

Vol. XXVIII

April, 1949

No. 4

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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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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IDENTIFICATION OF THE GODLY

“That every one which *seeth* the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life” (Joh 6:40). There is a seeing *of* the Son which is necessary for a saving faith *in* Him. That sight of Him is far more than an intellectual perception, being an experiential revelation of Him in the soul. The majority of professing Christians have nothing better than a natural notion and image of Christ in their brains; but those who behold Him to their everlasting well-being are granted a spiritual and supernatural sight of Him. That raises the vitally important question, How may I be certain that the *latter* is my case? By the *effects produced*. The sinner is brought to realize his desperate and dire need of Christ, and made sensible that He alone can meet his desperate case.

Christ can only be effectually seen in His own light (Psa 36:9; 2Co 4:6). As the sun cannot be seen except by its own light, neither can the Son of righteousness be beheld, unless He arises upon us with healing in His wings. He whose eyes were formerly blinded by sin, is now given a spiritual and inward sight of Him who is fairer than the children of men. By that sight, Christ is beheld as an all-sufficient Saviour for the vilest of sinners; and the heart is drawn out irresistibly to Him. He is now seen as a perfectly suited Physician to heal, Prophet to instruct, Priest to cleanse, and King to subdue His enemies.

1. A spiritual sight of the Son begets faith in Him. It cannot be otherwise, for such a view of Christ compels confidence in Him. When the Lord Jesus performed His first miracle at Cana and “manifested forth his glory,” we read that His disciples “believed on him” (Joh 2:11). A revelation of Christ puts unbelief quite out of countenance. While unbelief prevails, it says, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails... I will not believe” (Joh 20:25); but when Christ appears, faith exclaims, “My Lord and my God” (Joh 20:28). When a man’s eyes are opened to see the King in His beauty, his heart at once closes with Him. “They that *know* thy name *will* put their trust in thee” (Psa 9:10).

2. A spiritual sight of the Son works repentance and sorrow for sin. It is written, “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son” (Zec 12:10), which is fulfilled in the experience of every one whose eyes have been opened by divine grace. “Was it possible for you, O believer, to look upon this glorious Son of righteousness without a watering eye and a mourning penitential heart? Did not the heart, that was harder than a flint, become softer than wax, melting beneath the warm fire of the love of God manifested in Christ?”—Ralph Erskine (1685-1752). When Job saw the LORD, he abhorred himself and repented in dust and ashes (Job 42:5-6).

3. A spiritual sight of the Son inspires hope. The unregenerate, even the hypocrite, has a “hope” (Job 8:13), but when a person is supernaturally illumined by the Spirit, he perceives that his hope rests on a rotten foundation, and he is obliged to forsake his refuge of lies. Now he is horrified over his enmity against God and terrified at the imminent prospect of suffering His wrath for ever. His awful sins stare him in the face, and his expectation of escaping the just punishment of them expires. But a revelation of Christ to the soul changes his despair into a lively hope, and his fervent longing now is “to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phi 1:23).

4. A spiritual sight of the Son engenders love to Him, not only for His bounty, but chiefly for His beauty. This it is, and this alone, which breaks the power of natural enmity against God. Naught but a revelation of Christ will win the heart to Him. “Whom having not seen [by sense], ye love” (1Pe 1:8). Was it not so with Saul of Tarsus? Filled with prejudice and hatred against Christ and His followers, a sight of Him made him immediately drop the arms of his rebellion and cry, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Act 9:6). It is impossible to have a discovery of Christ made to the soul and yet not love Him, His people, and His precepts. I may indeed mourn the feebleness and fickleness of my love, yet I certainly would not do so if I still hated Him!

5. A spiritual sight of the Son causes a yearning for knowledge. Not of profitless speculations on prophecy, nor for a better grasp of theology, but for a deeper and fuller apprehension of Christ Himself: in His wondrous person, His glorious offices, His peerless perfections, and His perfect work; and that, not merely information of the same, but a personal acquaintance with them. When Christ has made Himself known to one, his longing is “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple” (Psa 27:4). No matter to what extent he may grow in grace, yet he will still desire and purpose with

Paul “that I may know him” (Phi 3:10), counting all else but loss, “for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phi 3:8), longing for the immediate vision of Him in glory.

6. A spiritual sight of the Son brings liberty. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2Co 3:17). The reference there, as the next verse goes on to show, is to the Comforter *as* a Spirit of revelation, discovering to the believer the glory of the Lord and conforming him thereto. Such is the actual experience of God’s children. A supernatural beholding of the glory of God in the face of Christ looses our chains, frees us from our legal bondage, and delivers from fears of the wrath to come. Liberty is then ours to freely unbosom ourselves to the Lord as we never did before, to tell out to Him the burden of our hearts, to pray and plead before Him in childlike reality. This it is which liberates the captive and opens the doors of the prison to him who previously was bound (Isa 61:1). “I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears” (Psa 34:4).

7. A spiritual sight of the Son instills joy. Therein is the spiritual fulfilment and personal application of that promise, “The wilderness and the solitary place [the Christless soul] shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing.” And what is it, dear reader, which occasions such a glorious transformation from desolation and barrenness into jubilation and fertility? This: “They shall *see* the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God” (Isa 35:1-2). The experience of their father Abraham is reproduced in all his believing children: “Abraham rejoiced to see my day” said Christ, “and he saw it, and was glad” (Joh 8:56). Thus it was, too, with the apostles: “Then were the disciples *glad*, when they *saw* the Lord” (Joh 20:20). A discovery of Christ unto the soul cannot but produce gladness.

8. A spiritual sight of the Son engenders longings. Longings to be delivered from the raging of indwelling sin, from the surgings of pride, the risings of self-will, the chilling blasts of unbelief—from everything which hinders his enjoyment of the Lord. The experience of such a soul is expressed in those words, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God” (Psa 42:1). Panteth for more of His grace to triumph over trials and hinderances; for more of His holiness, to be more fully conformed to His image; for more of His strength to overcome temptations; for more of His spirit to be brought into closer and more constant communion with Him. Yea, a discovery of Christ to the soul creates longings to depart from this scene and to be with Him for ever.

9. A spiritual sight of the Son causes contempt of the world and all that is within it. Once Christ is made a living reality to the heart, that person realizes that everything under the sun is “vanity and vexation of spirit” (Ecc 1:14; 2:17). He now finds that the most alluring wells of this world are “broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer 2:13), and can minister no satisfaction unto him. He has been thoroughly spoiled for them. An internal revelation of Christ completely eclipses the beauty and glory of those objects which charm the ungodly. His language now is, “What have I to do any more with idols?” (Hos 14:8). Moses esteemed the very “reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Heb 11:26). Even though he suffer a relapse and his love for Christ so cools that for a time he returns to the dainties which the unregenerate feed on, he finds them to be no better than “husks” which the swine eat.

10. A spiritual sight of the Son evokes zeal. There are indeed many who “have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge” (Rom 10:2), for it issues from the feverish energy of the flesh rather than being prompted by the Holy Spirit, and is directed by impulse, carnal reason, or tradition, instead of by means of God’s Word. But an inward revelation of Christ conveys such an experiential knowledge of Him as regularizes our energies and leads the soul to do and suffer for Him. Love for Him will not allow its possessor to be ideal, but constrains him to further His cause and help His followers. He has a true zeal for the honour and the glory of Christ as moves him to deny self, separate from the world, and run in the way of His commandments. Though he be ridiculed and persecuted, these things move him not, and he counts not his life dear unto himself.

If such effects as the above have been produced in you, my readers, then it can be said, “*Blessed are your eyes, for they see*” (Mat 13:16).



THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

64. 1 Peter 1:4-5

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1Pe 1:3). It is to be recalled that this epistle is addressed unto those who are “strangers scattered” abroad (1Pe 1:1). Most fitting then was this reference to the divine begetting of God’s elect, for it is thereby they are made such, both in heart and in conduct. The Lord Jesus was a Stranger here (Psa 69:8), for He was the Son of God from heaven; and so too are His people, for they have His Spirit within them. How that enhances this miracle of grace! Divine begetting is not only a doctrinal fact, but the actual communication to the soul of the very life of God (Joh 1:13). Formerly the Christian was both “in” and “of” the world, but now his “conversation [citizenship] is in heaven” (Phi 3:20), and “I am a stranger in the earth” (Psa 119:19) is henceforth his confession. To the soul renewed by God, this world becomes a barren wilderness: his heritage, his Home, is on high; and therefore, he now views the things of time and sense in a very different light from what he did before.

The chief interests of a born-again soul lie not in this mundane sphere. His affections will be set upon things above, and in proportion as they *are* so, his heart is detached from this world. Their strangership is an essential mark which distinguishes the saints from the ungodly. They who heartily embrace the promises of God are suitably affected by them (Heb 11:13). One of the certain effects of divine grace in the soul is to separate its possessor, both in spirit and in practice, from the world. His delight in heavenly things manifests itself in a weanedness from the things of earth—as the woman at the well left her bucket when she obtained from Christ the living water (Joh 4:28). Such a spirit constitutes him an alien among the worshippers of mammon. He is morally a foreigner in a strange land, surrounded by those who know him not (1Jo 3:1); neither understanding his joys or sorrows, nor appreciating the principles and motives which actuate him, for their pursuits and pleasures are radically different from his. Nay, he finds himself in the midst of enemies who hate him (Joh 15:19), and there is none with whom he can have communion, save the very few who have “obtained like precious faith” (2Pe 1:1).

But though there be nothing in this wilderness-world for the Christian, he has been “begotten...again unto a lively hope” (1Pe 1:3). Previously, he viewed death with horror, but now he perceives it will provide a blessed release from all sin and sorrow, and open the door into Paradise. The principle of grace received at the new birth not only inclines its possessor to love God and act faith on His Word, but also to “look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (2Co 4:18), inclining his aspirations away from the present unto the glorious future. As Thomas Manton (1620-1677) said, “The new nature was made for another world: it came from thence, and it carrieth the soul thither.” *Hope* is an assured expectation of future good. While faith is in exercise a vista of unclouded bliss, it is set before the heart, and hope enters into the enjoyment of the same. It is a living hope in a dying scene, which both supports and invigorates. While in healthy activity, hope not only sustains amid the trials of this life but lifts us above them. O for hearts to be more engaged in joyous anticipations of the future: they will quicken unto duty and stimulate unto perseverance. According to the intelligence and strength of hope will be our deliverance from the fear of death.

A further word must now be said upon the relation which “the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” bears to the Father’s begetting us unto this living hope. His God-honouring work and triumphant emergence from the grave was the *meritorious cause* not only of the justification of His people, but of their regeneration also. Mystically, they were delivered from their death in law when their Surety arose: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us *together with* Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together” (Eph 2:4-6). Those words refer to the corporate union of the Church with the Head and her judicial participation in His victory, and not to an individual experience. Nevertheless, since all the elect rose federally when their Representative arose, they must in due time be regenerated; since they have been made alive legally, they must in due course be quickened spiritually. Had not Christ risen, none had been quickened (1Co 15:17); but because He lives, they shall live also. The life that is in the Head must be communicated unto the members of His body.

The resurrection of Christ is the *virtual* cause of our regeneration. The Holy Spirit had not been given unless Christ had slain the last enemy and gone to the Father: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us...that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal 3:13-14). Regeneration issues as truly from the virtue of Christ's resurrection as does our justification. He purchased for His people the blessed Spirit to raise them up to grace and glory: "According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly *through* Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Ti 3:5-6)—i.e. because of His merits and mediation. The Holy Spirit is here to testify of Him to God's elect, to raise up faith in them to Him that they "may abound in hope" (Rom 15:12-13). Our spiritual deliverance from the grave of sin's guilt and pollution is as much owing to the efficacy of Christ's triumph over death as will be our physical vivication at His return. He is "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom 8:29).

The resurrection of Christ is also in the *exemplary pattern* of our regeneration. The same power put forth in raising Christ's body is employed in the recovering of our souls (Eph 1:19). The Lord Jesus is designated "the first begotten of the dead" (Rev 1:5), because His emerging from the grave was not only the pledge, but the likeness of both the regeneration of the souls of His people and the raising of their bodies. The similitude is obvious. Begetting is the beginning of a new life. When Christ was born into this world, it was "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3)—clothed with infirmity because of imputed iniquity; but when He rose in power and glory, it was in a body fitted for heaven: at regeneration, we receive a nature which makes us meet for heaven. As God's raising of Christ testified to His being pacified by His sacrifice (Heb 13:20), so by begetting us again, He assures us of our personal interest therein. As Christ's resurrection was the grand proof of His divine Sonship (Rom 1:4), so the new birth is the first open manifestation of our adoption. As Christ's resurrection was the first step into His glory and exaltation, so regeneration is the first stage of our entrance into all spiritual privileges.

Seventh, *its substance*: "To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for [us]" (1Pe 1:4). Regeneration is in order to glorification. We are begotten spiritually unto two things: a living hope in the present, a glorious heritage in the future. It is by God's begetting that we obtain our title to the latter. Inheritances go by birth: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (Joh 3:5). If not sons, there can be no heirship, and we must be born of God in order to become (vitaly) the children of God. But "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17). Not only does begetting confer title, but it also guarantees the inheritance. Already, the Christian has received the Spirit "which is the earnest of our inheritance" (Eph 1:14). As Christ's part was to purchase, so the Spirit's part is to make it known unto the heirs: "The things which God hath prepared for them that love him," He "hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (1Co 2:9-10). It is the Spirit's province to vouchsafe the regenerate sweet foretastes of what is in store for them, to bring something of heaven's joy into their souls on earth.

Not only does divine begetting give title to and ensure the inheritance, but it also imparts a *meetness* for the same. At the new birth, a nature is imparted which is suited to the celestial sphere, which qualifies the soul to dwell for ever with the Holy One (as is evident from his present communion with Him), and at the close of his earthly pilgrimage, indwelling sin (which now hinders his communion) dies with the body. It is all too little realized by the saints that at regeneration, they are at once fitted for heaven. Many of them—to the serious diminution of their peace and joy—suppose that they must still pass through a process of severe discipline and refining ere they are ready to enter the courts above. That is but another relic of Romanism. The case of the dying thief, who was taken immediately from his spiritual birthplace into Paradise, should teach them better. But it does not. So legalistic remains the heart even of a Christian that it is very difficult to convince him that the very hour he was born again, he was made as suitable for heaven as ever he would be, though he remained on earth another century; that no growth in grace or passing through fiery trials is essential to prepare the soul for the Father's House.

Nowhere does Scripture say that believers are "ripened," "meetened," or "gradually fitted" for heaven. The Holy Spirit expressly declares that God the Father hath "according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again...to an inheritance" (1Pe 1:3-4). What could be plainer? Nor does our text by any means stand alone. Christians have already been made "partakers of the divine nature" (2Pe 1:4), and what more can be needed to fit them for the divine presence? Scripture emphatically declares, "If a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal 4:7). The inheritance is the child's birthright or patrimony. To speak of "heirs" not being eligible for an estate is a contradiction in terms. Our fitness for the inheritance lies alone in our being

the children of God. If it be true that “except a man be born again, he cannot see [or enter] the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3, 5), then conversely, it necessarily follows that once he *has been* born again, he is qualified for an entrance into and enjoyment of God’s kingdom. All room for argument thereon is excluded by “giving thanks unto the Father, which *hath* made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12)—see our article thereon in the June 1947 issue.

By regeneration, we are made vitally one with Christ and thereby become “joint-heirs” (Rom 8:17) with Him. The portion of the Bride is her participation in that of the Bridegroom: “And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them” (Joh 17:22) declares the Redeemer of His redeemed. This too needs stressing today when so much error is parading itself as the Truth. In their fanciful attempts to “rightly [divide] the word of truth” (2Ti 2:15), men have wrongly divided the family of God. Dispensationalists hold that not only is there a distinction of earthly privileges, but that the same distinctions will be perpetuated in the world to come, that the New Testament believers will look down from a superior elevation upon Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; that saints who lived and died previously to Pentecost will not participate in the glory of the Church or enter into the inheritance “reserved in heaven for [us]” (1Pe 1:4). To affirm that those of this Christian era are to occupy a higher position and enjoy grander privileges than will those of previous ages is a serious and inexcusable mistake, for it clashes with the most fundamental teachings of Scriptures concerning the purpose of the Father, the redemption of Christ, and the work of the Spirit, and repudiates the essential features of God’s “so great salvation” (Heb 2:3).

All of God’s elect are the common-sharers of the riches of His wondrous grace, vessels he afore prepared “unto glory” (Rom 9:23), whom He predestinated to be “conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29). Christ acted as the Surety of the entire election of grace, and what His meritorious work secured for one of them, it necessarily secured for all. The saints of all ages are fellowheirs: each of them was predestinated by the same Father (Joh 10:16), each of them was regenerated by the same Spirit (2Co 4:13), each of them looked unto and trusted in the same Saviour. Scripture knows of no salvation which does not issue in joint-heirship with Christ. Those to whom God gives His Son—namely, the whole company of His elect from Abel to the end of earth’s history—He also “freely [gives them] *all* things” (Rom 8:32). That both Abraham and David were justified by faith is plain from Romans 4, and there is no higher destiny or more glorious prospect than that to which justification gives full title. The work of the Holy Spirit is identical in every member of God’s family: begetting them to, qualifying them for, a celestial heritage. All those who were effectually called by Him during the Old Testament era received the promise of “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15). Heaven-born children must have a heavenly portion.

A few words now upon that heavenly portion. It is one that is agreeable to the new life received at regeneration: a state of perfect holiness and happiness suited to spiritual beings united to material bodies. Many and varied are the descriptions given in Scripture of the nature of our inheritance. “Salvation” (Heb 9:28; 1Pe 1:5) in its fullness and perfection, bestowed upon the redeemed at Christ’s return. The “Father’s house [with its] many mansions,” which the Saviour is now preparing for “his own” (Joh 14:1-2). “The inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12), the purchased possession of the “the children of light” (1Th 5:5). “A city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” unto which Abraham’s faith and hope looked (Heb 11:10), and which is depicted in Revelation 21:10-27. “A kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb 12:28), even “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 1:11). God’s “eternal glory” unto which He has called us (1Pe 5:10), particularly as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ: “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory” (Joh 17:24). “The paradise of God” (Rev 2:7), of which Eden was but a shadow, and in which there is provided “fulness of joy...pleasures for evermore” (Psa 16:11).

“The celestial blessedness here, and in many other passages of Scripture receives the appellation of ‘an inheritance’ for two reasons—to mark its gratuitous nature, and to mark its secure tenure. An inheritance is something that is not obtained by the individual’s own exertions, but by the free gift or bequest of another. The earthly inheritance of the external people of God was not given them because they were greater or better than the other nations. It was because ‘the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them’ (Deu 10:15 and compare Psa 44:3). And the heavenly inheritance of the spiritual people of God is entirely the gift of sovereign kindness: ‘the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord’ (Rom 6:23). Again; no right is more indefeasible than the right of inheritance. If the right of the giver or bequeather be good, all is secure. The heavenly happiness, whether viewed as the gift of the divine Father or the bequest of the divine Son, is ‘sure to all the seed’ (Rom 4:16). If the title of the claimants be but as valid as the right of the origi-

nal proprietor, their tenure must be as secure as the Throne of God and of His Son”—John Brown of Had-dington (1722-1787).

The *excellence* of this “inheritance” or everlasting portion of the redeemed is described by three words. First, “incorruptible,” and thus, it is like its Author: “The incorruptible God” (Rom 1:23). All corruption is a change from better to worse, but heaven is without change or end. Hence, “incorruptible” has the force of enduring, imperishable. Nor will it corrupt its heirs, as many a worldly one has done. Second, it is “undefiled”; and thus, it is like its Purchaser, who passed through this depraved world uncontaminated (Heb 7:26), as a sunbeam is unsullied, though it shines on a filthy object. All defilement is by sin, but no germ of it can ever enter heaven. Hence, “undefiled” has the force of beneficent, incapable of injuring its possessors. Third, it “fadeth not away”; and thus, it is like the One who conducts us thither: “the *eternal* Spirit” (Heb 9:14)—the Holy Spirit, “pure river of [the] water of life” (Rev 22:1). “Undefiled” tells of its perennial and perpetual freshness: its splendour will never be marred, nor its beauty diminished. “Reserved in heaven” (1Pe 1:4) tells of the location and security of our inheritance: see Colossians 1:5; 2 Timothy 4:18.

Putting together the four descriptive terms, we are shown, first, the *nature* of our inheritance—indestructible. The substance of every earthly grandeur wears away; the mightiest empires eventually dissipate by reason of inherent corruption. Second, its *purity*: no serpent shall ever enter this paradise to defile it. Third, its changeless *beauty*: no rust shall tarnish or moth mar it, nor shall endless ages produce a wrinkle. Fourth, its *security*. It is guarded by Christ for His redeemed: no thief shall ever break into it. More specifically: it seems to us there is here a designed series of contrasts. First, from the inheritance of Adam: how soon was Eden corrupted! Second, from the inheritance which the Most High “divided to the nations” (Deu 32:8), which one and all have defiled by greed and bloodshed. Third, from the inheritance of Israel: how sadly the land of milk and honey wilted under the droughts and famines, which the LORD sent on it for their sins. Fourth, from that of the fallen angels, in heaven itself, who “kept not their first estate” (Jude :6), having no High Priest to intercede for them.

The apostle’s reference to the heavenly heritage of believers was a most appropriate one. He was writing to those who were—both naturally and spiritually—away from their homeland, aliens in a strange country. Many of them were converted Jews, and, as such, fiercely opposed and most cruelly treated. When a Jew became a Christian, he forfeited much: excommunicated from the synagogue, he became an outcast from his own people. Nevertheless, there was rich compensation for him. He had been divinely begotten unto an inheritance infinitely superior, both in quality and duration, to the land of Palestine: thus his gains far more than made up for his losses. The Holy Spirit, then, from the outset of the epistle, drew out the hearts of those suffering saints unto God by setting before them His abundant mercy and the exceeding riches of His grace. According as they were occupied with the same would their minds be lifted above this scene and their hearts filled with praise unto God. While few of *us* are experiencing any trials comparable with *theirs*, yet our lot is cast in a very dark day, and it behoves us to look away from the things seen and more and more fix our attention upon the blissful future awaiting us. Since God has designed such for us, how we should glorify Him!



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

44. Strategy

Lack of space prevented our adding a word at the close of our last on the concluding verse of Joshua 7, so to it we now turn: "And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor ['Trouble'], unto this day." Three things are to be noted: the memorial to solemnly remind Israel of Achan's sin, the LORD's reconciliation, and the name given to the place of execution and appeasement. As the twelve stones taken out of Jordan were permanently pitched in Gilgal (Jos 4:20-23) to perpetuate the memory of the miracle which the LORD had so graciously wrought there, so a great heap of stones was raised to mark the spot where the vengeance of the Holy One fell upon the one who had so grievously offended Him. That heap of stones was designed to serve as a terrible warning against the crime of sacrilege, to rebuke those who imagine themselves secure in secret sins, and to furnish a witness of what an awful thing it is to be a troubler of God's people.

There is an instructive emphasis in the "So the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger" (Jos 7:26), teaching us that the assemblies of His people must exercise a strict and holy discipline (for the honour of His name) if they are to escape His governmental judgments and chastenings. Cast into its positive form, that statement would read: when Israel had put away "the accursed thing" and dealt faithfully with the disturber of their peace, they were restored again to God's favour. Two further references are made in the Scriptures to this place, and very significant and blessed they are. Unto backsliding Israel, the LORD declared His purpose to recover and restore her, saying, "I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a *door of hope*" (Hos 2:15): our putting away of the offensive thing—by repentance and reformation—affords ground for hoping that God will renew His favours unto us. "And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor [where things are put right with God] a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have *sought me*" (Isa 65:10)—a promise which should be spiritualized and pleaded by each wayward but contrite saint.

"And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land" (Jos 8:1). In the preceding verse, we are told, "So the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger"; and while there can be little or no doubt that Joshua would—after the matter of Achan had been dealt with—*infer the same*, yet he had not been given any token from Him that such was the case; but now he received from God a word of cheer, a word of instruction, and a word of promise for faith to lay hold of. "When we have faithfully put away sin, that accursed thing which separates between our God, then, and not till then, we may expect to hear from God for our comfort; and God's directing us how to go on in our Christian walk, and warfare is a good evidence of His being reconciled to us"—Matthew Henry (1662-1714): that is, fellowship with Him is now restored. Note well that commentator's "and not till then": no purveyors of "smooth things" (Isa 30:10) were the faithful and practical Puritans, nor did they entertain their hearers and readers with matters of no spiritual profit.

The LORD's word "arise" intimates that, following the stoning of Achan and his family, Joshua again took his place on his face, or at least on his knees, before the LORD, seeking consolation and counsel from Him. Israel's progress in their conquest and occupation of Canaan had been rudely interrupted, and though the hindering cause had been put away, yet Joshua dare not attempt any further advance until His Master gave fresh indication of His will. This teaches us that, after a sin has been unsparingly judged by us—be it the case of an individual Christian, or that of an assembly—there must be a humble and definite waiting upon God for guidance as to what He would have us do next. His "fear not, neither be thou dismayed" (Jos 8:1) shows that the offence of Achan and its disastrous consequences had been a sore and unexpected blow to Joshua, making him almost ready to faint. "Corruptions within the church weaken the hands and dampen the spirits of her guides and helpers, more than opposition from without; treacherous Israelites are to be dreaded more than malicious Canaanites"—M. Henry.

That word, "fear not, neither be thou dismayed," was designed not only for Joshua personally, but for the whole of the congregation. Israel had failed lamentably at their first assault upon Ai, had been deeply humiliated, and in consequence, "the hearts of the people melted, and became as water" (Jos 7:5); and though they had obeyed the divine command of Joshua 7:15 in utterly destroying the culprit and all that he

had, yet they were in real need of an intimation that they had been restored to God's favour, and could count upon His leading them again to victory. Equally requisite is it that the penitent and humbled Christian should lay hold of this or some similar reassuring word. When iniquities have prevailed against him (Psa 65:3) and the enemy has humiliated him, he is prone to be "swallowed up with overmuch sorrow" (2Co 2:7) and suffer Satan to keep him in the slough of despond, which is not only needless and foolish, but dishonouring to God. If he has sincerely and contritely forsaken his sins, then he should confidently reckon upon God's mercy (Pro 28:13) and appropriate His promise, "he is faithful and just [to Christ's atoning sacrifice] to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1Jo 1:9).

The word of comfort or reassurance was followed by one of instruction: "Take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai" (Jos 8:1). Therein Joshua and the people under him received definite directions from the LORD what they must next do. Joshua was now to turn from the Throne of Grace and make for the field of battle, as the believer has to leave the place of secret prayer and go forth to conflict in the world. Linking the two words together, the LORD was bidding His servant not to be dismayed by the previous repulse at Ai, but to be strong and courageous. In like manner, He calls upon the restored backslider to renew the contest with his enemies. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Quit not the fight because you have been worsted, nor even if you were wounded. Though you were blameable for the failure, having confessed the same to God, resume the struggle. *That* is a part of what is included in "perseverance in grace" or "the final perseverance of the saints." "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise" (Mic 7:8). In its application to us individually, the "take all the people of war with thee" (Jos 8:1) means, See to it that all your powers and graces are exerted in a concerted effort.

"See, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land." That was spoken from the divine purpose: it was not "I will," but "I have given." It was God who "calleth those things which be not as though they were," as when He told the aged patriarch with barren wife, "I *have* made thee a father of many nations" (Rom 4:17). And as that word to Abraham was addressed unto his *faith*, so was this one here to Joshua. "See, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai" signified, Regard it as an accomplished fact, behold the victory with the eye of your spirit as one already achieved. It is thus that the soldiers of Christ are to wage their spiritual warfare, fully persuaded of the happy outcome. As the beloved, yet often hard-pressed, apostle expressed it: "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air" (1Co 9:26)—having no doubt whatever of reaching the goal, nor of vanquishing his enemy. It is "the good fight of *faith*" (1Ti 6:12), to which we are called; but if we be regulated by our reason or feelings, it soon becomes a fight of unbelief. This "see" (by faith) of Joshua 8:1 was similar to that of Exodus 14:13 and Joshua 6:2 (compare our remarks thereon in the March 1948 article).

Ere passing on to the next verse, let it be pointed out that the one we have just been pondering contains a timely message for the pastor, especially if he be discouraged and disheartened by the absence of any apparent success or fruit for his labours. First, he should search himself before God and test both his message and method by the Word, to see if he has in any way grieved the Holy Spirit and thereby prevented His blessing upon his ministry. Should such prove to be the case, his sin must be unsparingly judged and abandoned. If after diligent self-examination, no hindering cause is revealed, then let him take these words of the LORD as spoken immediately to himself: "Fear not, neither be thou dismayed" (Jos 8:1)—it is fear which causes dejection and dismay! Then let him say, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee" (Psa 56:3); or better, "I will trust, and not be afraid" (Isa 12:2). "Take all the people of war with thee" (Jos 8:1): earnestly solicit the prayerful co-operation of the saints; and whether you have that or no, be sure to take unto thee "the whole armour of God" (Eph 6:11-13). Further, eye by faith such promises as Isaiah 55:11; Matthew 28:20—for only thus will your fears be quietened.

"And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves: lay thee an ambush for the city behind it" (Jos 8:2). No mercy was to be shown the enemy, no truce made with him, but all the inhabitants were to be "utterly destroyed" as in the former instance (Jos 6:21). This teaches us that the Christian must adopt an uncompromising attitude toward every form of evil, even abstaining from the very appearance of it (1Th 5:22). On this occasion, divine permission was given Israel to appropriate the spoil and the cattle unto themselves. "The cattle upon a thousand hills" are the LORD's (Psa 50:10), and He disposes of them as He pleases. In connection with Jericho, Israel were forbidden to take anything unto themselves, the whole being "consecrated unto the LORD" (Jos 6:19); thereby intimating that He has a special claim upon "the firstfruits" (Exo 23:19; Pro 3:9), for that initial restriction was not again enforced. The grant here thereby

exhibiting the folly of covetous Achan—we never lose by waiting *God's* time, and only bring trouble upon ourselves if we attempt to anticipate it.

The method by which Ai was to be taken was quite different from the one used against the first stronghold of the Canaanites, which shows us, among other things, that God does not work uniformly. Thomas Scott (1747-1821) pointed out that “Jericho had been taken by a miracle...in order to teach the people to depend on God, and give Him the glory of all their successes. But they seemed to have inferred that they might despise their enemies and indulge themselves. They were, therefore, in the next instance, instructed that diligence, self-denial, and the exercise of all their powers—both of body and mind—were required in order to secure success.” While fully agreeing with those remarks, yet they do not, we think, fully explain the case. Though God be absolute sovereign, so that He ever acts freely, yet His ways with men are not capricious, but generally accord with their own behaviour. Because of their rash conduct in the first attack on Ai, Israel had missed God's best, and must now be content with His second best, is how we prefer to express it. The root cause of their failure was the flagrant offence of Achan, but more immediately, it was due to the conceit of the spies and the folly of Joshua in acceding to their carnal suggestion.

“So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai: and Joshua chose out thirty thousand mighty men of valour, and sent them away by night. And he commanded them, saying, Behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city, even behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready” (Jos 8:3-4). To how much trouble had Israel now put themselves in order to overthrow Ai! Ah, my reader, it requires no little pains in order to return to the path of blessing once we have departed from the same! In various ways, God makes us feel the folly of leaning unto our own understanding or acting in self-will, and shows us something of what we bring upon ourselves by missing His best. Observe, too, how precisely the LORD corrected Israel's failures, making them reverse their former policy. When the spies returned from the reconnoitering of Ai, they said unto Joshua, “Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai” (Jos 7:3). That was in direct variance with the pattern which God gave to Israel in Joshua 6:3, and to which He now required them to return—“take *all* the people of war with thee” (Jos 8:1). The closing words of the spies, “for they are but few” (Jos 7:3), showed they regarded Ai with contempt, as an easy prey, and the proposal that a single battalion of *their* fighting men would suffice was manifestly the language of conceit.

The LORD countered their pride by appointing a much more humbling method for capturing Ai than the one used in the overthrow of Jericho. There, Israel's army had marched openly around the walls of that fortress; here, where a smaller and weaker city was involved, the humiliating strategy of a secret ambush was assigned in order for an attack from the rear. In the latter case, Joshua had failed to spread before the LORD the suggestion of the spies and seek counsel of Him, and disastrous was the consequence. The result was that he had to spend many hours “on his face” before the ark ere an explanation of Israel's repulse was vouchsafed him; and later, he had to bow again before the LORD ere instructions were given for the new plan of campaign (Jos 8:1). The servant of God must not follow his own devices, but rather act according to the Word of his Master—for only then is he justified in counting upon His blessing. It is blessed to observe that however humbling the means which God now required to be used, both Joshua and those under him complied with the instructions God gave them. Having received an answer of peace from the LORD and an intimation of His will for them, they acted promptly in carrying out of the same.

“So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai” (Jos 8:3). That was not only an act of obedience, but, we doubt not, should also be regarded as one of faith—in response to Jehovah's “See, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai” (Jos 8:1). Should any one be disposed to ask, “But since the LORD had made such an announcement, why was it necessary for Joshua and the whole of his army to go to so much trouble?” he would betray his ignorance both of God's sovereignty and of man's accountability. God's predestination of the end does not render needless our use of means: rather does the former include the latter, and is realized by the same. When the LORD informed Hezekiah through one of His prophets that He would “add unto [his] days fifteen years” (Isa 38:5), that certainly did not imply that the king might henceforth dispense with food, drink, and sleep; and more than God's assurance to Paul that there should be “no loss of life” of the ship's contingent rendered it the less imperative to abstain from recklessness and to use means for their preservation (Act 27:22-24, 31). God's gracious assurances unto His people are not designed to promote indolence, but instead, to stimulate and to encourage diligence, knowing that our “labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1Co 15:58).

While it be true that unless God gives the victory, no efforts of ours can possibly achieve it; nevertheless, it is our bounden duty to make every effort. Though the fall of Ai was certain, yet Israel were called upon to discharge their responsibility. God's promises to us are not given to induce slothfulness, but to be a spur unto obedience to His precepts. Faith is no substitute for diligent and zealous work, but is to act as the director of the same. Hope is not to absolve us from the discharge of our obligations, but is to inspire unto the performing of the same. It is because victory *is sure* in the end that the soldiers of Christ are called upon to fight: that assurance is to be their incentive, from which they are to draw their energy. The genuine exercise of faith has a powerful influence both upon the Christian's efforts to mortify the old man and to vivify the new. This is clear from Romans 6:11, and what follows: we must obey the reckoning of faith, account ourselves legally one with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection before we can expect any success in subduing our lusts or developing our graces (Rom 6:13). Faith is indeed the victory "that overcometh the world" (1Jo 5:4-5); yet as the previous verse clearly shows, it is a faith which is operative in the keeping of God's commandments.

Thus, while Israel were called upon to exercise faith in the divine assurance of success, yet they were also required to adhere strictly to the strategy which God appointed. Very definite were the orders Joshua gave unto the thirty thousand men who were to fall upon the city from the rear: "Behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city, even behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready" (Jos 8:4)—they were told where to go, what to do, and how to comport themselves. Equally explicit are the instructions of the Christian in connection with the waging of his spiritual warfare; and the measure of his success will very largely be determined by how closely he sticks to them. Thus, after bidding believers, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (which can only be by the exercise of faith upon Him), the apostle bade them, "Put on the whole armour of God, that *ye may be able to stand* against the wiles of the devil" (Eph 6:10-11)—which plainly imports that unless they heeded his injunction, they would fall before the enemy's artifices. This is the more noticeable, because after enforcing his exhortation (Eph 6:12), he repeats, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand" (Eph 6:13). God has provided the armour, but *we* have to "take unto" us and "put on" the same—and not merely a part of it, but "the whole."



THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

28. *In Glory*

We have now arrived at the grand climax of our present subject, and well may we beg the LORD to enlarge our hearts that we may take in a soul-rapturing view thereof. Having traced out—most imperfectly—the revelation which God has made of Himself in the created universe, in the moral nature of man, in His shaping of human history, in His incarnate Son, in the sacred Scriptures, and in the saving discovery which He makes of Himself in the souls of His elect at their regeneration and conversion, we shall now endeavour to contemplate something of that manifestation which the Triune God will make in and through Christ unto His saints in *heaven*. That experiential knowledge of and communion with God which the believer has here on earth is indeed a real, affectionate, and blessed one, so that at times, he is lifted out of himself and made to rejoice with joy unspeakable; yet it is but an earnest and a foretaste of what he shall enjoy hereafter. At death, he enters into a life which amply compensates for all the trials and tribulations he experiences in this world. Said one who had endured persecution in every form: “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18).

The profession of the Gospel subjects the believer to peculiar hardships, for it requires him to deny self, take up his cross daily, and serve under the banner of One who is despised and rejected of men generally. To follow the example which Christ has left us involves having fellowship with His sufferings and enduring His reproach; and the more fully we be conformed to His holy image, the more shall we be hated, ridiculed, and opposed by the world—especially by its graceless professors. In certain periods of history, and in some countries today, particularly fierce and sore persecution was experienced by the saints; but everywhere and in all generations they have found, in different ways and degrees, that “all that will *live* godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2Ti 3:12). Yet that is only one side of the present experience of Christians: they also enjoy a “peace which passeth all understanding” (Phi 4:7), and have blessed fellowship with Christ as He walks and talks with them along the way. Moreover, “the hope which is laid up for [them] in heaven, whereof [they have] heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel” (Col 1:5) causes them, like Moses of old, to “[esteem] the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward,” and “by faith...he endured, as seeing him who is invisible” (Heb 11:26-27).

Such is the experience of God’s people, and ought to be so increasingly by all of them: looking off from the things seen and temporal unto those which are unseen and eternal. With the eye of faith fixed steadfastly upon the Captain of their salvation, they should run with patience the race set before them. Though a very small part of this world be their portion, they are to “[look] for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). Though called upon to suffer temporal losses for Christ’s sake, they are to remember that in heaven, they “have in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb 10:34). If they be the objects of scorn and infamy, they can rejoice that their names are written on high, and will yet be honoured by Christ—not only before the Father and the holy angels, but before an assembled universe, He will not be ashamed to call them brethren. If their affections be really set upon things above, then “having food and raiment [they will] be therewith content” (1Ti 6:8). If they have the assurance, they are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17), it will be a small matter when worms of the earth cast out their names as evil and shun their company. If believing anticipations of the glorious future be theirs, then “the joy of the LORD [will be their] strength” (Neh 8:10).

If the would-be disciple of Christ is enjoined to sit down first and count *the cost* (Luk 14:28), let him also make an inventory of the *compensations*. How rich those compensations are, how great “the recompence of the reward” (Heb 11:26) is, may be estimated by many considerations:

1. From the contrast presented by our present sufferings. “For our *light* affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal *weight* of glory” (2Co 4:17). The sufferings of God’s people in this world are, considered in themselves, often very heavy and grievous, and in many cases, long protracted. If, therefore, they be “light” when set over against their future bliss, how great that bliss must be! The paucity of human language to express it is seen in the piling up of one term upon another: it is a “weight,” it is an “exceeding” weight, even “a far more exceeding” weight—yea, it is an “eternal weight of glory.”

2. From the divine promises. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you...for great is your reward in heaven" (Mat 5:11-12); who can gauge what *He* terms "great"! "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mat 13:43). "Enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Mat 25:21).

3. From our relationship to God. The saints are designated His children and heirs, and it is not possible for Almighty God to invest created beings with higher honour than that. This sonship is not that which pertains to them as creatures, and which in a lower sense other creatures share; but rather, it is a peculiar privilege and dignity which belongs to them as new creatures in Christ Jesus. As such, they are nearer and dearer unto God than the unfallen angels. Therefore, the riches of the saints are to be estimated by the riches of God Himself!

4. From the declared purpose of God. "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might *shew* the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6-7). If, then, God has designed to make a lavish display of the fullness of His favour unto His people, how surpassingly glorious will such a demonstration of it be! As another has said, "When the Monarch of the universe declares His purpose of showing how much He loves His people, the utmost stretch of imagination will struggle in vain to form even a slight conception of their glory."

5. From the saints being God's inheritance. All creatures are God's property, but the saints are His in a peculiar sense. They are expressly denominated "God's heritage" (1Pe 5:3), which imports that all other things compared with them are trifling in His view. On them He sets His heart, loving them with an everlasting love, valuing them above the angels. That affords another standard by which we may measure their future felicity. Well might the apostle pray that the eyes of our understanding should be enlightened, that we might know, "what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Eph 1:18). According as God has glory in the saints, they themselves will be glorious.

6. From the love which Christ bears them. Of that love, they have the fullest proof in His infinite condescension to become incarnate for their sakes in the unparalleled humiliation into which He entered in His producing for them a perfect robe of righteousness, and in His making a full atonement for all their sins. That involved not only a life of poverty and shame, of enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself, but of suffering the wrath of God in their stead. Such love defies description and is beyond human comprehension. If He so loved us when we were enemies, what will He not bestow on us as His friends and brethren!

7. From the reward God has bestowed upon Christ. This also affords us a criterion by which we may gauge what awaits the saints. The stupendous achievements of Christ have been duly recognized by the Father and richly recompensed. That reward is one which is proportioned to the dignity of His person, one which is answerable to the revenue of honour and praise which His infinitely meritorious work brought to God, and which is commensurate with the unparalleled sufferings He endured and the sacrifice He made. When God gives, He does so—as in all His other actions—in accord with who and what He *is*. He has highly exalted the Redeemer, and "given him [the] name which is above every name" (Phi 2:9). In John 17:22, we find the Lord Jesus making mention to the Father of "the glory which thou [hast] gavest me." Oh, what a transcendent and supernal glory that will be! And that glory He *shares* with His beloved people: "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them"! That which pertains to the heavenly Bridegroom is also the portion of His Bride. "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" (Rev 3:21). The Head and His members form one body, and therefore, "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall [we] also appear with him in glory" (Col 3:4).

While the Scriptures make no attempt to gratify a carnal curiosity concerning the nature and occupations of that life into which the regenerate enter when they pass out of this world, yet sufficient *is* told them to feed hope and gladden their hearts. While it is stated that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him," let it not be overlooked that the same passage goes on to say, "But God *hath revealed them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1Co 2:9-10). Yes, He has, to no inconsiderable extent, graciously revealed the same in the Word of Truth; and while we are to beware of lusting to be wise above what is written (Psa 131:1; 2Ti 3:7), we should spare no pains to be made wise up to what *is* written. If the unregenerate go to such trouble and expense in manufacturing telescopes and erecting observatories in order to examine the stellar planets, and take such delight in each fresh discovery they make, yet never

expect to personally *possess* those distant stars, how intense should be *our* interest in those glories of heaven which will soon be ours for ever!

Not only has God been pleased to reveal to His people something of the blissful future awaiting them, but even while still in this vale of tears, He favours them at times with real *foretastes* of the same. Though at present, we are able to form only the most imperfect and indistinct ideas of the saints' felicity in heaven; nevertheless, in those moments of high elevation of soul, when the believer is abstracted from external things and absorbed with contemplating the perfections of God, he joins heartily with the Psalmist in exclaiming, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Psa 73:25). Not only at conversion, when the soul rejoices in the knowledge of sins forgiven and of his being accepted in the Beloved, but afterwards, in seasons of intimate fellowship with the Lord, the conscious motions of sin are suppressed, and he is sensible only of the exercise of holy desires, love, and joy. Such an experience is a real "earnest" of that which he will enjoy to a far greater degree when he is delivered from the body of this death (indwelling corruptions) and is "present with the Lord" (2Co 5:8), no longer viewing Him through a mirror, but beholding Him "face to face" (1Co 13:12).

It is at the second coming of Christ or at death that the believer in Him enters into the glorified state; and therefore, before examining what Holy Writ has to say upon the latter, we propose to enter into some detail on what it teaches concerning his dissolution. Since the vast majority of the redeemed enter heaven through the portals of death—for they have been doing so for almost six thousand years, and the New Testament seems to intimate there will be very few indeed of them upon earth at the Redeemer's return—it is appropriate that we should do so. Moreover, there is a real need for us to, for in certain quarters scarcely anything has been given out—either orally or in writing—for the instruction and comfort of God's people upon the dying of the saint. Not only does nature shrink from the experience and unbelief paint it in black, but the devil is not inactive in seeking to strike terror into their hearts. Not a few have been deprived of the blessed teaching of the Word thereon, because they have been erroneously led to believe that for a Christian to think much about death, or seek to prepare himself for it, is dishonouring to Christ and utterly inconsistent with "looking for that blessed hope" (Ti 2:13) and living in the daily expectation of His "glorious appearing."

That there is no real inconsistency between the two things is clear from many considerations. Whether the Saviour will return before "the millennium" or not until the close of earth's history, whether His coming be "imminent," or whether certain events must first take place, this is sure, that the apostle Paul was among the number of those who waited "for [God's] Son from heaven" (1Th 1:10); nevertheless, that did not deter him from communicating a most comforting and assuring description of what takes place at the death of a Christian (2Co 5:1-8). Let us also point out that when exhorting the New Testament saints to "run with patience the race that is set before [them]" (Heb 12:1), the first motive which the Holy Spirit supplies for the same is to remind them that they are "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1)—the reference being to those whose testimony is described in the previous chapter, of whom it is said, "these all *died in faith*" (Heb 11:13), and where the triumphant deaths of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are most blessedly depicted (Heb 11:20-22). We propose, then, to dwell upon the death of a child of God, the accompaniments or attendants of the same, and the glorious sequel thereto.

One of the distinguishing features of the Holy Scriptures and one of the many proofs of their divine inspiration is their blessed illumination of the grave and the revelation they vouchsafe concerning the hereafter. The light of nature and the best of pagan philosophy could provide no certainty about the next life. The famous Aristotle, when contemplating death, is said to have expressed himself thus: "*Anxius vixi, dubius morio, nescio quo vado*," which signifies, "I have lived in anxiety, I am dying in doubtfulness, and know not where I am going." How delightful the contrast of a Christian who can affirm, "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phi 1:23). How profoundly thankful should we be unto God for His holy Word! It not only reveals to us the way of salvation, makes clear the believer's path of duty, but it irradiates the valley of shadows and lifts a corner of the veil, affording to us a view of Immanuel's land. If God's people made a more prayerful and believing study of and meditated upon what that Word teaches about their departure from this world and their Homegoing, death would not only be divested of its terrors, but would be welcomed by them.

That there is a radical difference between the death of a believer and of an unbeliever is clear from many passages. "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death" (Pro 14:32), upon which Thomas Boston (1676-1732) well said: "This text looks like the cloud between the

Israelites and the Egyptians: having a dark side towards the latter and a bright side towards the former. It represents death like Pharaoh's jailer, bringing the chief butler and the chief baker out of prison: the one restored to his office, and the other to be led to his execution. It shows the difference between the godly and ungodly in their death: who, as they act a very different part in life, so in death have a very different exit...The righteous are not driven away as chaff before the wind, but led away as a bride to the marriage chamber, carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The righteous man dies not in a sinful state, but in a holy state. He goes not away in sin, but out of it. In his life, he was putting off the old man, changing his prison garments; and now the remaining rags of them are removed, and he is adorned with robes of glory. He has hope in his death: the well-founded expectation of better things than he ever had in this world."

Proverbs 14:32 is but one of many passages in the earlier Scriptures which evince that the Old Testament saints were far from being in the dark regarding death or what lay beyond it. They knew that in God's presence is "fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psa 16:11). Said David, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psa 17:15). And again, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD *for ever*" (Psa 23:6). It is true that life and immortality have been brought more fully "to light through the Gospel" (2Ti 1:10); nevertheless, it is clear that, from the dawn of human history, the light of divine revelation had, for the saints, illuminated the tomb. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psa 73:24), which, as a summary, goes as far as anything taught in the New Testament. "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan 12:2). And therefore, it is said of all those who died in faith that, having seen the promises of God afar off, they "were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb 11:13).

Before proceeding further, let us face the question, *Why* does a child of God die? Since physical death be one of the consequences of sin, and since the Lord Jesus was paid the whole of its wages, and therefore, put it away for His people, why should any of them have to enter the grave? A number of reputable writers whom we have consulted deem that a great and insoluble mystery, while others evade it by saying that such presents no greater problem than sin's remaining in us after regeneration. But neither of those things should present any difficulty: both are designed for God's glory and their good. As Proverbs 14:32 shows, there is a vast difference between the death of the righteous and that of the wicked. Death is not sent to the former as a *penal* infliction, but comes to him as a friend—to free him from all further sorrow and suffering, to induct the heir of glory into his inheritance. Why should a Christian die? sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master, and "made conformable unto his death" (Phi 3:10). What a fearful hardship had the saints from Pentecost onwards been obliged to remain on earth till the end of time! Surely it is an act of divine *love* to remove them from the vale of tears. But could not God have translated them to heaven without seeing death, like He did Enoch and Elijah? Yes, but they were exceptions; and in such case, Christ would not have the glory of raising their bodies from the dust and fashioning them like unto the body of His glory!



GLORIOUS SINAI

Near the close of our last, we saw that, upon Jehovah's awe-inspiring appearance on the mount and His proclamation of the Ten Commandments, the children of Israel said unto Moses, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Exo 20:19)—which was tantamount to an acknowledgement that they felt themselves unfit for dealing with the LORD directly on the ground of the Decalogue, that a mediator was needed, that Moses should treat with God on their behalf. We must now carefully consider the divine response to that request: "And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was. And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee" (Exo 20:21-24).

In the last-quoted verse, there is something which is very rarely, if ever, referred to by those who write upon "The Law," yet it should surely arrest the attention and impress the most casual reader. Here upon Sinai itself divine instructions were given for the making of an ALTAR upon which Israel were to 'sacrifice'! Furthermore, this was accompanied by the most gracious promise of the LORD's coming unto and (not cursing, but) *blessing* them! Let us consider this "altar" first in the light of Israel's request in verse 19. The LORD was here informing them that the mere provision of a mediator did not fully meet the exigencies of the situation. It met the need from *their* side, but not from *God's*. The Lawgiver was holy and the righteous demands of His Law must be fulfilled. The transgression of His Law could not be dealt with simply through a mediator as such: satisfaction must be made, *sin must be expiated*, God propitiated—only thus could the demands of divine justice be met. Accordingly, this is the very thing which was set before Israel in the immediate sequel. The "altar," divinely appointed at this time, told of the provision of God's grace and mercy unto them.

It must be remembered that for upwards of two centuries, the descendants of Abraham had resided in Egypt, and by comparing Scripture with Scripture, it is clear that, after the death of Joseph, the majority of them learned the ways of the heathen and became idolaters. Thus Joshua reminded them in his day that their forebears had served other gods, not only "on the other side of the flood" (i.e. in Chaldea, from which the LORD called Abraham), but also "in Egypt" (Jos 24:14). Likewise we are informed by one of their prophets that while there, the LORD expostulated with them, saying, "Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for my name's sake" (Eze 20:7-9). That casts a flood of light upon the early chapters of Exodus and shows that the Holy One was employing Pharaoh as His rod upon the disobedient Israelites.

After chastening them sorely, the LORD visited the Hebrews and delivered them from the house of bondage. Before so doing, He most impressibly showed all who had eyes to see that they too deserved the same fate as befell the Egyptians—only a substitutionary lamb saving them therefrom. By that pascal sacrifice, they were redeemed for Jehovah and brought unto Himself. That was the first intimation which they had yet received of the LORD's particular requirements; and even now in Exodus 20, no part of the ceremonial law had yet been made known. But the "altar" there erected was God's gracious provision for fully meeting His governmental claims, and which made it possible for a people full of infirmity and sin to approach Him without fear of death. Thus from the very outset of the divine dealings with Israel nationally, provision was made to maintain God's holiness and meet their failures. True, it was their transgression of the divine Law which made this altar necessary, yet it was God's grace which supplied the same. *That* requires to be taken into most careful consideration if the grand transaction of Sinai is to be correctly apprehended. Jehovah did not there propose to deal with Israel on the alone ground of His righteousness, but on that of His rich *mercy* also. Let "dispensationalists" duly note.

It is deeply important that we understand the relation between the two principal objects set before us in Exodus 20: God's giving of the Law, and God's furnishing instruction concerning the altar which must be made unto Him. In the Decalogue, there was presented a holy standard which made known the just re-

quirements of God, defining the conduct of the individual both unto Himself and unto his neighbour. That Standard was a perfect one in all its parts, requiring both internal and external purity. As such, it brought to light the sinfulness of man, for as a fallen creature, he was incapable of measuring up to its exalted demands. And therefore, as such, it was (and still is) admirably fitted to convince the fallen creature of his need of a Saviour. That it served this dual purpose at Sinai, we have seen: Israel were made conscious of their unfitness to deal immediately with Jehovah on the basis of the Law, asking for a mediator. But something more was required, and that need was met by the LORD's provision of the altar. Thus, it is quite clear from Exodus 20 itself that the Ten Commandments were never given to Israel as a means of salvation, or that they were to procure the divine favour by their obedience to them! Such an idea is completely ruled out.

"An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen" (Exo 20:24). The tabernacle was not yet erected, nor had any instruction been given concerning it. Clearly, then, what we have here was a divine ordinance, for Israel's immediate compliance; an altar was to be built *at the foot of Sinai!* It was not the future which was in view, but the present. All doubt as to the correctness of this conclusion is removed by a reference to Exodus 24:4—what is recorded in 22 and 23 being a connected account of what God made known to Moses in the mount for communication unto His people. There in 24:4, we read, "And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel" (Exo 24:4). That there may be no uncertainty in identifying *this* altar, it is immediately added, "And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered *burnt* offerings, and sacrificed *peace* offerings of oxen unto the LORD" (Exo 24:5)—the "young men" who performed this priestly work were probably the "firstborn" who had been sanctified unto the LORD (Exo 13:2, etc.), the Levites not yet being set apart to their office.

It was here and at this time that the covenant was formally entered into and ratified. First, "Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD [in Exodus 20], and all the judgments [of Exodus 21-23]: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do" (Exo 24:3). Previously, they had given a general assent to be under Jehovah's government (Exo 19:8), but now they agreed to be obedient in particular unto the laws which Moses had just enumerated unto them. Instead of rebuking them for what some regard as an arrogant boast on Israel's part, the LORD approved of their avowal: "I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have *well said* all that they have spoken" (Deu 5:28), only further breathing the wish, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" "And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD" (Exo 24:4), which was the first time that any part of God's Word was committed to writing!

The altar being built and the young men having offered the sacrifices unto the LORD, "Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words" (Exo 24:6-8). Everything here was of the nature of a formal and binding transaction. The "altar" was the token of God's presence, the "twelve pillars" the memorial of their presence. Half of the blood being sprinkled on the altar was the LORD's portion, and the other half sprinkled on them, Israel's—thereby the *mutual* agreement between them was indicated. First, the terms of the covenant were verbally made known unto them (Exo 24:3); and upon their free and universal approval of the same, those words were recorded in writing (Exo 24:4), designated "the book of the covenant" (Exo 24:7), which was also sprinkled with the blood (Heb 9:19).

Since the covenant which Israel entered into with Jehovah at Sinai formed the basis of all His subsequent dealings with them, it is most essential that we spare no effort to obtain a right conception of its character. In order thereto, it must first be clearly recognized that this contract in no wise set aside the earlier covenant with their fathers, in which Jehovah made donation of the land of Canaan unto them and promised to be a God to them and their seed (Gen 17:7; 18:13). This is abundantly clear from Exodus 19:4-6: for there God addressed the Hebrews as already standing in such a relation of nearness to Himself, as secured for them in interest, in His love and faithfulness, and ensured the supply of their every need. It is further proven from His preface to the Ten Commandments, for in affirming, "I am the LORD thy God,

which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt" (Exo 20:2), He rested His claim to their obedience on the ground of their favoured relation to Himself—His chosen, covenanted, redeemed people. Thus, both from the time when the Law was given and the language in which it was introduced, we see that it was never designed to interfere with the prior covenant of promise, but rather was something supplementary thereunto.

To affirm that the covenant at Sinai made void the provisions of the Abrahamic, which secured for his seed the inheritance as heaven's free gift, or to insist that its object was to establish a *new title* to gifts and blessings already conferred, is to grossly misinterpret the transaction and utterly confound the proper relation of things. Rather was this latter compact to be the handmaid of the former, to minister in an inferior though necessary place to the higher ends which the former had in view. The Abrahamic was the root of life and blessing; the Sinaitic, being grafted thereon with the design of making more fully known the requirements of divine righteousness. The seed of Abraham as God's acknowledged people and heirs were going to receive for their possession that land which He claimed as peculiarly His own. But they must occupy it as the partakers of His character of holiness, for thus alone could they either glorify His name or enjoy His blessing. Delivering them as He had from the region of idolatry and pollution, He would not suffer them to enter Canaan until He had set before them that standard of character and conduct at which they must ever sincerely and diligently aim.

They bound themselves by the most solemn engagement to realize as far as possible the pattern of excellence which had been set before them on the mount. As an abler pen than ours has pointed out, "Had they been faithful to their engagement—had they as a people striven in earnest through the grace offered them in the one covenant to exemplify the character of the righteous man exhibited in the other, '[delighting]...in the law of the LORD...[meditating therein] day and night'—then in their condition, they should assuredly have been 'like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper' [Psa 1:2-3]. Canaan, would then indeed have verified the description of a land flowing with milk and honey"—Patrick Fairbairn (1874-1905). A clear demonstration of that was furnished under the leadership of Joshua, for while Israel abode by their agreement and were obedient to the LORD, His smile of approbation was manifestly upon them. But alas, the next generation kept not the covenant, and dire were the consequences—as the book of Judges sadly exhibits.

Again: the nature of the Sinaitic covenant can only be rightly apprehended as we perceive and keep steadily in mind its *mixed* nature. In all of God's dealings with His people, He acts in His twofold character as "light" (1Jo 1:5) and as "love" (1Jo 3:11). While He dealt in sovereign grace with the father of all them that believe, He pressed upon him the obligation which privileges entailed: "Walk before me, and be thou perfect [upright]" (Gen 17:1); and as we have pointed out previously, God bore testimony unto Isaac that "Abraham *obeyed* my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen 26:5); though that is no more to be understood absolutely (i.e. that his conduct was flawless), than we are to take Christ's words concerning His apostles, "they *have kept* thy word" (Joh 17:6) as signifying they had done so perfectly. In like manner, whereas God had most conspicuously manifested His favour unto the Hebrews in Egypt and in the wilderness, at Sinai, He enforced the requirements of His holiness. First, in the Ten Commandments; yet even in them, definite mention was made of His "shewing mercy" (Exo 20:6), which was a vastly different and more blessed thing than His "taking vengeance" on transgressors. Second, in the ceremonial law which followed, wherein He not only declared the purity required from them, but appointed means for the removal of their impurities. And third, in the plans for the tabernacle, where He took up His abode in their midst, and the provisions of the priesthood to maintain their communion with Him.

Had there been nothing more than law in the Sinaitic covenant, nothing but a strict regime of unrelieved justice, then obviously there had been nothing further in Israel's experience save their suffering penalty, which was the just desert of sin. But as we read their subsequent history, we see clear evidences of something else—their availing themselves of the provision which mercy had made: the turning unto God as the Pardoner of sin and the Healer of iniquity, and a falling back from the covenant of Law to the covenant of grace and promise, to which it was added. Thus we find, that upon Israel's making the golden calf and Jehovah's wrath thereat, Moses pleading with Him for clemency on the ground of His promises to the fathers (Exo 32:13). So too we find that however sinful one individual or one generation might be, yet if the next in descent heartily turned unto the LORD, they were received into forgiveness and blessing. It was

only those children who persisted in the wickedness of their fathers who had visited upon them the guilt of their forebears. Thus, in Numbers 14, we find Moses entreating the LORD “according unto the greatness of thy mercy,” and He declared, “I have pardoned according to thy word” (Num 14:19-20); and though that unbelieving generation was debarred from entering Canaan, their children had that privilege.

Glorious Sinai! Let us indeed stand in awe before its solemn revelation of the majesty of Jehovah. But let us also admire the wondrous co-mingling of law and grace, justice and mercy, holiness and leniency, which was there displayed. That marvel of divine wisdom—for there is nothing in the least resembling it in all the productions of the human mind—appears at every point. We behold it in the “adding” of the Sinaitic covenant to the Abrahamic (Gal 3:19), for whereas promises predominated in the one, precepts were more conspicuous in the other. We see it in God’s gracious delivering of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, and then bringing them under His government. We see it in the joining of the ceremonial law to the moral—for while the latter enforces the requirements of that purity which the LORD demanded from His people and His condemnation of all that was contrary thereto, yet full provision was made for the promotion of the one and the removal of the other. The whole may well be summed up in that admirable dictum of Augustine: “The law was given that grace might be sought; grace was given that the law might be fulfilled.”



WITNESS BEARING

One of the ways in which Christians may give evidence in favour of their God is by testifying to the fact of His unmistakable interposition in answer to believing prayer. The world ridicules the idea, imagining that Nature is wound up like a clock, which mechanically and automatically sets the machinery of the universe in motion, without any present and direct intervention by the Creator. But the Lord's people *know* quite otherwise. Many times, and in a great variety of ways, they have proved for themselves that the Lord hears prayer, for there was such an evident *connection* between their supplications and the ordering of events that they cannot doubt for a moment the latter was the Father's granting of their requests. While they must not cast their pearls before swine, it is both their privilege and duty (as suitable opportunities are provided in private conversation) to acquaint their brethren and sisters with God's gracious answers of peace, thereby rejoicing their hearts and strengthening their faith.

A striking instance of divine intervention in response to believing prayer is narrated by George Müller (1805-1898): "When the water was dried up in Bristol, and the waterworks were not able to serve sufficient to the people, I, with more than a thousand children dependent upon me, never asked any man for a drop of water, but went on my knees before God; and a farmer, who was neither directly nor indirectly asked by me, called at my door the next hour and offered to bring us water; and when his supplies were dried up, instead of telling anybody, I went to my God, and told Him all about it; and another friend offered to let me fetch water from his brook." Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) declared: "I have had as distinct answers to prayer as if God had thrust His right hand through the blue sky and given right into my lap the bounty which I had sought of Him." Such too has been the writer's experience. And we trust *yours* too.

