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IN THE

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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

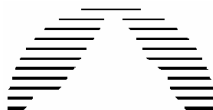
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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THE HIDDEN MANNA

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna" (Rev 2:17). This is one of the seven promises in Revelation 2 and 3 made to the overcomers, which is one of the many designations accorded the children of God in the Word of Truth, though probably one of those which most of these are least familiar with. The first time the word occurs in the N.T., it is used of the Lord Jesus (Luk 11:22), where He is portrayed as the One stronger than Satan, overcoming him and dividing his spoils—a representation of what He does for His elect at their conversion, when He delivered them from the power of Satan. The next time this word is found in the N.T. it is again in connection with Christ: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (Joh 16:33)—we are to take courage and consolation from that fact, for since He overcame the world for His people, and since they are both legally and vitally one with Him, God has ordained they shall participate in His victory. The word occurs again in connection with Christ as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," where we are told He "hath prevailed [overcome] to open the book" (Rev 5:5)—perhaps the title-deeds to that Inheritance.

"To him that overcometh"—the enemies of his salvation. The Christian is a warrior, engaged in a life and death fight, and though he receives many wounds in the conflict and is often thrown down by his adversaries, yet he gets up again, renews the struggle, and in the end, comes out victorious. "Him that overcometh" is in contrast from those who are overcome—like the unbelieving Israelites who were overthrown in the wilderness, like the many of John 6:66 who were offended at Christ's doctrine and who "went back and walked no more with Him," like Demas who made a promising start and accompanied Paul for a while, but of whom he had to say, he "hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2Ti 4:10). It is not enough to engage in warfare against sin and Satan, the flesh and the world; we must persevere therein unto the end. The overcomer is the one who cleaves to Christ and adheres to the Truth, who refuses to be deterred by the difficulties of the way, the assaults of his enemies, the allurements of false teachers.

Four things are necessary in order for anyone to be an overcomer. First, he must be supernaturally regenerated, for the task involved is much too arduous for mere nature to succeed in: "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world" (1Jo 5:4). It is the new nature, energised by the Holy Spirit, which qualifies for victory. Second, he must be endowed with a supernatural principle, otherwise his native unbelief would make defeat inevitable and certain: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1Jo 5:4)—God's gift, but our use of it. It is by the exercise of this grace that we obtain strength for the conflict and incentives to persevere. Third, he must have recourse to that which will heal his wounds and prevail before God as his plea: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 12:11). That blood gives the believer the right to claim enablement for his repelling of every attack of Satan's. Fourth, he must "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb 3:6).

For the encouragement of the Christian engaged in this fierce conflict the Lord has graciously made known the reward awaiting him, and the more his faith lays hold of the same and his hope anticipatively enjoys it, the more incentive will he have to continue fighting, or (changing the figure) to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1). It was thus our great Exemplar nerved Himself: "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb 12:2). In our judgment, these promises to the overcomer supply an intimation of wherein the blessedness of the heavenly state consists, such as is to be found nowhere else in the Scriptures. As they draw nearer the end of their pilgrimage the Lord's people should project their thoughts more and more unto what awaits them on High. The worn-out *worldling* seeks satisfaction in living over again in his mind those "pleasures of sin" (Heb 11:25) which engaged him in the past, but the veteran saint will rather contemplate those "pleasures for evermore" which are at God's right hand (Psa 16:11). A part of what those "pleasures" consist of is intimated in Revelation 2:17.

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna" (Rev 2:17). Here is a part of the spiritual entertainment which Christ has provided for His friends in glory. It seems to denote three things. First, as the manna was the food which God supplied from Heaven for His people of old, nourishing and sustaining them throughout their wilderness journey, it must be regarded as a figure of the written word which is the Christian's spiritual staff of life. And since the Word of God "liveth and abideth for ever" (1Pe 1:23), does not the "*hidden manna*" (Rev 2:17) point to the inexhaustible riches of Divine wisdom, which are stored up in it, and of which we have at present, but a fragmentary knowledge. We cannot think that any of that treasure will be lost to us—rather, do we conclude it will be made known and afford part of our delect-

tation on High. Now we know the marvels of Divine inspiration and revelation “in part,” but then shall we know them in full. 2 Corinthians 12:7 shows that Heaven is the place of “the abundance of the revelations.”

As the risen Christ expounded the Scriptures to His disciples and opened their understandings to understand them (Luk 24:27, 45), will not the glorified Saviour do the same for us (Heb 13:8)?

Second, the “manna” which God gave to Israel in the wilderness was also a manifest type of the incarnate Son, the “bread of life”—which is given to us, because broken for us (Joh 6:35, 48). Therefore, the “hidden manna” (Rev 2:17) refers, we conclude, to “In whom are *hid* all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3) in Him, of which I now have but the faintest conception, and to the “many things which Jesus did” that have not been recorded on any earthly scroll (Joh 21:25), and also to much that was precious about Him—which was never cognised even by His apostles. Nothing of this can be lost—all of it, we believe, will be feasted upon at the marriage supper of the Lamb, when He shall say “eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved” (Son 5:1). “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna” (Rev 2:17). We shall hear from Christ’s own lips the secrets of His life as He sojourned for thirty-three years in this world of sin, making known to us more fully the depths of humiliation into which He descended for us and the perfections He exercised—hidden from the eyes of men—as He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself.

Third, the historical reference (Exo 16:33, 34 and compare Heb 9:4) shows that the literal “hidden manna” consisted of a “pot” of manna which was laid “up before the LORD” to be “kept for your generations.” It was designed as a testimony and memorial of God’s grace unto His people. In its anti-typical fulfilment, this points, we believe, to the unfolding of His secret providences—which the Lord will make to us in Heaven, when we shall be able to *understand* (with amazement, awe, and adoration) what now we only *believe*—namely, that all His dealings with us were ordered by perfect love and unerring wisdom; and also to the blessed workings of His grace in and through us. “Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him *for them* that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name” (Mal 3:16), and the next verse seems to more than hint that the contents of that book will be made known and enjoyed “in that day” when the Lord of hosts makes up His jewels.

We conceive that each one of the redeemed will be given the holy privilege of making his or her personal contribution to this unfolding of God’s wondrous ways with us in providence and in grace—there will be no Divine restriction, “let your women keep silence in heaven,” for all the consequences of the Fall will be obliterated and the sisters as well as the brethren will then be “as the angels of God in heaven” (Mat 22:30). This writer believes that each one of the blood-bought company will say, in turn, “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for *my* soul” (Psa 66:16)—not only in regeneration, but in all that followed. O what a testimony each of them will then bear to God’s amazing grace and patience! What a witness each will give to God’s unfailing faithfulness and goodness in supplying every need as he crossed the Wilderness of Sin! How blessed it will be to hear one and another relate God’s wondrous answers to prayer—then there will be none of the scepticism which we fear there would be now were we to relate some of the miracles God has wrought in response to our feeble petitions. Everything which redounds to the glory of God will then be made known to the whole of His family. —A.W.P.

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

11. 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10

So many aspects of the Truth are brought before us and so many lines of thought are suggested by these verses that we must dispense with an introduction and consider, first, the *occasion* of this prayer. This is discovered to us in the immediate context. As we have pointed out in a previous article, false teachers had appeared at Corinth and had succeeded in sowing the seeds of dissension in the assembly there. The saints were in danger of being turned away from Christ by having their confidence in Paul undermined by the misrepresentations of his enemies. This had obliged him to engage in the distasteful task of vindicating himself—presenting the grounds which he had for claiming spiritual authority over them and for asserting his apostolic powers. So repugnant was this to his feelings, that he apologized for thus speaking of himself and begged them to bear with him (2Co 11:1), pointing out it was solely for their good that he now appeared to indulge in self-laudation.

Paul's enemies had insisted that he was greatly inferior to the Eleven, yea, that he was not an apostle at all, since he lacked the all-essential qualifications stated in Acts 1:21, 22—he had neither been one of the favoured band who were most closely associated with Christ during His public ministry, nor had he been a witness with them of His resurrection. That was an exceedingly grave charge, for if Paul was not a Divinely-called apostle, he had no authority to take the oversight of the churches and regulate their concerns. This obliged him to indulge in what seemed like boasting and to affirm, "I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles" (2Co 11:5). Previously, he had openly acknowledged his personal unworthiness to be numbered of their company (1Co 15:9), but now he was compelled to point out that in authority, knowledge, and effective grace, none of them excelled him, and then spread before them his credentials (2Co 11:22-33).

It is very blessed and touching to see the nature of the proofs Paul advanced to show he was a *true* minister of the Gospel. He boasts not of the success of his labours, the souls that had been saved under his preaching, or the number of churches he had planted, but mentions rather the opposition he had met with, the persecutions encountered, the sufferings he had gone through. He shows to them as it were the *scars* he had received "as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2Ti 2:3). He demonstrated he was a real servant of His by calling attention to the reproaches, the ignominy, the cruel treatment he had received. It was his sufferings, and his patient endurance of them, that made manifest that he was a genuine minister of Christ (compare Gal 1:10). Though great indeed was that honour attached to his office, yet the faithful discharge of it entailed that which no impostor, no self-seeker, no hireling would continue to meekly bear.

In chapter 11, the apostle had first met his opponents on their own ground and by comparing himself with them, had answered the fool according to his folly (Pro 26:5). Then he had demonstrated that he was a genuine officer of Him who is "despised and rejected of men" (Isa 53:3). But now he comes to that which was peculiar to himself and relates an experience which far excelled any that the other apostles had been favoured with. He continues his apology, but in an altered tone: "It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord" (2Co 12:1). To have "seen" the Lord was one of the requisites of valid apostleship (1Co 9:1), and Paul *had* done so by a heavenly vision (Act 26:19). Moreover these Corinthians were probably aware that he had been the subject of a vision which especially concerned *them* (Act 18:9, 10). But over and above these, he now went on to relate an experience which afforded superlative evidence of the favour of God to him as an apostle.

"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven...How that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2Co 12:2, 4). This was an experience unparalleled in the recorded history of men— an honour and privilege which far exceeded that bestowed upon any other mortal. It is impossible for us to adequately conceive of the extraordinary favour that was here granted the beloved apostle. He was personally transported to Paradise, translated to the Father's House, permitted an entrance into the Palace of the Sovereign of the universe. For a brief season, he was taken to be with "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb 12:23). There was the

glorified Lamb upon the Throne, and he would hear the seraphim exclaiming before Him, “‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:3). It is useless to indulge in speculation and impious to give rein to our imagination—we can but wonder and worship.

“Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he *seeth* me to be, or that he heareth of [not ‘from’!] me” (2Co 12:5, 6). That is exquisitely lovely. Paul had indeed a just ground for insisting upon the higher favour which God had shown him above all others, but inasmuch as it was gratuitous, implying no personal worthiness, he forbore. Had he glorified it had not been as a “fool” or empty boaster, but according to truth, to fact; but he restrained himself because he desired others not to think too highly of him! He preferred that men should judge him by what they saw and heard, and not esteem him by the special revelations God had given him! It was his “infirmities” he would glory in, for weakness, sustained by grace, is all that any saint may boast of in himself.

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure” (2Co 12:7). Having stated in the preceding verse that he did not wish others to think of him more highly than they should, he now tells us what means God used to prevent *himself* from so doing. The apostle was in danger of being unduly elated by the extraordinary manifestation of the Divine favour he had received. This is quite understandable—for one who had visited Paradise itself and then to be suddenly returned to this world of woe, required a heavy ballast to keep his ship on an even keel. The “third heaven” was too dizzy a remembrance to be safely borne by one who had to walk again on earth—and that, in a body of sin and death. The Lord knew this and graciously dealt accordingly, bestowing upon him that which kept him humble.

By nature, Paul was just as proud and foolish as all other men, and if his heart was kept lowly, it was not by his own unaided fidelity to the Truth, but because of the faithfulness of his Master who dealt so wisely with him. We must distinguish between the *cause* and the *occasion* of pride—the former is the evil nature or principle from which it proceeds; the latter, the object on which it fastens and which it perverts to its use. The “pride of life” (1Jo 2:16) can feed on anything, turning temporal mercies and even spiritual gifts and graces into poison. Pride was the main ingredient in the sin of our first parents—aspiring to be as God. There is pride in every sin, since it is a lifting up of the creature against the Creator. We are shown how God regards and abominates pride in Proverbs 6:16-19, where seven things are mentioned which the Lord hates, and the list is headed with “a proud look” (Pro 6:17)! The great work of grace is the subduing of our pride.

The celestial revelations which Paul had received had no tendency whatever in themselves to produce or promote pride, but like all other things, they were capable of being abused by indwelling sin. Therefore, lest he should be spiritually proud, become vain and self-confident regarding himself as a special favourite of Christ, there was given to Paul “a thorn in the flesh” (2Co 12:7). That it is termed a “thorn” intimates it was something that was painful; that it was a bodily affliction is signified by the words, “in the flesh”; that it remained within him is seen from his prayer that it might “depart”; and that Satan aggravated it appears from the next clause of the verse. So far from proposing to join the numerous company of the curious who have indulged in all manner of speculations as to precisely what this “thorn” consisted of, we are frank to say we have no idea of its nature, nor have we the least desire to be wise above what God has revealed.

Personally, we admire the Divine wisdom in restraining the apostle from being more explicit, for the general statement is better suited to a far wider application. Human nature being what it now is—had the Holy Spirit made known the specific character of this particular “thorn in the flesh”—certain afflicted and querulous souls would be most apt to say: Paul might “glory” in *his*, but if he had the painful distress which is *mine*, he would have sung another tune. Suppose the apostle had mentioned any certain physical disorder—say, inflamed eyes—those free from it, but having another (say, the gout) would consider that *their* “thorn” was much harder to endure. But since God has wisely left it undefined, each afflicted saint may take comfort from the possibility that his affliction is identical with Paul’s. Whatever in our persons or our circumstances serves to *mortify* our pride may be regarded as our “thorn in the flesh.”

Instead of vainly conjecturing exactly what Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” consisted of, let us draw comfort from the blessed fact that it was (not “sent” but) “*given*” him—that is, by God, as a Divine favour! It is thus that we should regard each painful trial as a merciful bestowal from God, the design of which is to hide pride from us. But this word “given” also connotes Paul’s *acceptance* of the same, that he meekly and thankfully regarded it as from the Lord. This “thorn” he also speaks of as “the messenger of Satan to buffet me” (2Co 12:7), the cases of Job and his boils, the woman of Luke 13:16, and the demon possessed, show

that the Devil is given the power to cause bodily affliction. In Paul's case, Satan desired to disqualify him from his work, but the Lord overruled him and made him render the apostle a good service. This should teach us to look above Satan and seek from God the reason why He has permitted him to afflict us.

"Lest I should be exalted above measure." Paul not only accepted the painful affliction as a gift from the Lord, but he also perceived *why* it was given him. And so should each Christian in like circumstances, and until he does so, he should humbly continue waiting on the Lord saying, "show me *wherefore* Thou contendest with me" (Job 10:3 and compare 2Sa 21:1, Job 6:24). If the reader has a "thorn in the flesh" and seeks enlightenment from above, he too may discover the needs-be for it. In Paul's case, it was to humble him to hide pride from him; and is not *that* usually God's chief design in His disciplinary dealings with us! In the apostle's case, it was not for correction, but for prevention. Such may have been God's merciful design towards you—perhaps He turned a wealthy relative against you to will his money elsewhere, or has withheld business prosperity from you—lest you be "puffed-up." How effective Paul's "thorn" was appears from the fact that for fourteen years, he never mentioned his rapture into Paradise, and would not have done so now but for exceptional circumstances.

"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me" (2Co 12:8). The "thorn" did not make him fret and fume, but caused him to pray. This brings us, second, to *the Object* of his prayer—namely, the Lord Jesus, as the next verse plainly shows. A decisive proof is this of the Godhead of Christ and also a clear intimation that petitions may be addressed to Him, as well as to the Father. Prayer was made to *Him* in Acts 1:24 and 4:24. As Stephen was being stoned, he cried, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" and begged Him not to lay this sin to the charge of his slayers (Act 7:59, 60). When he was the persecuting Saul of Tarsus, Ananias told the Lord that he had authority from the chief priests "to bind all that call on thy name" (Act 9:10-14). That it was the common practice of the primitive saints to invoke the Saviour's name is very evident from 1 Corinthians 1:2. There was a special propriety in Paul, here addressing Christ, for *He* is the One who admits into Paradise (Act 7:59, Rev 1:18).

But let us consider next, *his petition*: "I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me." We regard this request as being made before he had any perception of why the Lord had afflicted him, and also of manifesting his native kinship with us. Thorns are far from pleasant, and we desire their prompt removal. Nor is it wrong for us to do so—we should not be rational and sentient creatures if we did not shrink from suffering. For us to ask for deliverance from pain and trouble is not sinful, neither is it spiritual. Then *what is it?* Why, *natural*, the exercise of that instinct of self-preservation with which the Creator has endowed us. But it becomes sinful when we insist on deliverance, insubordinate to the Divine will. In Paul's case, and in many others, we see how grace triumphed over nature, the heart gladly acquiescing in the Lord's design.

Some have argued from the example of Christ in Gethsemane and Paul's case here that we ought never to ask God more than thrice for any particular thing, and that if it be not then granted, we must desist. But such an idea is contrary to the many Scriptures where *importunity* in asking is inculcated—for example, in Isaiah 62:7, Luke 11:8; 18:7. God is often pleased to test our faith and patience, for "the LORD wait, that he may be gracious" (Isa 30:18). The repeated request for deliverance shows how heavily the burden pressed upon Paul, as well as indicating how human he was—a man of "like passions as we are" (Jam 5:17). But as God's dear Son learned obedience by the things which He suffered—so also, on the behalf of Christ, it was given His most eminent servant to tread a similar path and be perfected by a special process of affliction.

Fourth, *the answer he received*: "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." (2Co 12:9). God's answer is not always in kind, and a mercy for us that it is not. How little are we able to perceive what would be for our good: "We know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom 8:26). Often we ask for temporal things, and God gives us spiritual; we ask for deliverance, and He grants patience—He answers not according to our will, but our wealth or profit. Hence, we must not be disheartened if our requests be not literally answered—sometimes God answers by reconciling our minds to humiliating trials. "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2Co 12:9)—to support under the severest and most protracted affliction, to enable the soul to lie submissively as clay in the hands of the Potter, to trust His wisdom and love, to be assured that He knows what is best for us.

"My grace": It is Mediatorial grace, the grace given to Christ as the covenant Head of His people (Joh 1:16). It is the Head speaking to a member of His Body. It is not inherent grace or the new nature, but freshly imparted, quickening grace. "My grace *is* sufficient"—not simply "will prove to be." What he knew theoretically, he was now to learn experimentally. A grace that can save a hell-deserving sinner must be sufficient for the petty trials of this life! He who gives the "thorn" also gives grace to bear it. Grace is given not only to resist temptations and strengthen graces, but also endure trials—yet it must be definitely and

diligently sought (Heb 4:16). "In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul" (Psa 138:3). "For my strength is made perfect in weakness," in supporting earthen vessels under the buffetings of Satan—*His* strength was demonstrated when frail women voluntarily went to the stake!

Fifth, Paul's *improvement thereof*: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2Co 12:9). That was more than a sullen submission or even a meek acquiescence. The "rather" points a contrast from the removal of the thorn: To glory on account of infirmities went far beyond resignation in suffering—namely, a *rejoicing*—and to this, *we* should aspire and pray. "Souls that are rich in grace can bear burdens without a burden," said a Puritan. Here is a test by which we may ascertain the measure or degree of grace we have—not by our speculative knowledge, but by the ease with which we bear afflictions, the cheerfulness of our spirits under persecution. When the apostles had been beaten, they departed "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Act 5:40, 41).

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2Co 12:10). This goes further than the foregoing verse—it was because I "took pleasure" in His infirmities that he gloried in them; and it was because they were the occasion of manifesting the power of Christ to uphold and work through one so frail, that he was glad of them. What nature recoils from an enlightened faith accepts and delights in, for the sake of the ulterior blessing—another example of where God can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, and also where He can make both the wrath of man and the enmity of the Serpent to praise Him! In the same way, though on a lower plane, David said, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted: that I might learn thy statutes" (Psa 119:71). By "the power of Christ," Paul triumphed over all obstacles.

What is meant by "when I am weak, then am I strong"? This needs to be correctly defined, for there is a weakness which does not result in strength, yea, a Christian's consciousness of weakness. There are those who are constantly talking about their inability and bemoaning their helplessness, and their ends! But he who has a true and spiritual sense of his insufficiency to do anything as he ought, is the one who is most earnest in crying to the strong for strength and, other things being equal, the one who is most active in appropriating His strength. To be "weak" is to be emptied of self—but to be at the time occupied with our inability, is to be absorbed with self. To be spiritually "weak" is to be conscious that I "lack wisdom," and that makes me "ask of God" (Jam 1:5); to feel my unbelief, and beg for an increase of faith.

Some *say* they are "*weak*" and then contradict their words by the way they act. Others are *happy* over the very realisation of their impotency—which is like one smitten with a stroke rejoicing in his paralysis as such. It needs to be steadily borne in mind that "hands which hang down, and the feeble knees" (Heb 12:12; Isa 35:3) bring no glory to God. 2 Kings 5:7 illustrates—that was not the language of humility and piety, but of unbelief and pride! My insufficiency is but a privative negative thing and is nothing to boast about—a consciousness thereof is only of value when it moves me to turn unto and lay hold of the Lord's sufficiency—2 Corinthians 3:5 gives *both* sides! The complement to, "for without me ye can do nothing." (Joh 15:5) is "I *can* do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phi 4:13 and compare Eph 6:10, 2Ti 2:1). —A.W.P.

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

23. *Fifteenth Miracle*

The passage which is now to engage our attention is much longer than usual, beginning as it does at 2 Kings 6:24 and running to the end of chapter 7. The whole of it needs to be read at a sitting, so as to perceive its connection, its unity, and its wonders. In it, there is a striking mingling of light and shade: The dark background of human depravity and the bright display of the prophet's faith, the exercise of God's justice in His sore judgments upon rebellious and wayward people, and the manifestation of His amazing mercy and grace. In it, we are shown how the wrath of man was made to praise the Lord, how the oath of a wicked king was made to recoil on his own head, how scepticism of his courtier was given the lie, and how the confidence of Elisha, his Master's word was vindicated. In it, we behold how the wicked was taken in his own craftiness, or to use the language of Samson's parable, how the eater was made to yield meat and how poor outcast lepers became the heralds of good news.

Truth is indeed stranger than fiction. Were one to invent a story after the order of the incident narrated in our present portion, critical readers would scorn it as being too far-fetched. But those who believe in the living and omnipotent God that presides over the affairs of this world, so far from finding anything here which taxes their faith, bow in adoration before Him who has only to speak and it is done, to will a thing and it is accomplished. In this case, Samaria was besieged by a powerful enemy, so that its inhabitants were completely invested. The situation became drastic and desperate, for there was a famine so acute that cannibalism was resorted unto. Yet under these extreme circumstances, Elisha announced that within twenty-four hours, there would be an abundance of food for everyone. His message was received with incredulity and scorn. Yet it came to pass, just as he had said, without a penny being spent, a gift being made, or a blow being struck—the investing Syrians fleeing in panic and leaving their vast stores of food to relieve the famished city.

We begin our examination of this miracle by considering, first, *its reality*. After our remarks above, it may strike the reader that it is quite an unnecessary waste of effort to labour a point which is obvious, and offer proof that a miracle *was* wrought on this occasion. The writer had thought so, too, had he not after completing his own meditations thereon, consulted several volumes on the O.T., only to find that this wonder is not listed among the miracles associated with Elisha. Even such a work as "The Companion Bible"—which supplies what is supposed to be a complete catalogue of the miracles of Elijah and Elisha—*omits* this one. We offer no solution to this strange oversight, but since other writers have failed to see in 2 Kings 7 one of the marvels of our prophet, we feel that we should present some of the evidence—which, in our judgment, furnishes clear proof that a supernatural event *was* wrought on this occasion, and that we are fully warranted in connecting it with him on whom Elijah's mantle fell.

The first thing that we would take note of is that when the people were in such desperate straits, and the king was so beside himself that he rent his clothes and swore that the prophet should be slain that very day, we are told, "But [contrastively] Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him" (2Ki 6:32), which suggests to us that they had waited upon the Lord and had received assurance from Him of His intervention in mercy. Second, that the prophet *was* in communion with and in possession of the secret of the Lord, is borne out by the remaining words of the verse, where he tells his companions of Jehoram's evil intention and announces the approach of his agent before he arrived. Next, we find the prophet plainly declaring that an abundant supply of food would be provided on the morrow (2Ki 7:1), and he did so in his official character as "the man of God" (2Ki 7:2 and repeated in 2Ki 7:17, 19!)—which, as we have seen in previous articles, is the title that is always accorded him when God was about to work mightily through him or for him in answer to his prayers.

Consider, too, the circumstances. "And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they [the Syrians] besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver." (2Ki 6:25). Nevertheless, the prophet declared that there should suddenly be provided sufficient food for all; and the sequel shows it came to pass just as he had predicted.

Nothing short of a miracle could have furnished such an abundant supply. The manner in which that food was furnished clearly evidenced the supernatural, as an impartial reading of 2 Kings 7:6, 7 will make clear—for it was their *enemies* who were made to supply their tables! Finally, if ye give due weight to the “according to the word of the LORD” and “as the man of God had said” in 2 Kings 7:16, 17 and link with 2 Kings 4:43, 44—where another of his miracle is in view and so referred to—the demonstration is complete.

Second, *its occurrence*. This was the terrible shortage of food in the city of Samaria, due to its being invested by an enemy, so that none of its inhabitants could go forth and obtain fresh supplies. “And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria” (2Ki 6:24). Strange as it may at first seem and sound to the reader, we see here one of the many internal evidences of the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures. This will appear if we quote the last clause of the very immediately preceding: “So the bands of Syria came *no more* into the land Israel” (2Ki 6:23). Had an impostor written this chapter, attempting to palm off upon us a pious forgery, he surely would not have been so careless as to place in immediate juxtaposition two statements, which a casual reader can only regard as flat contradiction. No; one who was inventing a story had certainly made it read consistently and plausibly. Hence, we arrive at the conclusion that this is no fictitious narrative from the pen of a pretender to inspiration.

“So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel [of which ‘Samaria’ was a part; as verse 20 shows]. And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria” (2Ki 6:23, 24). Now the placing of those two statements side by side is clear intimation to us that the Scriptures need to be read closely and carefully—that their terms require to be properly weighed, and that failure so to do will inevitably lead unto serious misunderstanding of their purport. It is because infidels only skim passages here and there, and are so poorly acquainted with the Word, that they charge it with being “full of contradictions.” But there is contradiction here, and if it presents any “difficulty” to us, it is entirely of our own making. The first statement has reference to the freebooting and irregular “bands”—which had, from time to time, preyed on the Samaritans (compare “companies” of 2 Kings 5:2), what we would term today, “commando raids”; where 2 Kings 6:24 speaks of organized war, a “mass invasion,” Benhadad gathering together “*all* his hosts.”

“And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria” (2Ki 6:24). The opening clauses far more than a historical time-mark—properly understood, it serves to bring out the character of this man. The introductory—“And”—bids us link his action here with what is recorded in the context. In the remote context (chapter 5), we saw how that God graciously healed Naaman of his leprosy. Naaman was a commander-in-chief of this man’s army and had been sent by him into Samaria to be cured of his dread disease. But so little did the Syrian monarch appreciate that signal favour, shortly after he assembled an increased force of his band and “warred against Israel” (2Ki 6:8). His plan was to capture Jehoram, by being foiled by Elisha, he sent his men to capture the prophet. In that too, it failed, for in answer to Elisha’s prayer, they were smitten with blindness—though instead of taking advantage of their helplessness, he later prayed for their eyes to be opened, and after having them feasted, sent them home to the master, who had returned to Syria.

“And it came to pass after *this*”—not that Benhadad repented of his former actings, nor that he was grateful for the mercy and kindness which had been shown his soldiers; but that he “gathered all his hosts and went and besieged Samaria.” Not only was this base ingratitude against his human benefactors, but it was blatant defiance against Jehovah Himself. Twice the Lord had manifested His miracle-working power, and that in grace, on his behalf; and here was his response. Yet we must look further if we are to perceive the deeper meaning of “it came to pass after this,” for we need to answer the question, Why did the Lord suffer this heathen to invade Israel’s territory? The reply is also furnished by the context. Benhadad was not the only one who had profited by God’s mercies in the immediate past—the king of Israel had also been Divinely delivered from those who sought his life. And how did *he* express his appreciation? Did he promptly institute a religious reformation in his dominions and tear down the altars which his wicked parents had set up? No, so far as we are informed, he was quite unmoved and continued in his idolatry.

It is written, “the curse causeless shall not come” (Pro 26:2). When God afflicts a people, be it a church or a nation, it is because He has a controversy with them—if they refuse to put right what is wrong. He chastises them. God, then, was acting in judgment on Samaria when He commissioned the Syrians to now enter their land in full force. “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is *mine* indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation” (Isa 10:5, 6). So again, at a later date, the Lord said of Nebuchadnezzar, “Thou art *my* battle axe and weapons of war: for with (or “by”) thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms” (Jer 51:20). It is in the light of such passages as these

that we should view the activities of Hitler and Mussolini! Though God's time to completely cast off Israel had not come in the days of Jehoram, yet He employed Benhadad to grievously afflict his kingdom.

"And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver" (2Ki 6:25). Troubles seldom come singly, for God means to leave us without excuse if we fail to recognise *whose* hand it is which is dealing with us. Benhadad chose his hour to attack when Israel was in sore tribulation, which serves also to illustrate Satan's favourite method of assaulting the saints—like the fiend that he is—he strikes when they are at their lowest ebb, coming as the roaring lion when their nerves are already stretched to the utmost, seeking to render them both praiseless and prayerless while lying on a bed of sickness, or to instill into their minds doubts of God's goodness in the hour of bereavement, or to question His promises when the meal has run low in their barrel. But since "we are not ignorant of his devices" (2Co 2:11), we should be on our guard against such tactics.

"And there was a great famine in Samaria" (2Ki 6:25). It needs to be pointed out in these days of skepticism and practical atheism that the inhabitants of earth are under the government of something infinitely better than "fickle fortune"—namely, in a world which is ruled over by the living God. Goodly harvests, or the *absence* of them, are not the result of chance nor the effect of a blind fate. In Psalm 105:16, we read that God "called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread." And, my reader, when *He* calls for a "famine," neither farmers nor scientists (so-called) can prevent or avert it. We have read in the past of "famines" in China and in India, but how faintly can we conceive of the awful horrors of one! As intimated above, the Lord called for this famine on Samaria, because the king and his subjects had not taken to heart His previous chastisements of the land for their idolatry—when a people refuse to heed the rod, then He smites more heavily.

"And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold they besieged it." (2Ki 6:25). Their design was not to storm but to starve the city, by throwing a powerful military cordon around it, so that none could either go out or come in. "And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, [probably taking stock of his defences and seeking to encourage the garrison] there cried a woman unto him saying, Help, my lord, O king" (2Ki 6:26). And well she might, for these were now deprived of the bare necessities of life, with a slow but painful death by starvation staring them in the face. Ah, my reader, how little we really value the common mercies of this life until they are taken from us! Poor was man; she turned to lean upon a broken reed, seeking relief from the apostate king, rather than making known her need unto the Lord. There is no hint anywhere in the narrative that the people betook themselves unto the Throne of grace.

"And he said, If the LORD do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?" (2Ki 6:27). That was not the language of submission and piety, but, as the sequel shows, of derision and blasphemy. His language was that of anger and despair—the Lord will not help, I cannot, so we must perish. Out of the abundance of his evil heart his mouth spake. Calming down a little, "And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman [pointing to a companion] said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son." (2Ki 6:28, 29)—which shows the desperate conditions which then prevailed and the awful pass to which things had come. Natural affection yielded to the pangs of hunger. This too must also be regarded as a most solemn example of the Divine justice, and vengeance on idolatrous Israel.

It must be steadily borne in mind that the people of Samaria had cast off their allegiance to Jehovah and were worshipping false gods, and therefore, according to His threatenings, the Lord visited them with severe judgments. They were so blockaded by the enemy that all ordinary food supplies failed them, so that in their desperation, they were driven to devour the most abominable offals and even human flesh. Of old, the Lord had announced unto Israel, "And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh of *your sons*" (Lev 26:28, 29). And again, "The LORD shall bring a nation against thee...and he shall besiege thee...and thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness" (Deu 28:49-53)—more completely fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. No words of God's shall fall to the ground: His *threatenings*—equally with His promises—are infallibly certain of fulfilment!

How few there are in Great Britain today who realise that but for the infinite mercy of God, the people in these Isles had, but three years ago, been reduced to sore straits. We too were besieged—both by sea and air—and only sovereign God prevented our merciless enemies from totally succeeding in cutting off our principal food supplies. We are not unmindful of the kindness and help of the U.S.A., and the still nobler

generosity of Canada, but all their loans and gifts had been useless if they failed to cross the ocean—in that case, long before now the spectre of famine had stalked our cities. Nor are we unmindful of our intrepid Royal Navy, nor the brave men who manned our merchant ships. But *Who* was it that imparted such courage to them that—again and again after their ships had been torpedoed and themselves left to spend awful days in an open boat—as soon as they were rescued, volunteered to man other ships and went forth afresh to bring in vital supplies? There is a human side to it, and we greatly admire the same; but there is also a Divine side to it, and we have reminded ourselves of it.

Though they recognise not the hand of the Lord in deliverance, the people of Britain now breathe easier since they believe that the submarine menace has been mastered, and we now have full control of the air. But multiplied weapons, both of defence and of offence, are no security against the displeasure of Him whom we continue to defy, with our Sabbath ploughing, harvesting, pleasuring, and many other things. Agriculture may be organized here on a scale it never has been before, yet that guarantees neither crops nor weather to gather them. Of old, God said unto Israel, “*I have smitten* you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your figtrees, and your olive trees *increased*, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto Me. I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt; your young men have I slain with the sword...yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord” (Amo 4:9, 10). The Almighty has a thousand weapons in His armoury by which He can slay us, Will our nation remain deaf to His continued warnings until His patience is exhausted? It looks very much like it.

“And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh” (2Ki 6:30). According to the customs of those days and the ways of Oriental people, this was the assumption of the external garb of a penitent; but what was it worth while he renounced not his idols? Not a particle in the eyes of Him who cannot be imposed upon by any outward shows. It was a pose which the king adopted for the benefit of his subjects, to signify that he felt deeply for their miseries; yet he lamented not for his *own* iniquities, which were the procuring cause of the calamity. Instead of so doing, the very next verse tells us that he took an awful oath that Elisha should be promptly slain. “Rend your *heart* and not your garments” (Joe 2:13) is ever the Divine call to those under chastisement, for God desireth truth (reality) in “the inward parts” (Psa 51:6).

As it is useless to wear sackcloth when we mourn not for our sins, so it is in vain to flock to church on a “day of prayer” and then return at once to our vanities and idols. In the past, Israel complained, “Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.” And God made them answer by saying, “Behold, in the day of your fasting, ye find *pleasure* and things wherewith ye grieve others...ye fast not as this day to make your voice heard on High” (Isa 58:3, 4). Thus, there is such a thing as not only praying, but fasting; and yet, for God to pay no attention to it. At a later date, He said to them, “When ye fasted and mourned...did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? Should ye not *hear* the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets?” (Zec 7:5, 7). While a nation tramples upon the Divine commandments, neither prayer and fasting, nor any other religious performances, are of any avail with Him who says, “Behold *to obey* is better than sacrifice” (1Sa 15:22). There must be a turning away from sin before there can be any real turning unto God. —A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

5c. Its Arrangement

Upon the Son's cheerful acceptance of the terms proposed to Him concerning the federal undertaking He was to engage in, the Father in turn bound Himself to do certain things for and unto the Son. This it was which constituted the very essence of that compact which was made by Them, for a covenant is an agreement between two parties who come under mutual engagements. Something is to be done by one party, in consequence of which the other party binds himself to do another thing in return. As there must be two parties to covenant, so there must be two parts in a covenant—a condition and a promise. It is the performing of the condition or terms of the covenant—the work of service specified—which gives the first party the right to the promised reward. Having already shown what Christ consented to do, we turn now to consider what the Father promised to bestow. First, He agreed to make all needful preparation for the incarnation of His Son. Second, to give Him all requisite assistance in the performing of His work. Third, to bestow upon Him a meet reward.

The promise to make all needful preparation for the incarnation of His Son comprehended the whole of the Father's providences or governance of this world from the creation of man until Christ began His public ministry: "But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto [now], and I work" (Joh 5:17). The Father's "work" included the ordering of human history, and particularly, His dealings with Abraham and his descendants, and the separation of Israel from the rest of the nations—for it was from Israel that Christ, according to the flesh, would issue. The Father's "work" included the giving of a written revelation, in which the covenant was made known and the advent of His Son promised, so that an expectation of His appearing was created and a foundation was laid for His mission. The Father's "work" also involved the "preparation of a body for His Son, which was accomplished by the miracle of the virgin birth. When "the fulness of the time was come [when all the necessary preparations were completed], God sent forth his Son, made of a woman" (Gal 4:4).

The Father promised to give His Son all requisite help for the performing of His work. First, in order for the discharge of His mediatorial office, there was that which *fitted Him* thereto. "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD" (Isa 11:1, 2). Upon which the Puritan Charnock said, "All the gifts of the Spirit should reside in Him as in a proper habitation, perpetually. The human nature being a creature could not beautify and enrich itself with needful gifts; this promise of the Spirit was therefore necessary, His humanity could not else have performed the work it was designed for. So that the habitual holiness residing in the humanity of Christ was a fruit of this eternal covenant. Though the Divine nature of Christ, by virtue of its union, might sanctify the human nature, yet the Spirit was promised Him, because it is His proper office to continue those gifts, which are necessary for any undertaking in the world; and the personal operations of the Trinity do not interfere. It might also be because every person in the Trinity should plainly have a distinct hand in our redemption."

The Father, then, furnished and equipped Christ for His arduous work by a plentiful effusion of the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thus, He declared, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him" (Isa 42:1). Those promises were fulfilled at His baptism, when the Spirit descended upon Him (Mat 3:16), for it was then that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power" (Act 10:38). This was freely owned by the Saviour Himself, for in the synagogue, He read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised," and then declared, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luk 4:18, 21). So too we find Him acknowledging, "I cast out devils by the Spirit of God..." (Mat 12:28).

Second, the Father promised to invest His Son with a threefold office. In order to the saving of His people, it was most requisite that whatever Christ did, He should act by the authority of the Father, by a

commission under the broad seal of Heaven. Accordingly, He said, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren" (Deu 18:15, 18 and see Act 3:22). Christ did not run without being sent: It was God who anointed Him to preach. Again, "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest [He did not intrude Himself into that office]; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee (Heb 5:5)—Christ was "*made* an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb 6:20). So also God the Father invested Him with the royal office: "Yet have I set [*anointed*] my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Psa 2:6), "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper" (Jer 23:5), for "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand" (Joh 3:35); and therefore, hath He made Him "higher than the kings of the earth." (Psa 89:27).

Third, the Father promised Christ strength, support and protection to execute the great work of redemption. His undertaking would be attended with such difficulties that creature power, though unimpaired by sin, would have been quite inadequate for it. It was to be performed in human nature, and *that* had failed in a much easier task, even when possessed of untainted innocence. Therefore did the Father assure Him of help and succour, to carry Him through all the obstacles and dangers, trials and opposition He would meet with. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold...I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will *keep thee*, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles" (Isa 42:1, 6). "The work of redemption was so high and so hard that it would have broken the hearts and the backs of all the glorious angels and mighty men on earth, had they entered on it; therefore, the Father engaged Himself to stand close to Jesus Christ and mightily assist and strengthen Him in all His mediatorial administrations" (T. Brooks, Puritan).

Christ is said to be "the son of man whom thou [God the Father] madest strong for thyself" (Psa 80:17), for He had sworn, "mine arm also shall *strengthen* him" (Psa 89:21). It is blessed to see how that the Redeemer, in the days of His flesh, acknowledged these promises. "I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly" (Psa 22:10). "Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother [see Mat 1:21, 22] hath he made mention of my name. And *he* hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me" (Isa 49:1, 2). "The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned... For the Lord GOD *will help* me...and I know that I shall not be ashamed" (Isa 50:4, 7). In unshaken confidence, when His enemies were conspiring against Him, and His friends were on the point of forsaking Him, He declared, "yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (Joh 16:32).

Those promises of the Father were the support of His soul in the hour of His supreme crisis: His heart laid hold of them, acted faith on them, and received comfort and strength therefrom. "Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust" (Psa 16:1), was His petition and plea. "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. *For* the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." (Isa 50:6, 7). When He was denounced by the Jews and condemned by Pilate, He consoled Himself with the assurance, "He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me" (Isa 50:8). "I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psa 16:8-11). In the prospect of death, He rejoiced in the sure knowledge of resurrection.

Fourth, the Father promised Him a glorious reward. First, a glory for Himself *personally*, as the God-man Mediator. As He was to endure the cross, so He was also to receive the crown. The enduring of the cross was a covenant engagement on His part, and the bestowing of the crown was a covenant engagement on the Father's part. That was plainly borne witness to by His prophets, for the Spirit in them "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, *and* the glory that should follow" (1Pe 1:11). That glory consisted in His being fully invested with His priestly and royal offices. As it was with that type, so with the Antitype. David was anointed incipiently and privately before he slew Goliath (1Sa 16:13), but formally and publicly after his victories (2Sa 5:12). The antitypical David was indeed "anointed with the Holy Spirit" at the Jordan, but not until after He had triumphed over sin, Satan, and the grave, did God anoint Him "with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Heb 1:9) and publicly make Him to be "both Lord and Christ" (Act 2:36).

"The solemn inauguration into all His offices was after His making reconciliation: making an end of sin, bringing in everlasting righteousness and thereby shutting up all prophecy and vision, because all the prophecies tended to Him and were accomplished in Him; and then as manifesting Himself the most holy, He was to be anointed—i.e. fully invested in all the office of Prophet, Priest and King (Dan 9:24). The compact ran thus: Do this, suffer death for the vindication of the honour of My Law, and Thou shalt be Priest and King forever. He could not, therefore, be solemnly installed until He had performed the condition on His part (for the promise was made to Him, considered as Mediator or God-man); then it was that He was advanced, for the ground of His exaltation is pitched wholly upon His sufferings. Therefore, God hath given Him a glory as a just debt due to the price paid, the sufferings undergone, and the obedience yielded to the mediatory Law" (S. Charnock). Hence, it is that the general assembly of Heaven say, with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Rev 5:12).

Subsidiary to that glorious investiture was the Father's promise to *raise* Christ from the dead. "He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever" (Psa 21:4). Beautifully does that link up with Psalm 102:23-27—quoted by the apostle in Hebrews 1:12 as the words of the Father to the Son. In Psalm 102:23, 24, we hear the incarnate Son saying, "He shortened my days. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days"—to which the Father made answer, "Thy years are throughout all generations...But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end" (verse 27). So again, He received assurance, "He shall prolong his days!" (Isa 53:10). The Father made promise that the One who had been bruised by Him and whose soul He had made "an offering for sin" should have a glorious deliverance and should reign in life. It was in fulfilment of such promises as these that "The God of peace [the reconciled One], that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb 13:20).

In like manner, subsidiary to Christ's glorious investiture of His full priestly and kingly offices was His *ascension*, for though He was born King and acted as Priest at the cross when He "offered Himself to God" and "made intercession for the transgressors," yet not until He had completely performed His part of the covenant could He enter into His rightful reward. Accordingly, we find promise of ascension made unto Him. It was clearly implied in "I will make Him My Firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth" (Psa 89:27). It was revealed in, "Who shall ascend into the Hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His Holy Place?" answered by, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in" (Psa 24:3, 7). It was plainly announced in "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive" (Psa 68:18). It was such promises as these the Saviour had in mind when He said "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luk 24:26).

"Behold, my servant shall deal prudently [consequently], he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high" (Isa 52:13). The 53rd of Isaiah—that wondrous chapter in which we have so solemnly, so strikingly, and so evangelically depicted, the vicarious sufferings of Christ—closes with that blessed promise of the Father: "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death" (Isa 53:12). The similitude used there is taken from the honouring of military conquerors who, having in fight defeated and rooted their enemies, gained a great victory; and in consequence, are suitably rewarded by their princes—being exalted by them and given a share of the spoils or fruits of war. It was as though God the Father said: This My incarnate and successful Son shall receive such honour, glory, renown, and riches after His toils and conflicts as are meet for His triumphs. He shall have a glorious recompense for all His humiliation and sufferings at the hands of men, for His opposition from Satan and for His enduring of My wrath—for nothing less is due Him. The fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12 is seen in Ephesians 4:8, Colossians 2:15, etc.

"The obedience of Christ bears to these blessings not only the relation of antecedent to consequent, but of merit to reward; so that His obedience is the cause: and the condition being fulfilled by virtue of obedience, He has a right to the reward" (H. Witsius, the Dutch Puritan). That is the precise force of the "Therefore" in the above verse, as it is also in "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness [a summary of His work of obedience]: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows (Psa 45:7). It was not only that justice required it, but the covenant fidelity of the Father was involved therein—hence His assurance, "But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted" (Psa 89:24). Thus also the N.T.: Christ "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name" (Phi 2:8, 9). It was Christ's meriting the reward for *Himself* which was the ground of His meriting life and glory for *us*.

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Act 2:36). That was the whole burden or theme of Peter's pentecostal sermon, the grand truth proclaimed therein and enforced by Scripture, that He—whom the Jews had vilified—God had glorified. Having faithfully fulfilled the terms of the everlasting covenant, the Saviour was elevated to dominion and empire over the world. God's exaltation of Him in His human nature to His own right hand (Isaiah 33), was a full confirmation and demonstration of what He had acquired by His death. He made Him "both Lord and Christ," seating "Messiah the Prince" (Dan 9:25) upon the throne of the universe. This is an economical Lordship, a dispensation committed to Him as God-man by the Father—just as He has "given him authority to execute judgment also" (Joh 5:27). The One whom His enemies crowned with thorns, God has "crowned with glory and honour" (Heb 2:9). He must be received by us as "Lord" before we can have Him for our "Christ": He must have the throne of our hearts, if we are to receive His benefits.

It was promised Christ that "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth...Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper" (Psa 72:8, 11, 12). As of this in consequence of, "The LORD [the Father] said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool...The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psa 110:1, 4); that is, a *royal* Priest—"he shall be a priest upon his throne" (Zec 6:13). A regal inheritance was assured Him. Not only has He acquired the mundane inheritance forfeited by the first Adam, but as the risen Redeemer declared, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Mat 28:18), for the Father "hath appointed [Him] heir of all things" so that now He is "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb 1:2, 3), wielding the sceptre of universal dominion. The "government" is upon "*His* shoulder" (Isa 9:6).

It was promised that a blessed harvest should crown His undertaking, that He should reap the fruit of His sufferings. "The pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand" (Isa 53:10). What that signifies is intimated in such passages as the following: "I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth" (Isa 49:8, 9). "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee" (Isa 55:5). "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isa 60:3). To the One who came forth from Bethlehem, it was promised, "now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth" (Mic 5:2, 4). How fully these promises have yet been fulfilled or how much longer human history must yet continue we do not profess to know, but even now, "angels and authorities and powers" are "subject unto him" (1Pe 3:22). —A.W.P.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH OR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

6. Its Seasonableness

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven...He hath made every thing beautiful in his time” (Ecc 3:1, 11). If the whole of these eleven verses be read consecutively, it will be seen that they furnish a full outline of the many and different experiences of human life in this world—each aspect of man’s varied career and his reactions thereto being stated. That which is emphasised in connection with all the mutations and vicissitudes of life, is that they are all ordained and regulated by God, according to His unerring wisdom. Not only has He appointed a time to every purpose under heaven, but has made “every thing beautiful *in* his time.” Nothing is too early, nothing too late; everything is perfectly coordinated, and, as we learn from the N.T., made to “work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28).

There is a predestined time when each creature and each event shall come forth, how long it shall continue, and in what circumstances it shall be—all being determined by the Lord. This is true of the world as a whole, for God “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11). This earth has not always existed. God was the One who decided when it should spring into being, and He created it by a mere fiat: “For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Psa 33:9). Nor will it last forever, for the hour is coming when its very elements “shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2Pe 3:10). How far distant, or how near, that solemn hour is, no creature has any means of knowing; yet the precise day for it is unchangeably fixed in the Divine decree.

The same grand truth which pertains to the whole of creation applies with equal force to all the workings of Divine Providence. The beginning and the end, and the whole intervening career, of each person has been determined by his Maker. So too the rise, the progress, the height attained, and the entire history of each nation has been foreordained of God. “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36). A nation is but the aggregate of individuals comprising it, and though its corporate life be much longer than of any one generation of its members, yet it is subject to the same Divine laws. Each kingdom, each empire, has its birth and development, its maturity and zenith, its decline and death. The Egyptian had; so had the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian and Roman.

What is stated in Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11 holds good of things in the spiritual realm; equally so with those in the material sphere—though we are more apt to forget this in connection with the former than with the latter. It is a fact that in the Christian life, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Ecc 3:1). How can it be otherwise, seeing that the God of creation, the God of providence, and the God of all grace is one. It is true there is much in the Divine operations, both in Providence and in Grace—which is profoundly mysterious, for “great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend” (Job 37:5). Yet not a little light is cast upon those higher mysteries, if we seek to observe the ways and workings of God *in Nature*. How often the Lord Jesus made us of that principle, directing the attention of His hearers unto the most familiar objects in the physical realm.

Again and again, we find the Divine Teacher using the things growing in the field to illustrate and adumbrate the things which are invisible and to inculcate lessons of spiritual value. “*Consider the lilies*” (Mat 6:28; Luk 12:27). Not only look upon and admire them, but receive instruction therefrom. “*Learn a parable of the fig tree*” (Mat 24:32; Mar 13:28). Yes, *learn* from it—ponder it, let it inform you about spiritual matters. When Christ insisted on the inseparable connection there is between character and conduct, He employed the similitude of a tree being known by its fruit. When He urged the necessity of new hearts in ordering for the reception of new covenant blessings, He spoke of new bottles for new wine. When He revealed the essential conditions of spiritual fruitfulness, He mentioned the vine and its branches. Yes, there is much in the material world from which we may learn valuable lessons on the spiritual life.

Take the seasons which God has appointed for the year and how each brings forth accordingly. The coldness and barrenness of the winter gives place to the warmth and fertility of the spring, while the vege-

tables and fruit which sprout in the spring and grow through the summer are matured in the autumn. Each season has its own peculiar features and characteristic products. The same principle is seen operating in a human being. The life of man is divided into distinct seasons or stages: Childhood, youth, maturity and old age. And each of those stages is marked by characteristic features: The innocence and shyness of (normal) children, the zeal and vigour of youth, the stability and endurance of maturity, the experience and wisdom of old age—and each of these distinctive features is “beautiful in [its] time.”

Not only has God appointed the particular seasons when each of His creatures shall come forth and flourish, but we are obliged to *wait* His set time for the same. If we sow seeds in the winter, they will not germinate. Plants which sprout in the spring cannot be forced, but have to wait for the Summer’s sun. So it is in the human realm. “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” We cannot put old heads on young shoulders, and though our moderns are attempting to do so, their efforts will not only prove unsuccessful but issue in disastrous consequences. As everything is “beautiful in his time,” they are incongruous and unseemly *out* of season. “When I was a child, I spake as a child...I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1Co 13:11).

In the light of what has been said, it is both interesting and instructive to ponder the ways of God with His people during the O.T. and N.T. eras. Much of that which obtained under the Mosaic dispensation was suited to that infantile period and was “beautiful in his time,” but now that “the fulness of time” has come, such things would be quite out of place. During that kindergarten stage, God instituted an elaborate ritual which appealed to the senses, and instructed by means of pictures and symbols. There was the colourful tabernacle, the priestly vestments, the burning of incense, the playing of instruments. They were all invested with a typical significance, but when the Substance appeared, there was no further need of them. They had become obsolete, and to bring forward such things into Christian worship—as Rome does—is an unseasonable lapsing back to the nursery stage.

All that has been pointed out above is most pertinent to the spiritual growth of the individual Christian—and particularly to the several *stages* of his development or progress, and if duly attended to, should preserve from many mistaken notions and erroneous conclusions. As the year is divided into different seasons, so the Christian life has different stages, and as there are certain features which more or less characterise the year’s seasons, so there are certain experiences, more or less peculiar to each stage in the Christian life, and a search of the year’s seasons is marked by a decided *change* in what the garden and the orchard then brings forth, so there is a variation and alteration in the graces manifested and the fruits borne by the Christian during the several stages through which he passes; but “everything is beautiful in his time”—as it would be incongruous out of its season.

Now though, the earth’s seasons are four in number, yet only three of them are concerned with fertility or production. The analogy pertains spiritually: In the Christian life, there is a spring, a summer, and an autumn—the “winter” is when his body has been committed to the grave in sure and certain hope of resurrection, awaiting the eternal Spring. Thus, we should expect to find that the more explicit teaching of the N.T. divides the spiritual life of the saint on earth into three stages; and such is indeed the case. In one of his parables of the kingdom of God, Christ used the similitude of a man casting seed into the ground (a figure of preaching the Gospel), saying “For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear” (Mar 4:28): *There* are the three stages of growth. In like manner, we find the apostle grading those to whom he wrote into three classes—namely, “fathers,” “young men,” and “little children” (1Jo 2:13).

Nothing which lives is brought to maturity immediately in this lower world. Instead, everything advances by gradual growth and orderly progress. God indeed created Adam and Eve in their full perfection, but He does not regenerate us into our complete stature in Christ. All the parts and faculties of the new man come into being at the new birth, but time is needed for their development and manifestation. Moreover, as natural talents are not bestowed uniformly—to some being given five, to others two, and to yet others only one (Mat 25:15), so God bestows a greater measure of grace to one of His people than to another. There is therefore a great difference among Christians—all are not of one stature, strength, and growth in godliness. Some are “sheep” and others, but “lambs” (Joh 21:15, 16). Some are “strong”; others are “weak” (Rom 15:1). Some are but “babes”; others are of “full age” (Heb 5:13, 14). Nevertheless, each brings forth fruit “in his season” (Psa 1:3).

If more attention were paid unto the principles, which we have sought to enunciate and illustrate above, some of us would be preserved from forming harsh judgments of our younger brethren and sisters and from criticizing them, because they do not exercise those graces and bear those fruits which pertain more to the stage of Christian maturity. One would instantly perceive the folly of a farmer who complained,

because his field of grain bore no golden ears during the early months of spring. Equally senseless and sinful is it to blame a babe in Christ, because he has neither the mature judgment nor the patience of an experienced and long-tried believer. To that statement, every spiritual reader will readily assent; yet, we very much fear that some of these very persons are guilty of the same thing in another direction: *Self-ward*—reproaching themselves in later life, because they lack the glow and ardour, and the zeal and zest which formerly characterised them.

Some older Christians look back and compare themselves with the days of their spiritual youth, and then utter hard things against themselves, concluding that so far from having advanced, they have retrograded. In certain cases, their lamentations are justifiable, as with Solomon. But in many instances, they are not warrantable—being occasioned by a wrong standard of measurement and through failing to bear in mind the seasonableness or unseasonableness of certain fruits at particular times. They complain now because they lack the liveliness of earlier days, when they had warmer affections for Christ and His people, more joy in reading the Word and prayer, more zeal in seeking to promote the good of others, more fruit for their labours. They complain that though they now spend more time in using the means of grace, others who are but spiritual babes appear to derive far greater benefit, though less diligent in duties than they are.

In some cases where conversion has been more radical and clearly marked, growth is more easily perceived, but where conversion itself was a quiet and gradual experience, it is much more difficult to trace out the subsequent progress that is made. As the Christian obtains more light from God, he becomes increasingly aware of his filth, and by apprehensions of his decrease, he will increase in humility. As spiritual wisdom increases, he measures himself by *higher* standard—and thus, becomes more conscious of his comings short thereof. Formerly, he was more occupied with his outward walk, but now he is more diligent in seeking to discipline his heart. In earlier years, there may have been more fervour in his prayers; but now, his petitions should be more spiritual. As the Christian grows spiritually, his desires enlarge, and because his attainments do not keep pace, he is apt to err in his judgment of himself: “There is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches” (Pro 13:7)!

Young Christians are generally more enthusiastic and active, yet the zeal is not always according to knowledge, and at times, it is unseasonable through neglecting temporal affairs for spiritual. A young Christian is ready to respond to almost any plausible appeal for money, but a mature one is more cautious before he acts, lest he should be supporting enemies of the Truth. The older Christian may not perform some duties with the same zest as formerly, yet with more conscience—quality rather than quantity is what now more concerns him. As we grow older, greater and more difficulties are encountered, and the overcoming of them evidences that we have a larger measure of grace. Particular graces may not be as conspicuous as previously, and yet the exercise of new ones be more evident (2Pe 1:5-7). Measure not your growth by any one part of your life, nor by any single aspect of it, but by your Christian career as a whole.

It is by no means a simple matter to accurately classify believers as to which particular form they belong to in the school of Christ, either concerning ourselves or others, for spiritual growth is rarely *uniform*—though it ought to be so. Some Christians are weak and strong at one and the same time, in different respects, as both experience and observation show. Some have better heads than hearts, while others have sounder hearts than heads. So they are weak in knowledge, ignorant and unsettled in the Faith, who nevertheless put to shame their better-instructed brethren by their love and zeal, and their walk and fruitfulness. Others have a good understanding of the Truth, but are veritable babes when it comes to putting it into practice. Solomon was endued with great wisdom, but ruined his testimony through yielding to fleshly lusts. “A Christian should labour for a good heart well-headed, and a head well-hearted” (T. Manton, 1620-1677).

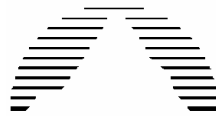
Again, it needs to be borne in mind that there are great differences in the same Christian at sundry times, yea, within a single season, so that the three stages of spiritual growth may coincide in a single saint. The maturest “father” in some respects may be as weak as a new born “babe” in other regards, and tempted as violently as the “young men.” The case of the godliest man is not always uniform. One day, he may be rapt into the holy mount to behold Christ in His glory, and the same evening, be tossed with winds and waves, and in his feelings like a ship on the point of sinking. Now he may, like Paul, be caught up into Paradise and favoured with revelations, which he cannot express to others, and anon be afflicted with a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him. Calms and storms, peace and troubles, combats and conquests, weakness and strength, alternate in the lives of God’s people—yet in each, they may bring forth fruit which is “beautiful in his time” (Ecc 3:11).

All that has been dwelt upon above may appear unto some of our readers as being so elementary and obvious that there was really no need to point out the same. Though that be the case, there are others who at

least require to be reminded thereof. It is not so much our knowledge, but the *use* we make of it that counts the most, and often our worst failures issue not from ignorance, but from acting contrary to the light we have. A due recognition of the seasonableness or unreasonableness of particular spiritual fruits in the Christian life will preserve from many wrong conclusions. On the one hand, it should keep him from expecting to find in a spiritual babe those fruits and developed graces which pertain unto a state of maturity; and on the other hand, he who regards himself as a “father” in Christ must vindicate that estimation by banding forth far more than do young Christians. —A.W.P.

TO AMERICAN READERS

In order to give a double opportunity for at least one of each issue of the “Studies” to reach those of our U.S.A. and Canadian friends, who kindly take two or more copies, we have, for the last four years, sent the same with a two weeks’ interval between mailings, so that the second lot could go by a different convoy. But now that conditions on the Atlantic are reported to be much improved, we shall cease so doing, and during 1945 D.V., post two of each issue in the same envelope—no doubt that will be more acceptable. Yet *prayer* will still be needed that it may please God to protect your copies as they cross the ocean.



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