience he manifests his lack of love.”

Glance again at v.7, “They went forth for the sake of THE NAME.” It is arresting. To Christian hearts it is thrilling. Just as “the Name” to a Jew always meant Jehovah, so now to the Christian – whether Jew or Gentile – “the Name” means the One which is dear and glorious above all others. Ignatius, later writing to the Ephesians, says, “I am in bonds for THE NAME’S SAKE”; and , “Some are wont of malicious guile to hawk about THE NAME.” In Acts 5:41 the whipped

apostles left the council chambers, not chafed and humiliated, but “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for THE NAME”! Oh, for a like humility, loyalty and love! Oh, let my love be such to Thee,

That I may ever grateful be
To suffer stigma, brand or shame,
And count it honor for Thy Name
Who didst so much for me!

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

JUDE: CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

WHY TO CONTEND – APOSTATE PREACHERS (3-16)

Their subtle perversions: two basic denials 3-4

Their certain doom: three historic examples 5-7

Their impious ways: three historic examples 8-11

Their utter falsity: six awful metaphors 12-13

Enoch’s prophecy: coming destruction 14-16

HOW TO CONTEND – OUR TRUE RESOURCES (17-23)

Realize that the apostasy has been foretold 17-19

“Build,” “pray in the Spirit,” “keep,” “look” 20-21

Show compassion towards certain who contend 22

Others seek urgently to rescue: but keep pure 23

Jude’s doxology: coming consummation

The writer of this short but intense letter calls himself a “bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James,” By common consent the James here referred to is the James who wrote the epistle of James. If our inquiry into the identity of that James be sound, then both he and Jude were sons of Alphaeus and Mary, and were the cousins of our dear Lord. Jude’s being so closely related to our Savior after the flesh adds luster to his designation of himself as the “BONDSERVANT of Jesus Christ.” Our Lord’s human kinsmen recognized his Divine nature and glory, though some of them disbelieved at first, and were now his adoring servants.

Contents and Analysis

This little epistle of Jude was written under special constraint, as the writer himself tells us (v.3). The constraint arose from a disturbing consideration of the apostasy which was blighting Christian assemblies through the subversive teachings of false brethren. It speaks with special force to our own times.

There is a clear orderliness of thought running through it. Its central idea is that of **CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH**, in accord with verse 3, which gives the key. The first 16 verses tell **WHY** to contend, because of apostate teachers. The remaining verses tell **HOW** to contend, showing our true resources.

First then, in v.3-4 we find that the subtle perverters were guilty of **TWO BASIC DENIALS**: (1) denying grace by “turning it” into lasciviousness, (2) “denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

Next in v.5-7 we find their certain doom foretold and illustrated by three historic examples of a like Divine vengeance on such, i.e. Egypt, angels, Sodom.

Next, in v.8-11 Jude describes in scathing terms the character and conduct of these false teachers whom he combats, comparing them with three historic figures infamous for their impiety, i.e. Cain, Balaam, Korah.

Next, in v.12-16 he exposes their utter falsity, dragging away all their deceiving draperies, in six awful metaphors: (1) hidden rocks, (2) exploiting shepherds, (3) clouds without water, (4) trees without fruit, (5) wild waves of the sea, (6) wandering stars. Then this section ends with the Enoch prophecy of coming destruction upon all such.

The remaining verses of the letter, which show us HOW to contend for the faith, break up equally clearly. First, we are to realize that such apostasy has been foretold. Second, there is to be a “building up of yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit” so as to “keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Third, we are to “show compassion” to certain who “doubt” or, more literally, “contend.” Fourth, we are urgently to seek the rescue of others, but to keep our separation and purity in doing so, “hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” This little epistle then ends with a prophetic doxology envisaging an ultimate heavenly consummation (v.24-25).

Perhaps the language of this short but sharply severe epistle may seem too scalding to some readers. But when one honestly, realistically reflects on the life and death issues involved, on the awful majesty and marvelous grace of God, on the costliness and preciousness of the salvation purchased on Calvary, on the measureless sin of knowingly distorting grace, dishonoring Christ, deceiving souls, and thus “doing despite” to the Holy Spirit – NO, it is not Jude who is too severe but our own perception which is blurred.

Of course, in all contending for the faith we must “keep ourselves in the love of God,” the counterpart of which is that the love of God must be IN US. We must love, even while we contend against the errors of apostatizers. We must love their SOULS even while we oppose their WORDS and deplore their WAYS. Sometimes it is delicately difficult to keep these separate, but the love of Christ in our hearts will put wisdom in our lips. Also, we must make a distinction between different KINDS of errorists, as v.22-23 tells us. The word in many translations “doubt” should be “contend.” There are some who “contend” against us. Endless counter-contention with them is useless. But there are others who need “snatching out of the fire”; they have been deceived, and in one sense or another, by bewilderment, remorse, doubt or danger, are in the fire. And there are still others on whom we are to “have mercy with fear,” being cautious lest in seeking to bring them back we should defile our own garments.

Yes, we must make distinction. Let this letter of Jude’s show us that there is urgent need for contending to preserve the purity of the true Gospel; but let it show us at the same time that in such contending, more than in anything else, we need the love of Christ in our hearts, and the wisdom of the Spirit in our minds.

The closing doxology – one of the sublimest in the New Testament begins, “Now unto Him ...”; but in the Greek the “Now” is really “But”, making a contrast with what has just preceded. i.e. “the garment spotted by the flesh.” Over against that metaphor of defilement comes this:

“But unto Him who is able to guard you from stumbling, and

to set you WITHOUT BLEMISH before the presence of His glory, in exceeding great joy; to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time, and now, and unto all the ages. Amen.”

[↑ Table of Contents ↑](#)

THE REVELATION: THE RISEN CHRIST ENTHRONED

1. The Son of Man & the Seven Churches (1-5)
The Lamb Enthroned in Heaven
2. The Great Tribulation & the Wrath of God (6-20)
The Lamb Enthroned on Earth
3. The New Jerusalem (21-22)
The Lamb Enthroned in the New Heavens and New Earth

In God’s estimate, this book is of supreme value. In it we behold the end and consummation of all God’s work and plan, the climax and outcome of all His dispensations and dealings with men; and in it every prophecy and promise, every purpose and covenant finds its ultimate goal and fulfillment. In Genesis we have the beginning of all, in Revelation we have the end and goal of all.

This book which seems the most mystifying is the one book of the Bible which is named a “Revelation.” We dare say that the book is one of the easiest to understand. That is to say in its TOTAL significance and in its FOCAL message it is surely such as the plain man can understand.

MAIN MOVEMENTS AND ANALYSIS

No book of Scripture is built upon a clearer plan. It runs in three movements, each issuing in a transcendent climax.

In the first movement, covering the first five chapters, the goal is THE ENTHRONEMENT OF CHRIST IN HEAVEN. In the central movement, covering chapters 6-20, the goal is the ENTHRONEMENT OF CHRIST ON EARTH. In the final movement the lovely climax is the ENTHRONEMENT OF CHRIST IN THE NEW CREATION. Let us get a hold of this, the Book of Revelation is the unveiling of our Lord’s THREE ENTHRONEMENTS.

Next, let it be realized that the main body of the book (chapters 6-19) runs in two parallel series of chapters. Both chapter-groups depict the same series of happenings but from two different aspects. Both run through two awful epochs (1) The Great Tribulation and (2) The Wrath of God. The 7 seals of the first member of the parallel are matched with the 7 personages of the second member. In both there is a sealing of an Israelite remnant on earth and the blessedness of the saints in heaven. The 7 trumpets of the one part exactly parallel with the 7 vials of the other part. In the first member (6-11) we have THE EARTHLY VIEW of these things; in the second member (12-19) we have THE HEAVENLY VIEW of them.

THE FIRST CHAPTER GROUP

THE SON OF MAN AMID THE LAMPSTANDS 1

(Christ in heaven, operating through the assemblies on earth)
THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN ASSEMBLIES 2-3
(The assemblies on earth functioning for Christ in heaven)
THE HEAVENLY THRONE AND WORSHIP 4
(The place of supreme authority and control)
THE LAMB AND THE SEVEN-SEALED BOOK 5
(Christ put in the place of supreme control)

In chapter 1 we have the vision of the Son of Man amid the lampstands. What is the central truth here symbolized? Surely we are meant to get a vivid, moving impression of THE CHRIST IN HEAVEN OPERATING THROUGH THE CHURCH ON EARTH.

Then come chapters 2-3 with their 7 letters of commendation, instruction, exhortation and correction to those 7 churches of Christ on earth. What is the prevailing thought in these? Equally clear it is THE CHURCH ON EARTH FUNCTIONING FOR THE CHRIST IN HEAVEN.

Thus the vision of the Son of Man amid the lampstands, and the letters to the seven churches are the converse sides of the one truth; one the heavenly, the other the earthly.

Christ then is risen, living, ascended; robed in awful holiness and overwhelming heavenly splendor. Although at present invisible to the earth, He is more active on earth than ever. He is moving amid the lampstands; He is operating through the Church on earth; and the Church on earth is functioning for Him through the churches plural.

What is His last word to the Church? It is this: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." This reference to our Lord's joint-occupancy of the Father's throne opens the door to the vision of that throne which now follows in chapters 4-5. Chapter 4 spends itself in describing the throne of the Deity and the worship of heaven. In it we are shown the place of supreme authority – the throne. Then in chapter 5, that of the Lamb and the 7-sealed book, in which we see the Lamb Himself "set down" amid the throne. Grasp it firmly: the ruling purpose in this first movement of the Apocalypse is to put the Lamb on the throne. The book cannot go forward until He is there. Thus this first movement reaches its climax: CHRIST, THE LAMB, IN THE PLACE OF SUPREME CONTROL.

One thing we would insist on is that these chapters describe something which has ALREADY HAPPENED. Their enthronement of the Lamb in heaven is not something yet to happen. He is there NOW.

THE SECOND MOVEMENT

As soon as the Lamb is put in the throne, the Apocalypse moves on through the two shock-epochs of the "Great Tribulation" and the "Wrath of God." In this middle and longest part many readers find themselves in a chaotic mix-up simply because they fail to see that chapters 12-19 are a parallel "repeat" of chapters 6-11.

THE "GREAT TRIBULATION"

The seven seals (6) The seven personages (12-13)
Parenthetical (7) Parenthetical (14)
1. Israel remnant sealed 1. Israel remnant sealed on

on earth before "wrath." earth before "wrath" comes.
2. Blessedness of saints 2. Blessedness of saints.
in heaven. 3. Warning: "Wrath" coming.
4. Vision: reason for Armageddon.

THE "WRATH OF GOD"

SEVEN TRUMPETS (8) SEVEN BOWLS (15-16)

1. On the earth. 1. On the earth.
2. On the sea. 2. On the sea.
3. On the rivers. 3. On the rivers.
4. Sun, moon, stars. 4. Sun.
5. Darkness, scourge. 5. Darkness, scourge.
6. Euphrates: army. 6. Euphrates: kings.
7. "Nations angry", "Wrath," 7. "Nations fell", "Wrath,"
"Great voices", "Time no more" "Voices, thunderings", "It is done."
Parenthesis: Jerusalem in Parenthesis: Babylon in "Wrath
"Great Tribulation" 10-11 of God" 17-18
End of 7th Trumpet 11 End of 7th Bowl 19-20
1. Kingdom of Lord & Christ 1. Lord God reigneth.
2. The 24 elders worship. 2. The 24 elders worship.
3. Time of dead to be judged 3. He hath judged.
4. "WRATH" come. 4. Armageddon.

THE MILLENNIAL REIGN OF CHRIST 20:1-6

THE FINAL OUTRAGE AND DOOM OF SATAN 20:7-10

THE FINAL JUDGMENT OF MANKIND 20:11-15

THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH 21-22

The Great Tribulation vs. the Wrath of God: In this parallel there is one feature which is peculiarly arresting when once it is perceived, namely, the solemn pause between the 7 seals and the 7 trumpets in the first set, and the correspondingly solemn break between the 7 personages and the 7 vials in the second set. WHY then, this break? It is to mark a distinction between the two stages and the age-end crisis, i.e.. the Great Tribulation and the Wrath of God (Mat.24:29-31). This has an illuminating bearing upon the question as to whether the Church will or will not go through the Great Tribulation. For there are passages in the New Testament which seem to show that believers of the last days (there is only one small part of the total Church on earth at any given moment) will be on earth during the so-called "Great Tribulation." II Thessalonians 2 is one such.

The "Great Tribulation" and the "Wrath of God" are not identical. The "Wrath of God" is the last awful end-bit which immediately follows the "Great Tribulation" (Mat.24:29). Now certainly no blood-bought, Spirit-sealed member of our Lord's body can be thought of as left on earth and undergo THAT. Yet it is quite possible so it seems to us, that believers will still be here during the "Great Tribulation" when the "man of sin" is here.

We do not here dogmatically affirm one way or the other; but we think that the distinction which the Scriptures make between the "Great Tribulation" and the "Wrath of God" is important. Remember, the "Great Tribulation" is largely a Satanic instigation through the man of sin, whereas the "Wrath of God" is entirely an affliction from God Himself.

THE FINAL MOVEMENT (21-22)

The Apocalypse reaches its sublime climax in the “all things new” of chapters 21-22. The first movement of the book (1-5) finds its climax in the enthronement of the Lamb in HEAVEN. Both of the parallel chapter-series which comprise the middle area issue in the enthronement of our Lord on EARTH (11:15-17 & Ch.20). The climax point of the final unveiling in chapters 21-22 is the enthronement of the Lamb in “the new heaven and earth” for evermore. Seven times the Lamb is mentioned; and this is what the seventh mention says:

“And there shall be no more curse, but THE THRONE OF
GOD AND OF THE LAMB shall be in it [i.e. new Jerusalem].”

Not Heaven

These last two chapters of the Bible must not be thought of as a description of heaven; they describe something which is to be on EARTH (though of course in that new order of things there will be open traffic between earth and heaven). In 21:2 John says, “And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming DOWN from God out of heaven,” i.e. to EARTH. “And the NATIONS shall walk in the light of it (v.24).” This is the ultimate golden prospect for this old earth of ours! It will be a “new earth”; and the “new heaven” will mean that the invisible environs of the earth have been forever freed from “the prince of the power of the air.”

Not the Millennium

The Millennium is the subject of the 20th chapter, where we find the saints reigning with Christ a thousand years (v.4-6). During that thousand years Satan is interned in the abyss (v.1-3); but at the end he is released: whereupon he immediately goes forth to deceive the nations, and there is a swift, last, violent insurrection (v.7-10). The purpose of this is to finally demonstrate the utter incorrigibility of Satan, and the irremediable failure of Adamic human nature – even after a thousand years of perfect government; thus immediately preparing for the final, general judgment at the “Great White Throne” and the winding up of the present order. During the Millennium the OLD Jerusalem is built up; but in these last two chapters the “NEW Jerusalem” comes “down” from heaven.

THE END

Can we do better than finish this series of studies where the Bible itself finishes? Look again at its final picture of our Lord and His redeemed ones in glory of the coming “new heaven and the new earth.”

“And there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and
of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him;
and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their
foreheads. And there shall be no night there, and they need no
candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them
light; and they shall reign unto the ages of the ages.” Revelation 22:3-5

Ineffable consummation! Described, yet in its full meaning utterly indescribable! Pick out the seven elements which together constitute its supernal sublimity:

“There shall be no curse” – i.e. perfect sinlessness
“The throne of God and of the Lamb” – i.e. perfect government
“His servants shall serve Him” – i.e. perfect service
“They shall see His face” – i.e. perfect vision
“His name in their foreheads” – i.e. perfect likeness
“The Lord God giveth them light” – i.e. perfect illumination

by J. Sydlow Baxter

“They reign forever and ever” – i.e. perfect blessedness

And now, with this Divinely unveiled, soul-thrilling consummation in view, let us close, praying the last, yearning prayer of the Bible:

“EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”