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STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow in their influence upon God's people around the world, through their clarity, careful exposition, and Christ-centeredness.

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STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink

NEW THINGS

In writing upon things new and old, the question arises, What is the order in which they should be dealt with? Either is permissible according to taste, or for the purpose of emphasis, for no scriptural principle would be contravened whichever were given the preference. In our Bibles, the Old Testament comes before the New, and in the experience of a Christian, he is born naturally before he is born spiritually. Nevertheless, since our Lord said, “Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (Mat 13:52). We cannot err if we follow that classification. In view of the popular delusion of this generation, with its craze for what is novel and modern, and its contempt of that which is stable and ancient, it is perhaps necessary to point out that all new things are not good and desirable, nor all old things to be despised. For on the one hand, we read of “new gods,” which Israel wickedly followed (Jdg 5:8), and on the other, of “old paths” which we are bidden to ask for (Jer 6:16). In our remarks, we shall dwell the longest on those which are least understood, seeking to furnish help where it is most needed.

1. *The new heart.* “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Eze 36:25-26). Whatever fulfilment that prediction may or may not have in connection with the Jews at some future day, it is made good in the experience of the regenerate in all ages. The language is, of course, highly figurative, nevertheless, it expresses simple but grand realities. It describes the essential features of that miracle of grace which is wrought within the people of God. First, there is an effectual application of the pure Word of God unto their souls, whereby they are cleansed from the love of sin and conformed unto His holiness. “The fear of the LORD is to depart

from evil," yea, "to hate evil" (Pro 16:6; 8:13). When the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, its affections are drawn unto things above, and it finds its satisfaction in them.

Second, a new heart and spirit are assured. The heart is the cause of all motions and actions. By nature, it is a heart of stone—insensible, inflexible, impenitent, impervious to spiritual things, unmoved by mercies or judgments, invitations or warnings, dead and dry—fit emblem of the vile and inveterate *enmity* of fallen man against God. But when He quickens us, then does He make good that word, "I will give them an heart *to know me*" (Jer 24:7). That is not a mere head knowledge of God, but an experiential one, which is accompanied by an approbation of Him, communion with Him, acknowledgment of Him; or, as Deuteronomy 30:6 says, "*To love* the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul." That new heart is tender, warm, pliable. The "new spirit" signifies an enlightened understanding, a sensitive conscience, a submissive will. There is then an inward and universal change, producing a transforming and permanent effect. A change which brings its subject to serve God sincerely and cheerfully. Those gifts are the bestowments of God's sovereign favour and are communicated by divine power. Nothing whatever is here attributed to man. God appropriates the whole work unto Himself. The imparting of a vital principle requires a supernatural Agent. To remove the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh is an act of omnipotence.

2. *The new covenant.* This was inaugurated and established by the Lord Jesus, being founded on the blood of atonement. Its contents are described in Hebrews 8:8-12, where Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted. At the time God gave that assurance through the prophet, the fleshly descendants of Abraham were divided into two hostile groups, with separate kings and centres of worship. They were antagonistic to each other, and as such strikingly adumbrated the great division between God's elect among the Jews and the Gentiles in their natural state and status (Eph 2:14, 16). But just as God announced that the separate houses of Judah and Israel should "become one" (Eze 36:16), so His elect among Jews and Gentiles are made one by Christ (Eph 2:14-18), and therefore are all born-again believers designated the "children and seed" of Abraham (Gal 3:7, 29), and are "blessed with faithful Abraham" (Gal 3:9). Thus, the house of Israel in Hebrews 8:10 is to be understood mystically and spiritually (cf. Rom 2:28-29; Gal 6:16). That this new covenant is in force today is clear from, "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant" (Heb 8:6), from "This cup is the new testament in my blood" (Luk 22:20, compared with 1Co 11:24-25), and from "Wherefore the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us" (Heb 10:15).

The question has been raised, both by Calvinists and Arminians, as to whether the promises of Hebrews 8:10-12 are absolute or conditional, and rarely has one answered to the satisfaction of the other. The former dwelling upon 11 Samuel 23:5, and the latter upon Isaiah 55:3, neither giving due weight to *both* of those passages. Personally, we would say that those promises are absolute as they were made by God to Christ—conditional as they are made by Christ to us—to a full interest in them, faith and obedience are indispensable. To the sinner Christ says, "Incline your ear" (cease your rebellion and submit to My lordship), "and come unto me" (throw down the weapons of your warfare and cast yourself upon My mercy): "hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you" (Isa 55:3). Human responsibility is there addressed and enforced. Our compli-

ance with those terms is conversion. Christ will not disgrace His grace by entering into a covenant with those who are still defiant and impenitent. “The honour of God would fall to the ground if we should be pardoned without submission, without confession of past sins, or resolution of future obedience” (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677).

3. *The new name.* “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (Rev 2:17). The “hidden manna” speaks of Christ’s feasting him with spiritual and inward refreshments—those enjoyments of Himself which the world knows nothing about. The giving of “a white stone” is a figure taken from a custom of the ancients, that being handed to those acquitted after trial, as a black one was to those condemned. Thus, it signified absolution from guilt. The “new name” tells of acceptance, as adopted ones take the name of the family into which they are adopted. The giving of a new name not only betokened a new beginning, but carried with it a high honour, as is clear from the cases of Abram (Gen 17:5), Jacob (Gen 32:5), Simon (Joh 1:42), and Saul when commended to a new work (Act 13:9). The new name is an expression of the Lord’s personal delight in the individual overcomer. No one else knows it because the ground of this knowledge is hid in his own consciousness and experience. In this world, his name is of no account, but then he will be owned by the Lord of glory, and be advanced to a new dignity.

4. *The new song.* The fundamental passage on this is Psalm 40:3, where the speaker is the Lord Jesus. In the preceding verse, He owns the Father’s action in bringing Him up out of a horrible pit and miry clay, setting His feet upon a rock, and establishing His goings. Thus, it is the resurrected Christ who is in view. On the eve of His death, at the passover supper, He had sung one of the old Psalms (Mat 26:30), but upon His triumph over the grave a new song was put into His mouth, “even praise unto [not simply “His,” but] *our* God.” Thus, the members are conformed to their Head in this too, and exhorted, “O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvelous things” (Psa 98:1). This is a call to the renewed soul to celebrate the honour of the Lamb, who fulfilled the law on his behalf, put away all his sins by the sacrifice of Himself, and brought in an everlasting righteousness for him. Then has He not given him abundant cause to rejoice and to laud his wonderful Saviour? The Son of God took upon Him the form of a servant, became the poorest of the poor, suffered, and died in his stead. Then let him raise unto Him a song of loving gratitude and praise. Let him make melody in his heart unto the Lord, let him give vent to his joy (and not stifle it), let hosannahs resound unto the Conqueror of his foes. The angels celebrated the wondrous work of God in creation, “The morning stars sang together” (Job 38:7), but the Church has a far grander cause to hymn His praise, even redemption. The new song will be sung in heaven (Rev 5:9), but the saints are learning to lisp it even now.

5. *The new life.* “That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4)—abstaining from the things which displease, practicing what honours Him. Thanksgiving is to be translated into thanksgiving, *showing forth* the virtues of “Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1Pe 2:9).

6. *New mercies.* “It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed....They are new every morning” (Lam 3:22-23). Each fresh day brings fresh proofs of His unflinching compassions, chief of which is His renewing us in the inner man day by day (2Co 4:16).

7. *The new earth.* “We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2Pe 3:13). The question is often asked, “When will the prayer be answered and God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mat 6:10)? When the new earth replaces the old one, for *there*, “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9).

EXPOSITION OF JOHN’S FIRST EPISTLE

25. *The World Prohibited (2:15)*

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

The connection between our present verse and the foregoing ones may not be apparent at once, but a little reflection will make it evident that it is linked more or less closely to all that precedes. As we have previously pointed out, the contents of verses 12-14 were designed to pave the way for what follows. John would duly impress his readers with what the riches of grace had made them in themselves, and this in order to prepare them to respond cheerfully to the prohibition of verse 15. In view of what they now were in relation unto God in Christ, they should the more readily and heartily detest that which is directly opposed to Him. As we have repeatedly observed in those sections of the epistle already traversed, John is fond of presenting the truth under the form of sharply defined antitheses. It is so again here. Having described the several members of God’s family, he sets over against them the world. They are solemnly reminded that they have to live their lives in an evil and hostile environment, and therefore are they warned against its menace, and instructed how to carry themselves toward it.

At the beginning of our chapter the apostle had announced, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not”; and to enforce that injunction he had stated the broad and basic principles by which the characters of believers are to be formed and their conduct regulated. They must fix their eyes upon the One who is their Advocate with the Father, keep God’s commandments, and walk even as Christ walked (verses 1-6). Then he had descended from the general to the particular: calling upon them to exercise love unto their brethren (verses 7-11). Next, he had expressed some strong assurances (verses 12-14)—addressed to the different grades of Christians to whom he was writing—which were designed as motives and incentives unto a compliance with the exhortations to which he

now returns. Following the command to love the brethren is the dehortation¹ “Love not the world.” It gives additional point and weight unto these precepts if we bear in mind that they are not only rules for the direction of conduct, but also tests by which we are required to examine and measure ourselves, for proof that we personally possess a saving knowledge of the truth.

As the apostle proceeded to develop his subject and pursue the several designs which he had before him when writing this epistle, the different tests which are presented become increasingly searching, and the line of demarcation between a valid and an invalid Christian profession is drawn more sharply. On the other hand, the characteristics and walk of the regenerate are so delineated and their portion and privileges so described, that their comfort and assurance should be proportionately deepened. Thus it is both a needful and a salutary thing for every one of us carefully and honestly to try himself by each of these admonitions and precepts. As James Morgan (1799-1873) pointed out, “Without conformity to them we are not entitled to conclude that ‘we know’ Christ or that we are ‘in Him’ by faith. As, therefore, we would have our evidences clear of a saving interest in Him, and would enjoy the assurance of a living faith, we must cultivate a close conformity to the manner of life enjoined by the apostle.” It is with such considerations before us that we should prayerfully ponder the interdiction of our present text, and, instead of viewing it abstractedly, suffer ourselves to be searched by it.

There is also an undoubted link between verses 15-17 and that which was before us in verses 9-11. There John had contrasted those who walk in darkness and those who abide in the light, and, as Erich Haupt (1841-1910) strikingly pointed out, here again (verse 15) is the “darkness,” though in its concrete form, where its kingdom is to be found. It is not sufficiently recognized that the world is the domain where darkness works and holds sway. Nor is it sufficiently realized that, morally, darkness is not an objective thing only, but a subjective one too, an operative force within man; yet Scripture speaks expressly of “the power of darkness” (Luk 22:53, Col 1:13) and “the rulers of the darkness of this world” (Eph 6:12). Darkness is as truly the animating principle in the unregenerate as light is in the saints. All that is outside of God in Christ is under the dominion of sin and Satan, which is but another way of saying that it is the realm of darkness. That is the fundamental reason why the world is not to be loved by us: it is the very antipodes from Him who is light, as is made very plain in the verses which follow, where its hideous features are depicted.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” This verse contains one of the innumerable proofs of the divine authorship of the Bible, for its teaching concerning the world is at direct variance with the beliefs and sentiments of humanity. If on the one hand that which is of great price in the sight of God (1Pe 3:4) is despised by the world, on the other hand that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God (Luk 16:15). Now if there be anything which is highly esteemed by man it is the world. He thinks highly of it, and speaks loudly in its praise, for he regards it as his world. Since it be that which his labours

¹ **dehortation**— the act of exhorting (a person) against a particular purpose or course of action; advising or counseling against.

have produced, man views the world with pride and satisfaction, boasts of its progress, and is assured that it will yet develop into a real Utopia. Certain it is then that none of mankind ever invented such a statement as “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (Jam 4:4). Equally evident is it that our text never originated with the human mind.

The Bible uniformly condemns the world. Again and again Christ and His apostles indicted and warned the saints against it. When the Son of God became incarnate and tabernacled among men, “the world knew him not” (Joh 1:10); yea, He declared, “Me it hateth” (Joh 7:7). He insisted that the whole world was of less value than a man’s soul (Mat 16:26). He intimated that its cares and the deceitfulness of riches were the thorns which choked the Word and made its hearer unfruitful (Mat 13:22). He solemnly said, “Woe unto the world because of offences” (Mat 18:7). He announced that Satan was its prince (Joh 14:30). In reference to the Holy Spirit He stated, “whom the world cannot receive” (Joh 14:17). He averred,² “I pray not for the world” (Joh 17:9). He “gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4), and therefore are His people forbidden to be conformed to it (Rom 12:2). The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God (1Co 3:19). “Ungodliness and worldly lusts” are linked together (Ti 2:12). 2 Peter 2:20 mentions “the pollutions of the world,” while 1 John 5:19 informs us that “the whole world lieth in wickedness.” Such declarations as these are radically opposed to all the beliefs and philosophies of men.

The above passages greatly need pressing today upon all professing Christians: “all,” we say, genuine saints not excepted. A careful pondering of the same makes it very manifest that this dehortation “love not the world” is no incidental or secondary one, but rather one which is fundamental unto vital godliness. It is therefore a matter of great practical importance that we obtain a right understanding and definition of the world, the “things that are in it,” and especially of what is meant by loving the same; otherwise, how can we rightly keep this precept? There are some conscientious souls who are very apt to distress themselves needlessly through incorrectly interpreting the same, supposing that to have their thoughts engaged with secular things while performing their daily duties is a species of worldliness, and a contravention of this injunction. But that is not so: God requires every able-bodied person to be engaged in some useful occupation: “work with your own hands” (1Th 4:11), and “if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2Th 3:10).

Honest industry is incumbent upon all, and if our calling be a lawful one, then we should apply our minds to the same: “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might” (Ecc 9:10). “Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, *and* look well to thy herds” (Pro 27:23). If there be an eye single to God’s glory and a conscientious performance of duty, He is as truly honoured and pleased by the farmer as by the preacher, the labourer as his employer. Indolence or inattention to practical matters is very far from being an evidence of spirituality: “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” therein (Rom 12:11) is one of the marks of a true disciple. It is not sinful to trade, to be industrious in the same, and to acquire money; yet constant watchfulness is necessary

² **averred** – asserted as a fact; declared to be true.

lest we be captivated and ensnared: “if riches increase, set not your heart upon them” (Psa 62:10). Many a prosperous merchant has been a man of deep piety, and his wealth a power for good. Nor is it wrong for a Christian man to lay up in store for his family, agreeably to the bounty of the Lord toward him (2Co 12:14; 1Ti 5:8).

No. Scripture does not require the saints to renounce the duties of relative life, or to become careless in the discharge of them. The proper evidence of being a Christian is not merely to talk about divine things, but (by grace) to walk according to the rules of God’s Word in whatever position Providence has placed him: whether as a master or servant, husband or wife, parent or child, bearing rule or yielding obedience as unto the Lord. Diligence and fidelity in the management of temporal affairs are to be maintained, yet without a sinful conformity to the world. It is indeed necessary that the believer should ever bear in mind that “the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself” (Psa 4:3), and that as a stranger and pilgrim in this scene he must abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul (1Pe 2:11). Yet that is far from signifying that he is to make himself conspicuous as an oddity. There is a happy medium between a sinful compliance with the world, being a slave to its opinions and an imitator of its fashions, and a scrupulous singularity which repudiates the spirit and liberty of the Gospel, and which is in reality nothing but a spirit of self-righteousness.

“*Love not the world.*” In this and all similar passages the “world” is both a society and a system. The members of it are described as “men of the world, which have their portion in this life” (Psa 17:14). Their chief good consists of the things of time and sense: their consuming desire is to crowd as much as possible of earthly joy into the present. Of each of its prosperous citizens it is said, “Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches” (Psa 52:7). As a system, it is under the dominion of Satan: he is its “prince,” regulating its policy and politics; its “god” (2Co 4:4), directing its religions. It is therefore the embodiment of his spirit, bearing his image and wearing his livery. Thus it is said of the unregenerate that they walk “according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph 2:2). As Christ declared to some of its most respected devotees, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will [desire and are determined to] do” (Joh 8:44); they listen willingly to his solicitations and readily credit his lies.

Considered morally, rather than materially, the *world* is synonymous with the kingdom of Satan (Mat 12:26) or the unregenerate part of mankind, together with the things on which they set their hearts: all that is outside “the kingdom of God”—where His authority is owned. “It is the reign or kingdom of ‘the carnal mind’ which is ‘enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ Wherever that mind prevails, there is the world” (Robert S. Candlish, 1806-1873). It is fallen human nature acting out itself under the influence of the devil, fashioning the framework of society after its own tendencies. Its very spirit is hostile to godliness, for it is dominated by carnal ambition, pride, avarice, self-pleasing, and sensuous desires and interests. Its opinions are false, its aims selfish, its pleasures sinful, its influence thoroughly demoralizing. The maxims which govern it, the springs which operate it, the ends which it seeks, are earthly, sensual, devil-

ish. Its politics are corrupt, its honours empty baubles, its smiles fickle. Even to its own votaries it is a thing of bitter disappointments, for it is full of illusions and fierce rivalries.

Now since the world is the sphere of rebellion against God, His people are commanded not to love it. They are not to esteem it as their portion or treasure. They are forbidden to set their affections upon it. Love is the supreme affection in whatever heart it dwells. It is jealous and will brook no rival. Its very nature is to make everything else subordinate to the object on which it is set, whether that object be God, a human creature, riches or pleasure. To love the world is to give it the first place in our hearts, to idolize it, to make everything else subordinate to the acquisition and enjoyment of it, to despise whatever comes into competition with it. Where the world be loved, it possesses and governs the soul, overcoming the scruples of conscience and the principles of integrity, for its influence is subtle and insidious, powerful and perilous. It dominates many who do not suspect it. To love the world is to make its vanities the chief objects of our pursuit, to share its friendships, to court its smiles, to conform to its ways, and to find our happiness in what it yields. Since the world is openly antagonistic to God, for any of His people to love it is to exercise a spirit of hostility to Him—it is to act a traitor's part, to hold converse with the enemy's camp.

Even the habitable earth in which we reside must not be cherished by the Christian as though it were his eternal dwelling place: for "this *is* not *your* rest, because it is polluted" (Mic 2:10). As Matthew Henry (1662-1714) remarked, "It was never intended to be so: it was designed for our passage, but not for our portion; our inn, but not our home...let us therefore sit loose to it, live above it, and think of leaving it." All the time we spend here is but a night in comparison with eternity. Even the patriarchs were not satisfied with Canaan, though, it flowed with milk and honey; instead, they "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth," and desired a better country, that is a heavenly, "wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city" (Heb 11:13, 16). A loathness to leave this earth indicates that our affections cleave too much unto it. To be content with such a sinful scene as this is sure proof that any individual is in a sad state of heart. It is because of their proneness to cleave to it that God so often embitters this world unto them.

"*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.*" In the second clause the apostle descends from the general to the particular. One may renounce the world as a whole, and yet the heart still clings to some of its parts. Even an unregenerate religionist may separate himself from the grosser aspects of the world, refusing to have fellowship with the giddy and frivolous, scorn its carnal attractions, and yet remain a thorough worldling at heart. He may have no sympathy with its tone and spirit, and yet certain objects in it possess great attraction for and have power over him. It is all the same in essence whether I love the world collectively or any of the single things which comprise it. It is not sufficient that I eschew the ways of the world, I must also detach my affections from everything which seeks to claim them. I must not delight in anything which would cause me to lessen my esteem of Christ and heavenly things. I am not to value any object if it hinders the performance of my duties Godward, dulls my relish for His Word, or chills the spirit of praise and prayer. I am to prefer nothing to spiritual things. I may use many of the things that are in the world, but I must not abuse them, trust in them, or place my happiness in them.

Manton most helpfully pointed out:

“God doth not require that we should love nothing, think of nothing, but Himself: the state of this life will not permit that. But God must have all the heart so far (1) that nothing be loved against God—a prohibited object is forbidden: sin must not be loved. (2) Nothing above God with a superior love: ‘he that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me’ (Mat 10:37). (3) Not equal with God, for then our love is but a partial and half love, divided between God and the creature. God above all, and our neighbour as ourselves. God can endure no rival. Love to man is but the second commandment, and must give way to the first. (4) Nothing apart from God, but as subservient to Him: God in the creature, Christ in His members: myself, wife, children, natural comforts in God and from God.”

The Christian’s love is to be reserved for God, and not thrown away upon anything which is averse to Him, and therefore whatever present and sensible things exert a malignant influence upon the mind, as opposed to the influence and effect which spiritual and future things should have upon us, are to be shunned.

As “love not the world” is not an order forbidding the believer to have any intercourse with the society of the world or to engage in commerce therein, so love not the things that are in the world is not a prohibition against his making a moderate use of the comforts and conveniences of this life, agreeable to the station to which the Lord has appointed him here. Christians are not required to cut themselves off from all contact with their fellow men and retire into a monastery or convent; nor are they directed to abstain from pleasant food or the wearing of clothes which become their station; still less is it wrong for them to admire the wonders and beauties of God’s handiwork in the material creation. While he is bidden to be temperate in all things, yet it is no virtue for a saint to adopt the austerities of the Spartans or to practice the bodily mortifications of the Brahmins. There is a “strictness” which arises from ignorance rather than knowledge, and a self-denial which is the fruit of fanaticism rather than spirituality. To be wholly concerned about externals is to gratify the spirit of self-righteousness, for it is possible to starve the body while feeding pride.

“If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” It comes to the same thing whether the love of the Father refers to His being shed abroad in the heart, or ours to Him, for the one cannot be without the other. If my prevailing desires be for the things which are in the world, if I conform to its carnal manners, comply with its sinful demands, and would do anything rather than antagonize it, then obviously I am an unregenerate person. If my affections be set upon the world which hounded His Son to death, and which hates His people in proportion as they see His image in them, how can the love of the Father dwell in me? It is impossible: the world, which lieth in the wicked, and the Father are irreconcilable, for they are diametrically opposed. Since they be thoroughly incompatible, love for the world and love to God cannot dwell together in the same heart. That was plainly taught by Christ: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (Mat 6:24). Both cannot rule the soul, for their governments and commands are contrary: their spirit and their course are diverse. Each person has to choose which of the two claimants for his heart shall be served and loved. Each Christian is required resolutely to resist the world in every re-

spect in which it draws him away from God, and refuse to comply with it at the cost of disobeying Him.

Here are some tests by which the reader should examine himself to determine whether he loves the world or the Father. Which do you seek with the more fervour: the wealth and honours of the world, or the riches of grace and the approbation³ of God? Which have the greater attraction: the pleasures of the world, which are but for a season, or those pleasures at God's right hand, which are for evermore? Wherein lies your confidence: in the money you have "laid up for a rainy day," or in the living and faithful God, who has promised to supply all the need of His people? Which occasions the deeper sorrow: a temporal loss, or the severance of fellowship with God? Which are you spending more money upon: personal comforts and luxuries, or the circulation of God's Word and the spread of His Gospel? What most dominates your mind: thoughts and schemes after worldly advancements, or resolutions and efforts to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord? Do your "good intentions" materialize, or are they empty dreams?

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

77. The Levites, Part 3

As we have pointed out in previous articles, Israel's inheritance was one, but the land of Canaan was split into two unequal parts by the Jordan. Thus, in order to get a connected and complete picture of what it has pleased the Holy Spirit to make known concerning the apportioning of the country promised to Abraham and his seed, it is necessary to take into account the dispositions which were made under Moses. Then it was that two and a half of the tribes received their portions on the eastward side of the river, whereas Joshua 14-19 treats only of the allotting of the western sections to the remaining nine and a half tribes. The link between those important transactions is supplied by Joshua 13:33, for it connects what is said in 13:8, 15, 24, 29 (about the two and a half tribes), with what Joshua subsequently did. There we are told, "But unto the tribe of Levi, Moses gave not any inheritance: the LORD God of Israel was their inheritance, as he said unto them."

As intimated in our last, the Levites are to be regarded both literally and typically, and typically in a twofold way—personally and officially. Personally, they shadowed forth the *entire company of Christians* in their priestly character. Officially, they prefigured *the ministers* of Christ. Having considered the former, we now turn to the latter. But let us first quote a noteworthy comment of Thomas Scott (1747-1821) on Joshua 13:33, "As Moses was himself of the tribe of Levi, he gave a special proof that he acted by divine authority in the overlooking of his own family and his own tribe: for though the Levites were well provided for, yet the security of that provision was so interwoven with the worship of God that, had they universally apostatized, the Levites would have been left destitute; whilst all

³ **approbation** – warm approval; liking; praise.

the other tribes would have had possession of their estates—that is, without some immediate divine intervention. Had Moses acted according to the natural bias of the human mind, he would probably have first provided for his own tribe; but on the contrary, he expressly appointed that they should have no inheritance in Israel.”

As Israel was a peculiar people and not to be reckoned among the nations (Num 23:9)—a figure of the church which is “not of the world” (Joh 17:14)—so the Levites were a peculiar tribe, in all respects different from the others—figure of the ministers of Christ (2Ti 2:4). The special position assigned the Levites is first shown in Numbers 1:1-3, 45-46. There we see how they were singled out for different treatment from their fellows, for when the census was taken to ascertain how many men were eligible for military service in each tribe, we are told, “But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them. For the LORD had spoken unto Moses, saying, Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel” (verses 47-49). Thus, they were exempted from military duties, because they were to be wholly devoted unto the Lord. “They that minister about holy things should neither entangle themselves nor be entangled in secular affairs. The ministry is itself work enough for a whole man, and all them too little enough to be employed in it. It is an admonition to ministers to distinguish themselves by their exemplary conversation from common Christians: not affecting to seem greater, but aiming to be better, every way better, than others” (Matthew Henry).

It was for the same reason that the Levites received no separate portion of Canaan. As Joshua 24:13 informs us, it was a land which abounded in “vineyards and oliveyards,” and *they* required considerable time and attention. The Levites had no fields to cultivate, nothing to divert their energies from fully serving the Lord. When it is said that, “The LORD God of Israel was their inheritance” (13:33), it is to be understood in a *temporal* sense, for spiritually He was the heritage of all the tribes. It was the will of God that the Levites should be supported by that portion which He reserved to Himself out of the estates of all the other Israelites, “I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in the tabernacle of the congregation” (Num 18:21, and see verse 24). A tithe from the fruits of the ground of the other tribes was given them, so that, without any expense or labour of their own, they were not only freed from secular toils and snares, but plentifully supplied with everything needful for their bodies.

In the above arrangement, we behold the sovereignty, the goodness, and the wisdom of God. His sovereignty in the various disposition of His favours; His goodness in relieving the Levites of any need to plough and sow; His wisdom in so ordering the mutual dependence of the tribes. Whereas the Levites were privileged to minister in the sacred work of the tabernacle, which no others were permitted to engage in, the other tribes had an inheritance in the land of Canaan which was denied the Levites. Thus, neither had occasion to envy or despise the other; and each alike had cause to be grateful unto the Lord. Such are the relations which God has appointed between His ministers and the rank and file of His people in this New Testament era. “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?” (1Co 9:11). No indeed, for the labourer is worthy of his hire (1Ti 5:18). “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that

teacheth in all good things” (Gal 6:6)—in everything that is needful for their comfortable subsistence. Thereby both the obligations and the honours are equally divided.

The method which God ordered for the supply of the temporal needs of the Levites made the same dependent upon the maintenance of the appointed worship of the Lord, for if the nation became either irreligious or idolatrous, they would neither bring sacrifices nor pay tithes. “Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin [contract guilt], and die. But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle” (Num 18:22-23). As Matthew Henry remarked, “If ministers expect that the people should keep in their sphere, and not intermeddle with sacred offices, let them keep in theirs, and not entangle themselves in secular affairs.” “Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for an inheritance, then *ye* shall offer up an heave offering of it for the LORD, even a tenth part of the tithes...and ye shall give thereof the LORD’s heave offering to Aaron the priest. Out of all your gifts ye shall offer every heave offering of the LORD, of all the best thereof” (verses 26-29). Thus were they to honour the Lord with their substance, practice what they preached, and set before the people an example of generosity. How that condemns the stinginess of many preachers today!

In addition to the tithes, a further part of the Levites’ portion was, “They shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire” (Deu 18:1). It was unto that the apostle made reference in 1 Corinthians 9:13-14, and showed that the same principle holds good in connection with those who correspond to the Levites in this dispensation, “Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.” God has a variety of ways of providing for those who are more immediately dependent upon Him. The lilies toil not, neither do they spin, yet is clothing supplied them (Mat 6:28-29); the birds of the air sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet our heavenly Father feeds them (Mat 6:26). Christ sent forth the twelve “without purse or script,” yet when they returned from their mission and He asked them, “Lacked ye any thing?” They said, “Nothing” (Luk 22:35). Those who fully count on Him for the supply of their every need are not confounded.

“Command the children of Israel, that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and ye shall give also unto the Levites suburbs for the cities round about them. And the cities shall they have to dwell in; and the suburbs of them shall be for their cattle, and for their goods, and for all their beasts....So all the cities which ye shall give to the Levites shall be forty and eight cities” (Num 35:2-8). It is to be borne in mind that, even though they served by courses, only a small percentage of them would officiate at the tabernacle, and those cities were required by the remainder of the tribe—their brethren and families, as well as their own wives and children. It is interesting to note that, as a mark of His special favour, God gave orders, “Notwithstanding the cities of the Levites, and the houses of the cities of their possession, may the Levites redeem at any time. And if a man purchase of the Levites, then the house that was sold, and the city of his possession, shall go out in the year of jubilee [i.e. revert to its original owner]....But the field of the suburbs of their cities may not be sold, for it is their perpetual possession” (Lev 25:32-34).

“Thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all the things that belong to it....And when the tabernacle sitteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up; and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death. And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts. But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony” (Num 1:50-53). Thus were they divinely constituted the custodians of the tabernacle and the carriers of its sacred contents. This receives amplification in Numbers 4, where detailed charges were given the three principal families of the Levites; to wit, the Kohathites, the Gershonites, and the Merarites, who were named after the three sons of Levi—all which is recorded there going to show that God assigns the place and work of each of His servants according to His own sovereign pleasure. His ministers are not free to choose their own field or particular service, but the occupation of each is to be determined by the will of their Master.

The tasks assigned the Levites were many and varied, though for the most part humble and menial. They were “given unto Aaron and his sons” (Num 8:19) to minister unto them in subordinate and preparatory offices, while the priests were serving within the tabernacle itself. Though brethren of the priests, they were given to them as servants or assistants, and the meanest and most laborious part of the worship assigned them. They were not allowed to go within the sanctuary itself, nor even to look upon the sacred vessels. “Their brethren also the Levites were appointed unto all manner of service of the tabernacle of the house of God. But Aaron and his sons offered upon the altar of the burnt offering, and on the altar of incense, and were appointed for all the work of the place most holy” (1Ch 6:48-49). In fulfilling their appointment, it fell to them to keep the tabernacle and its instruments in a proper state for the divine service (Num 3:8), to carry its different parts when removing from place to place (Num 1:51). But it was Aaron and his sons who must *cover* the holy ark, the table of shewbread, the candlestick, and the altar of incense (Num 4:5-14). Only when Aaron and his sons “made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is set forward; *after that*, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die” (verse 15), nor were their eyes ever permitted to behold them.

In later times, when the temple was built, some of them occupied the post of door-keeper or porter (1Ch 9:14, 17, 23). “And they lodged round about the house of God, because the charge was upon them, and the opening thereof every morning pertained to them....Some of them also were appointed to oversee the vessels, and all the instruments of the sanctuary, and the fine flour, and the wine, and the oil, and the frankincense, and the spices...had the set office over the things that were made in the pans...were over the shewbread, to prepare it every Sabbath” (1Ch 9:32). Thus were they required to make themselves generally useful in connection with the service of the Lord and the public worship of the congregation of Israel. Though signally favoured by God in their calling, many lowly tasks fell to their lot. While greatly privileged, there was no place for the exercise of pride.

The Levites were also the ones who were responsible to take charge of the musical arrangements connected with the public worship. "And these are they whom David set over the service of song in the house of the Lord" (1Ch 6:31). So too under the reign of Solomon, we read that "also the Levites, which were the singers...being arrayed in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps...the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound in praising and thanking the LORD" (2Ch 5:12-13). Finally, it was foretold of them that "they shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law" (Deu 33:10). According as Israel's spirituality ebbed or flowed was that duty discharged. Thus, in the days of Asa, for a long season Israel had been "without a teaching priest" (2Ch 15:3), but under a partial reformation under Jehoshaphat, he sent out his princes, accompanied by the Levites and priests, "and they taught in Judah" (2Ch 17:7-9). "And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the LORD" (2Ch 30:22, and cf. 35:3). It was chiefly through their instrumentality that the people were kept acquainted with the divine statutes (see also Nehemiah 8:7).

Thus the Levites were assigned a most elevated and privileged station, and yet they were called upon to perform the most lowly tasks, being servants unto others. So it is (or should be) with those who correspond to them now. The Christian ministry is dignified far above any earthly vocation. It was that which engaged the Lord of glory when He tabernacled upon earth, and it is that which He has established as a standing ordinance in His Church (Eph 4:11). Thus, the ministry of the sacred office belongs to a kingdom which is not of this world. It is charged with the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, promoting His glory, seeking the spiritual and eternal good of immortal souls. But so far from such an office fostering a vainglorious spirit, it should have a direct tendency to deepen self-abasement, and cause those who occupy it to "rejoice with trembling" (Psa 2:11), for who is sufficient for these things (2Co 2:16)? The utmost reverence is required in handling such high and holy things. Instead of pluming themselves, ministers of the Gospel have reason to cry, "Woe is me! For...I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5). Such a commission as theirs, so momentous a charge, calls for godly fear and trembling.

What point does the menial character of the Levites' service give to "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1Pe 5:3)! That prohibits ministers not only assuming any temporal power, but also attempting dominion over the faith and consciences of men. Let not preachers of the Gospel abuse their position: they are to win respect, and not command it. "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all" (2Ti 2:24). Alas, love of power has been as great an evil in the ministry as has the love of money. Nor are papists the only offenders. There are many little popes and would-be popes among Protestants. Preachers are not given the right to usurp authority over their brethren, nor to adopt an arrogant or tyrannical attitude. A haughty and domineering spirit ill becomes those who profess to be the servants of Him who deigned to wash and wipe the feet of His disciples. The greatest ability and most unwearied diligence will not commend the minister unto the spiritually-minded unless he be clothed with humility.

The ministry of our Lord was distinguished by both the dignity of God and the compassion of a man. By the authority received from the Father, and yet by the lowliness of the servant, Who declared, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mat 20:28). Thus, it was with the chief of His apostles, "Unto me, who am less than the

least of all saints, is this grace given" (Eph 3:8) was his estimate of himself. *That* was the language of a true "Levite"! So too was his, "Yet have I made myself *servant* unto all" (1Co 9:19); and again, "ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" and "I seek not yours, but you" (2Co 4:5; 12:14). Let Gospel ministers emulate the Levites in being unencumbered by worldly concerns, that they may devote themselves entirely to the service of God and His people. Let them not attempt to lift the covering that has been placed upon holy vessels, remembering that, "Secret things belong unto the LORD" (Deu 29:29). Let them be diligent in teaching the people the divine precepts. Let them take the lead in having a song of praise on their lips and commend Christ by a cheerful countenance.

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

10. Its Evidences, Part 1

After the ground we have already covered in the preceding articles, it might be thought there was no need for us to devote a separate section to the furnishing of *proof* that man is a fallen and depraved creature, one who has departed far from his Maker and rightful Lord. Though the Word of God needs no confirming by anything outside itself, it is not without value or interest to find that the teaching of Genesis 3 is substantiated by the hard facts of history and observation. And since there is no point on which the world is so dark as concerning its own darkness, we deem it requisite to make demonstration of the same. All men by nature, unrenewed in their minds by the saving operations of the Holy Spirit, are in a state of darkness with respect to any vital knowledge of God. Be they in other things never so learned and skillful, in spiritual matters they are blind and stupid. But that is something which they cannot endure to hear about, and when it be pressed upon their notice, their ire is at once aroused. The proud intellectualists who deem themselves so much wiser than the humble and simple believer, regard it as but an empty conceit of illiterates when told that "The way of peace they have not known (Rom 3:17)." Such infatuated souls are quite ignorant of their very ignorance.

Even in Christendom, the average churchgoer is fully satisfied if he learn by rote a few of the elementary principles of religion. By so doing, he comforts himself that he is not an infidel, and since he believes there is a God (though it be one which his own imagination has devised), he plumes himself that he is far from being an atheist. Yet, as to having any living, spiritual, influential and practical knowledge of the Lord and His ways, he is quite a stranger, altogether unenlightened. Nor does he feel in the least need of divine illumination. Nay, he has no relish of or desire for a closer acquaintance with God. Never having realized himself to be a lost sinner, he has never sought the Saviour, for it is only those who are sensible of sickness who value a physician—as none but those who are conscious of soul starvation yearn for the Bread of life. Men may proudly boast that this twentieth century is an age of enlightenment, but, however that may be so in a material and mechanical sense, it is certainly very far from being the case spiritually. It is often averred by those

who ought to know better that men today are more eager in their quest for truth than in former days, but hard facts give the lie to such an assertion.

In Job 12:24-25, we are told concerning "the chief people of the earth" that "they grope in the dark without light." How evident that is unto those whose eyes have been anointed with the Holy Spirit, yea, even to natural men who have not been given up to a strong delusion that they should believe a lie. Who but those blinded by prejudice and incapable of perceiving what is right before them would still believe in "the progress of man" and "the steady advance of the human race"? And yet such postulates are made daily by those who are regarded as being the best educated and the greatest thinkers. One had supposed that the idle dreams of idealists and theorizers would have been dispelled by the happenings of the past thirty years, when hundreds of millions of earth's inhabitants were engaged in a life and death struggle, in which the most barbarous inhumanities were perpetrated, tens of thousands of peaceful citizens killed in their homes, hundreds of thousands more maimed for the rest of their days, and incalculable material damage wrought. But so persistent is error, so widely accepted is this chimera of "evolution," and so radically is it opposed to that which we are here contending for, that no efforts are to be spared in exposing the one and establishing the other. It is with the desire to do so that we now present some of the abundant evidence which testifies clearly to the utterly ruined condition of fallen mankind.

These proofs may be drawn from the teaching of Holy Writ, the records of human historians, our own observations, and personal experience. The third chapter of Genesis describes the origin of human depravity. In the very next chapter, the bitter fruits of the fall quickly begin to be manifested. In the former, we behold sin in our first parents, in the latter, sin in their firstborn, who very soon supplied proof of his having received an evil nature from them. In Genesis 3, the sin was against God. In Genesis 4, it was both against Him and against a fellow man. That is ever the order. Where there is no fear of God before the eyes, there will be no genuine respect for the rights of our neighbours. Yet even at that early date, we behold the sovereign and distinguishing grace of God at work, for it was by a God-given faith that Abel presented unto the Lord an acceptable sacrifice (Heb 11:4), whereas it was in blatant self-will and self-pleasing that Cain brought the fruit of the ground as an offering. Upon the Lord's rejection thereof we are told, "And Cain was very wroth" (Gen 4:5), being angry because he could not approach and worship God according to the dictates of his own mind, and thereby displayed his native enmity against Him. Jealous of God's approval of Abel, Cain rose up and murdered his brother.

Like leprosy, sin contaminates, spreads, and produces death. Near the close of Genesis 4, we see sin corrupting family life, for Lamech was guilty of polygamy, murder, and a spirit of fierce revenge (verse 23). In Genesis 5, death is written in capital letters over the inspired record, for no less than eight times do we there read, "and he died." But again we are shown grace superabounding in the midst of abounding sin, for Enoch, the seventh from Adam, died not, being translated without seeing death. That much of his time was spent in expostulating with and warning the wicked of his day is intimated in Jude 14-15, where we are told that he prophesied, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken *against him*." Noah too was "a preacher of righteous-

ness" (2Pe 2:5) unto the antediluvians, but seemingly with little effect, for we read, "And God saw that the wickedness of men was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," that "All flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth," and that the earth was "filled with violence through them" (Gen 6:5, 12-13).

But though God sent a flood which swept away the whole of that wicked generation, sin was not eradicated from human nature. Instead, fresh evidence of the depravity of man was soon forthcoming. After such a merciful deliverance from the deluge, after witnessing such a fearful demonstration of God's holy wrath against sin, and after the Lord's making a gracious covenant with Noah, which contained most blessed promises and assurances, one had supposed that the human race would ever after adhere to the ways of virtue. But alas, the very next thing that we read of is that "Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: and he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent" (9:20-21). Scholars tell us that the Hebrew word for "uncovered" clearly indicates a deliberate act, and not a mere unconscious effect of drunkenness—the sins of intemperance and impurity are twin sisters. The sad lapse of Noah gave occasion to his son to sin, for, instead of throwing the mantle of charity over his parent's infirmity, he dishonoured his father, manifesting a total disrespect for and subjection to him. In consequence, he brought down upon his descendants a curse, the effects and results of which are apparent to this very day (verse 25).

As we pointed out over thirty years ago in an article on the subject, Genesis 9 brings before us the inauguration of a new beginning, and, a pondering of the same, causes our minds to turn back to the first beginning of the human race. A careful comparison of the two reveals a series of most remarkable parallels between the histories of Adam and Noah. Adam was placed upon an earth which came up out of "the great deep" (Gen 1:2), so also did Noah come forth on to an earth which had just emerged from the waters of the great deluge. Adam was made lord of creation (1:28), and into the hand of Noah, God also delivered all things (9:2). Adam was "blessed" of God and told to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (1:28), and in like manner, Noah was blessed and told to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (9:1). Adam was placed by God in a garden to "dress and keep it" (2:15), and Noah "began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard" (9:20). It was in the garden that Adam transgressed and fell, and the product of the vineyard was the occasion of Noah's sad fall. The sin of Adam resulted in the exposure of his nakedness (3:7), and likewise, we read that Noah "was uncovered within his tent" (9:21). Adam's sin brought down a terrible curse upon his posterity (Rom 5:12), and so did Noah's too (9:24-25). Immediately after the fall of Adam, a remarkable prophecy was given containing in outline the history of redemption (3:15), and immediately after Noah's fall, a remarkable prophecy was uttered containing in outline the history of the great divisions of our race (9:25-27).

Genesis 10 and 11 take up the history of the postdiluvian earth. They show us something of the ways of men in this new world—revolting against God, seeking to glorify and deify themselves. They make known the carnal principles by which the world-system is now regulated. Since 10:8-12 and 11:1-9 interrupt the course of the genealogies given there, they should be regarded as an important parenthesis—the former one explaining the latter. The first is concerned with Nimrod, and of him we learn that: 1. He was a descend-

ant of Ham, through Cush (10:8), and therefore of that branch of Noah's family on which the curse rested. 2. Nimrod signifies "the rebel." 3. He "began to be a mighty one in the earth," which implies that he struggled for the pre-eminence and by force of will obtained it. 4. "In the earth" intimates conquest and subjugation, becoming a leader of and ruler over men. 5. He was a mighty hunter (10:9). Three times over in Genesis 10 and again in 1 Chronicles 1:10 is the term "mighty" used of him. The Hebrew word also being rendered "chief" and "chieftain." 6. He was "a mighty hunter *before the LORD*" (10:9). Compare that with "the earth also was corrupt *before God*" (6:11), and we get the impression that this proud rebel pursued his ambitious and impious designs in brazen defiance of the Almighty. 7. Nimrod was a king and had his headquarters in Babylon (10:10).

From the opening verses of Genesis 11, it is clear that Nimrod had an inordinate desire for fame, that he lusted after supreme dominion or the establishment of a world empire (10:10-11), and that he headed a great confederacy in open rebellion against JEHOVAH. The very word "Babel" signifies, "The gate of God," but afterwards, because of the Divine judgment inflicted on it, it came to mean, "Confusion." By putting together the different details supplied by the Spirit, there can be little doubt that Nimrod not only organized an imperial government, over which he presided as king, but that he also instituted a new and *idolatrous worship*. Though not mentioned by name in Genesis 11, it is evident from the foregoing chapter that he was the leader of the movement here described. The topographical reference in 11:2 is just as significant, morally, as is "going *down* into Egypt" (Isa 31:1) and "*up* to Jerusalem" (Mar 10:33). "They journeyed *from the east*" connotes that they turned their backs on the sunrise. God had commanded Noah to "multiply, and replenish the earth" (9:1), but here we read, "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven: and let us make us a name, *lest* we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (11:4). That was directly contrary to God, and He at once intervened, brought to naught Nimrod's scheme, and "scattered them abroad upon the face of all the earth" (11:9).

At the Tower of Babel another crisis had arrived in the history of the human race. There mankind was again guilty of apostasy and declared defiance of the Most High. The divine confounding of man's speech was the origin of the different nations of the earth, and, after the overthrow of Nimrod's effort, we get the formation of "the world" as it has existed ever since. This is confirmed in Romans 1, where the apostle supplies proof of the guilt of the Gentiles. In verse 19, we read of "that which *may be* known of God"—through the display of His perfections in the works of creation. Verse 21 goes farther, and states, "When they *knew God* [i.e. in the days of Nimrod], they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools [in connection with the Tower of Babel], and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man." It was then that idolatry commenced. In what follows, we are told three times over that "God gave them up" (verses 24, 26, 28). It was then that He abandoned them and "suffered all nations to walk in their own ways" (Act 14:16).

The next thing, after that great crisis in human affairs recorded in Genesis 11, was the divine call of Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, but before turning to that, let us consider some of the effects of the former. The first of the Gentile nations about which

Scripture has much to say are the Egyptians, and they made their depravity clear by ill-treating the Hebrews, and defying the Lord. The seven nations which inhabited Canaan when Israel entered that land in the days of Joshua were devoted to the most horrible abominations and wickedness (Lev 18:6-25; Deu 9:5). The characters of the renowned empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome are intimated in Daniel 7:4-7, where they are likened to wild beasts. Outside the narrow bounds of Judaism, the whole world was heathen, completely dominated by the devil. Having turned their backs on Him Who is light, they were in total spiritual darkness, given up to ignorance, superstition, and vice. One and all sought their happiness in the pleasures of earth, according to their various desires and appetites. But whatever "happiness" was enjoyed by them, it was but an animal and fleeting one, utterly unworthy of creatures made for eternity. They were quite insensible of their real misery, poverty and blindness.

It is true that the arts were developed to a high degree by some of the ancients and that there were famous sages among them, but the masses of the people were grossly materialistic, and their teachers propagated the wildest absurdities. They one and all denied a divine creation of the world, holding for the most part that matter is eternal. Some believed there was no survival of the soul after death, others in the theory of transmigration—the souls of men passing into the bodies of animals. In short, "The world by wisdom knew not God" (1Co 1:21), and where there be ignorance of Him, there is always ignorance of ourselves. They realized not that they were victims of the great deceiver of souls, who blinds the minds of those who believe not. No nation of old was as highly educated as the Greeks, yet the private lives of her most eminent men were stained by the most revolting crimes. Those who had the ear of the public and talked most about setting men free from their passions, and were held in the highest esteem as the teachers of truth and virtue, were themselves the abject slaves of sin and Satan, and, morally speaking, society was rotten to the core.

The whole world festered in its corruption. Sensual indulgence was everywhere carried to its highest pitch. Gluttony was an art, fornication was indulged in without restraint. The prophet shows (Hosea 4) that where there is no knowledge of God in a land, there is no mercy and truth among its inhabitants. Instead, selfishness, oppression, and persecution bear all down. There is scarcely a page in the annals of the world which does not furnish tragic illustrations of the greed and grind, the injustice and chicanery, the avarice and consciencelessness, the intemperance and immorality to which fallen human nature is so horribly prone. Oh, what a sad spectacle does history present of our race! Abundantly does it bear witness to the divine declaration, "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity" (Psa 62:9). Modern infidels may paint a beautiful picture of the virtues of many of the heathen, and out of their hatred of Christianity, exalt them to the highest seats of intellectual attainment and moral excellence, but the clear testimony of history definitely refutes them.

The earth has been made an Acaldama by its murders and fightings deluging it with blood. "The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty" (Psa 74:20). In ancient Greece, parents were at liberty to expose their children to perish from cold and hunger, or to be eaten up by wild beasts, and though such exposures were frequently practiced, they passed without punishment or censure. Wars were prosecuted with the utmost

ferocity, and if any of the vanquished escaped death, lifelong slavery of the most abject kind was the only prospect before them. At Rome, which was then the metropolis of the world, the court of Caesar was steeped in licentiousness. To provide amusement for his senators, six hundred gladiators fought a hand-to-hand conflict in the public theatre. Not to be outdone, Pompey turned five hundred lions into the arena to engage an equal number of his braves, and "delicate ladies" sat applauding and gloating over the flow of blood. The aged and infirm were banished to an island in the Tiber. Almost two-thirds of the "civilized" world were slaves, their masters having absolute power over them. Human sacrifices were frequently offered on their temple altars. Destruction and misery were in their ways, and the way of peace they knew not (Rom 3:16-17).

The "Deists" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries dilated much upon the charming innocence of the tribes which dwelt in the sylvan bowers of primeval forests, untainted by the vice of civilization, unpolluted by modern commerce. But when the woods of America were entered by the white man, he found the Indians as ferocious and cruel as wild beasts, so that, as one expressed it, "The red tomahawk might have been emblazoned as the red man's coat of arms, and his eyes of glaring revenge regarded as the index of his character." When travellers penetrated into the interior of Africa, where it was hoped to find human nature in its primitive excellence, they found, instead, primitive devilry. Take the milder races. To look into the gentle face of the Hindu one would suppose him incapable of brutality and bestiality, but let the facts of the Sepoy rebellion of last century be read, and you will find the mercilessness of the tiger. So too of the placid Chinaman. The Boxer outbreak and atrocities at the beginning of this century witnessed similar inhumanities. If a new tribe were discovered, we should *know* it too must be depraved and vicious. Simply to be informed that they were *men* would oblige us to conclude that they were "hateful, and hating one another" (Ti 3:3).

INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Part 18

24. *The law of cause and effect.* By this we mean the observing and tracing out of *the connection* which exists between certain notable events in the life of an individual or nation and what led up to the same. For instance, the closing events recorded in the sad history of Lot startle and stagger us by their deplorable and revolting nature. Yet if we carefully ponder all that preceded, then the tragic finale can almost be anticipated. Or take the better-known case of Simon Peter's denial of Christ, which seems to be altogether out of keeping with what we know of his character. Strange indeed is the anomaly presented. That the one who feared not to step out of the ship and walk on the sea to his beloved Master, and who boldly drew his sword and smote off the ear of the high priest's servant when a strong force came to arrest the Saviour, should tremble in the presence of a maid, and be afraid to own the Lord Jesus! Nevertheless, his melancholy fall was not an isolated event having no

relation to what had gone before. Rather was it all of a piece with his previous attitude and actions, being the logical, and virtually the inevitable, sequel to them. These are examples of a numerous class of cases, and they should be carefully borne in mind as we read the biographical portions of Scripture.

This principle of interpretation will be the more easily grasped when we point out that it is much the same as the law of sowing and reaping. That law operates now, in this world, and it is an important part of the expositor's task to observe its outworking in the lives of biblical characters.

Consider then some of the details recorded about Lot *before* his career ended amid the dark shadows of his mountain cave. After the initial reference to him in Genesis 11:31, nothing is said about him until after Abraham's sorry sojourn in Egypt. It appears that Lot contracted Egypt's spirit and acquired a taste for its fleshpots. In Genesis 13:6-7, we read of a strife between the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot. The Lord's later rewarding of the former and the subsequent conduct of the latter seem clearly to intimate which of them was to blame. The proposal that Abraham made to his nephew (13:8-9) was a most generous one, and Lot's carnality at once appeared in the advantage he took of it. Instead of leaving the choice to his uncle, Lot yielded to the lust of the eyes, and chose the plain of Jordan, which was well watered and "like the land of Egypt" (13:10)! Next, he "pitched his tent toward Sodom" (13:12). Then he went and "dwelt in Sodom" (14:12), forsaking the pilgrim's tent for a "house" (19:3). There he settled down, became an alderman, sitting in its "gate" (19:1), while his daughters married men of Sodom.

Let us in a similar way briefly trace the several downward steps which led to Peter's awful fall. There was first his self-assurance and proud boast when he declared, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I" (Mar 14:29). We doubt not his sincerity on that occasion, but it is clear that he realized not his instability. Self-ignorance and self-confidence ever accompany each other—not until self be really known is it distrusted. Second, he failed to comply with his Master's exhortation, "Watch ye and pray" (Mar 14:38-40), and instead went to sleep again. It is only a felt sense of weakness which causes one earnestly to seek strength. Third, he disregarded Christ's solemn warning that Satan desired to seize and sift him (Luk 22:31, 33). Fourth, we behold him acting in the energy of the flesh in drawing the sword (Joh 18:10). Naturally, he meant well, but spiritually, how dull his perceptions. How completely out of place was his weapon in the presence of the meek and lowly Saviour! No wonder we are next told that he followed Christ "afar off" (Mat 26:58), for he was entirely out of the current of His Spirit. Solemn is it to see him disregarding the providential warning of the closed door (Joh 18:16). He was cold spiritually as well as physically, but how pathetic to see him warming himself at the enemy's fire (Joh 18:18). That he "sat down" in such circumstances (Mar 14:54) shows how serious was his decline. All of these things paved the way for his ultimate cursing and swearing (Mat 26:74).

What unmistakable and manifest instances are the above of the working of the law of cause and effect! But let us turn now to a different class of cases, where there was a different sowing and a happier reaping. In Genesis 22, we have one of the most touching and exquisite scenes presented in the Scriptures. There we behold grace triumphing over nature, the spirit rising superior to the flesh. It was the final and severest test to which the

faith and obedience of Abraham were submitted. He was called upon to sacrifice his beloved Isaac, and to be himself the executioner. How grandly the sorely tried patriarch responded, binding his only son, laying him on the altar, taking the knife in his hand, and desisting not until a voice from heaven bade him slay not the lad. Now observe the blessed though less-known sequel. Said the angel of the covenant unto him, "By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for *because* thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed...*because* thou hast obeyed my voice" (verses 16-18). Thus was the Lord pleased to make mention of His servant's submission as the consideration of His gracious reward on this occasion. Not that there was any proportion between the one and the other, but that He thereby placed this honour upon that faith and obedience by which Abraham had honoured Him. Later, he made gracious promises to Isaac, "because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge" (26:2-5).

In Numbers 14, a very different scene is presented to our view. There we behold the reactions of Israel unto the doleful report made by the unbelieving majority of the spies which Moses had sent to reconnoiter Canaan. "All the congregation lifted up their voice, and...wept" (verse 1), conducting themselves like a lot of peevish children. Worse still, they murmured against Moses and Aaron, and spoke of appointing a new leader to conduct them back again to Egypt. At considerable risk to their lives (verse 10), Joshua and Caleb remonstrated with them. The Lord interposed, passed sentence upon that faithless generation, sentencing them to die in the wilderness. In blessed contrast therewith, He said, "But my servant Caleb, *because* he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it" (verse 24). Numbers 25 supplies us with another example of the same principle. Setting aside his own feelings, the son of Eleazar acted for the honour of JEHOVAH, and of him the Lord said, he "hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake...Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; *because* he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel" (verses 10-13).

Now it scarcely needs pointing out that neither Abraham, Caleb, nor Phinehas brought God into his debt, or placed Him under any obligation to them. Yet their cases illustrate a most important principle in the governmental ways of God. That principle is stated in His own declaration: "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1Sa 2:30). Though there be nothing whatever meritorious about the good works of His people, God is pleased to bear testimony of His approval of the same and make it manifest concerning His commandments that "in keeping of them there is great reward" (Psa 19:11). Thus the Lord witnessed to His acceptance of the holy zeal of Phinehas by putting an immediate stop to the plague upon Israel, and by entailing the priesthood on his family.

As Matthew Henry pointed out, "The reward answered to the service: by executing justice he had made an atonement for the children of Israel (Num 25:13), and therefore he and his should henceforth be employed in making atonement by sacrifice." Proverbs 11:31 states the same principle. "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth." As Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) remarked, "Albeit that the dispositions of divine grace

are to the fullest degree sovereign and irrespective of human merit, yet in the dealings of Providence there is often discernible a rule of justice by which the injured are at length avenged and the righteous ultimately delivered.”

David acknowledged, “The LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight” (Psa 18:24). He was alluding to God’s delivering him from his enemies, particularly from Saul. How had he conducted himself toward the king? Did he commit any sin which warranted his hostility? Did he injure him in any way? No, he neither hated Saul nor coveted his throne, and therefore that monarch was most unjust in so relentlessly seeking his life.

So innocent was David in this respect that he appealed to the great Searcher of hearts, “Let not them that are mine enemies *wrongfully* rejoice over me” (Psa 35:19). Thus, when he said, “The LORD recompense me according to my righteousness,” he was far from giving vent to a pharisaical spirit. Instead, he was avowing his innocence before the bar of *human* equity. Since he bore his persecutor no malice, he enjoyed the testimony of a good conscience. In all that he suffered at the hands of Saul, David retaliated not. He not only refused to slay, or even injure him when he was at his mercy, but he took every opportunity to serve the cause of Israel, notwithstanding the ingratitude, envy, and treachery he received in return. In his deliverance and in having the throne conferred upon him, David recognized one of the basic principles operating in the divine government of this world, and owned that God had graciously rewarded him because of his integrity.

Deity hesitates not to take as one of His titles, “The LORD God of recompences” (Jer 51:56), and has shown, all through His Word, that He deals with sinner and saint as such. Unto Joshua He said, that if he gave His Word its proper place, meditated in it day and night, that he might observe to do according to all that is written therein, “*Then* thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and *then* thou shalt have good success” (Jos 1:8 and cf. Job 36:11; Pro 3:1-4). On the other hand, He said to wayward Israel, “Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? *Because* ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you” (2Ch 24:20). That is an unvarying principle in His government. Of Uzziah, we read, “As long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper” (2Ch 26:5). The judgment of God even upon Ahab’s kingdom was postponed, “Because he humbled himself before me,” said God (1Ki 21:29). Contrariwise, He told David that the sword should never depart from his house, “because thou hast despised me” (2Sa 12:9-10). The New Testament teaches the same thing. “Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy” (Mat 5:7). “If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (6:15). “With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (7:2). “*Because* thou hast kept the word of my patience, *I also* will keep thee” (Rev 3:10).

God has established an inseparable connection between holiness and happiness, and it is no small part of the expositor’s work to point out that as our ways please Him, His smile is upon us, but when we are wayward, we are greatly the losers. To show that though God’s people are not under the curse of the rod, they *are* under discipline—and for him to note scriptural illustrations of that fact. It is one thing to have our sins pardoned, but it is quite another to enjoy God’s favours in providence and nature as well as spiritually, as the lives of biblical characters clearly exemplify. God does not afflict willingly (Lam 3:33),

but chastens because we give Him occasion to do so (Psa 89:30-33). When we grieve not the Holy Spirit, He makes Christ more real and precious to the soul. The channel of blessing is unchoked, and real answers are received to prayer. But alas, how often we give God occasion to say, "Your sins have withholden good things from you" (Jer 5:25). Then let the preacher miss no opportunity of proving from Scripture that the path of obedience is the path of blessing (Psa 81:11-16), and demonstrate that God orders His ways with us according to our conduct (Jer 17:10)—He did so with Christ Himself, John 8:29; 10:17; Psalm 45:7.

25. *The law of emphasis.* The fundamental importance and perpetuity of the moral law was intimated in its being written by God's own finger, and by the two tables on which it was inscribed being placed for safe custody within the sacred ark. The inestimable value of the Gospel was signified in its being announced to the shepherds by an angel, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people," and his being joined by a great multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luk 2:10).

The relative weightiness of anything is generally indicated by the place and prominence given to it in the Scriptures. Thus, only two of the evangelists make mention of the actual birth of Christ. Only one of them supplies us with any details about His boyhood. Mark and Luke alone refer to His ascension, but all four of them describe His sacrificial death and victorious resurrection! How plainly that tells us *which* should be most pressed by His servants, and which should most engage the hearts and minds of His people!

Another means and method employed by the Spirit to arrest our attention and focus our minds upon distinct portions of the truth is His use of a great number of "figures of speech." In them, He has arranged words and phrases in an unusual manner for the purpose of more deeply impressing the reader with what is said.

The learned author of *The Companion Bible* (now almost unobtainable) dealt more fully with this subject than any English writer, and from him we now select one or two examples. The figure of *anabasis* or graduation, in which there is the working up to a climax, as in, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, *yea rather*, that is risen again, who is *even* at the right hand of God, who *also* maketh intercession for us" (Rom 8:33-34). So again in 11 Peter 1:5-7, "add to your faith virtue...charity." The opposite figure is that of *catabasis* or gradual descent, a notable instance of which is found in Philippians 2:6-8.

The more common form of emphasis is that of *repetition*. This is found in the Word in quite a variety of ways, as in the doubling of a name, "Abraham, Abraham" (Gen 22:11). There were six other individuals whom the Lord thus addressed, "Jacob, Jacob" (46:2), "Moses, Moses" (Exo 3:4), "Samuel, Samuel" (1Sa 3:10), "Martha, Martha" (Luk 10:41), "Simon, Simon" (Luk 22:31), "Saul, Saul" (Act 9:4). Then there was our Lord's pathetic, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem" (Mat 23:37), and His cry of anguish, "My God, my God" (Mat 27:46); as there will yet be the urgent "Lord, Lord" of the lost (Luk 13:25).

Such intensified forms of expression as "the holy of holies," "the song of songs" (Song 1:1), "vanity of vanities" (Ecc 12:8), and the unspeakable "for ever and ever" (Psa 10:16; 45:6; Heb 1:8), express the same principle. Again, "Wait on the LORD: be of good cour-

age, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD” (Psa 27:14); “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice” (Phi 4:4). Yet more emphatic is the, “Holy, holy, holy” of Isaiah 6:3, the “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD” (Jer 22:29), and because it will not, the, “I will overturn, overturn, overturn” (Eze 21:27), with the resultant, “Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth” (Rev 8:13).

A simple form of structural repetition occurs in the adoring language found at both the beginning and the end of Psalm 8, “O LORD our LORD, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” Other forms of this principle are what are technically known as *cyloides*, or circular repetition, where the same phrase occurs at regular intervals, as in, “Turn us again, O God” (Psa 80:3, 7, 19); *epibole*, or overlaid repetition, where the same phrase is used at irregular intervals, as, “The voice of the LORD” (Psa 29: 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9); *epimone*, or lingering, where the repetition is with the design of making a more lasting impression, as in John 21:15-17, where our Lord continued to challenge the love of His erring disciple, and evinced His acceptance of his responses by His, “Feed my lambs, feed my sheep.”

In the Old Testament, many examples are found of what is called Hebrew parallelism, in which the same thought is expressed in different language. For instance, “He shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness” (Psa 9:8). “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Pro 16:18, and compare Isa 1:18). In other cases, the truth is driven home by a contrast, “The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just” (Pro 3:33, and 15:17). In the Greek, emphasis is indicated by the order of words in a sentence, “Now of Jesus Christ the birth was on this wise” (Mat 1:18); “But commendeth his love toward us” (Rom 5:8).

The importance of *heeding* the divine emphasis is intimated in a number of ways. The “verily, verily” (Joh 1:51 etc.) with which Christ prefaced some of His weightiest utterances. His use of the interrogative rather than the affirmative in such cases as, “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mar 8:36)—so much more forceful than “It would profit a man nothing if,” etc.

In order to call urgent attention to what He has just said, Christ’s, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) is used again, with a slight variation, in each of His addresses to the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3. Several notable statements of Paul are prefaced with “This is a faithful saying” (1Ti 1:15; 4:9; 2Ti 2:11; Ti 3:8). When he explains the significance of Melchizedek, he gives point to this principle, “*First* being by interpretation King of righteousness, and *after that* also King of Salem, which is, King of peace” (Heb 7:2 and cf. Jam 3:17). For the purpose of impressiveness, other declarations are introduced with the word “Behold.” “*Behold*, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psa 133:1 and cf. 1Jo 3:1).

