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“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

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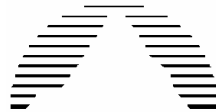
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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GOD'S VOICE IN JUDGMENTS

“Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I frame evil against you and devise a device against you” (Jer 18:11). That is the language of God unto a kingdom whose overthrow is threatened by His judgments, to whom the dispensations of his providence announce impending ruin. The dark clouds of calamity overhead testify to God’s disapproval of a nation’s sins. Under such solemn presages of the impending storm of Divine wrath proud spirits ought to be tamed and the masses brought to realize what a vain thing it is to fight against the Almighty and how fearful are the consequences of flouting His authority and treading underfoot His laws. The effects of evil doing are termed by the Spirit “gall and wormwood,” but it is not until God brings a nation into external miseries they are made to realize the truth thereof. “Thine own wickedness shall correct thee and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts” (Jer 2:19).

“Behold, I frame evil against you.” The speaker is the Most High and “none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest thou?” He framed evil against the antediluvians. “The earth was filled with violence...all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Gen 6:11,12). Warnings of impending doom were given by Enoch (Jude 14,15) and Noah, but none heeded. Then the storm burst: “all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven opened” (Gen 7:11). And what could men do to help themselves? Nothing whatever. God “framed evil” against Sodom and Gomorrah and what could their inhabitants do when He “rained fire and brimstone” upon them (Gen 18:24). They were powerless to withstand it. God “framed evil” against Egypt. Her haughty monarch exclaimed “who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?” (Exo 5:2), but discovered that He was not to be defied with impunity when He “took off their chariot wheels” and drowned him and his hosts in the Red Sea.

When the Almighty sends a devastating earthquake, what can puny man do? When He withholds the rain and famine ravages a land, who can resist Him? When He visits with a pestilence which cuts off millions in the prime of life, as the “flu” did in 1918, who can say Him nay? When He unleashes the dreadful hounds of war, who can turn them back? Is there, then, no hope? Yes, if the masses will truly humble themselves beneath the Hand that has begun to smite them. God’s judgments are articulate: they call upon all to throw down the weapons of their high-handed rebellion against Heaven. God takes away their peace and comforts that they may put away their idols. Calamities are sent upon evil-doers that they should depart from their wickedness. God is able to destroy the mightiest kingdom in the twinkling of an eye, but usually He spreads His judgments over a period, as in the ten plagues upon Egypt, granting space for repentance and allowing an interval between the announcement of His having “framed evil,” and the actual and full execution thereof.

Thus it is here in Jeremiah 18:11: after declaring He had devised a device against a nation God adds, “Return ye now everyone from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.” Conversion ought to be the immediate outcome of God’s judgments, whether they be threatened or in actual course of fulfillment. If men would forsake their sins God would soon lay aside His rod. But observe the urgency of the Call: “return ye *now* every one from his evil way.” There is no time for delay: God will not be trifled with. Men are very prone to procrastinate: they put off the day of repentance and defer their reformation. They hope and resolve, yet postpone the same, and the longer they do so the harder their hearts become and the more completely the Devil obtains possession of them. Agrippa was “almost persuaded,” but that was as far as he went: his lusts held him fast. “*Today* if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts” (Psa 95:7): if ever there was a time when it was imperative to heed that exhortation it is now.

“And they said, There is no hope” (Jer 18:12). There are three possible interpretations of those words. First, they may be regarded as the language of despair: there is no hope for us *in God*, we have sinned beyond the reach of mercy. But that would necessarily presuppose they were deeply convicted of their guilt,

and the remainder of the verse definitely precludes any such concept. Second, "there is no hope" might be the language of confessed helplessness. There is no hope *in us*: we are too besotted to reform, too wedded to our sins to break from them; but the remainder of the verse is flatly against this too. Third, "there is no hope" was the language of blatant defiance. There is no hope *for you*: it is useless to preach to us, our minds are fully made up, we are determined to have our own way, and nothing you say can change us. "We will walk after our own devices and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart" they declared. It was the language of open rebellion, whether expressed in words or in deeds.

That this is the obvious meaning of their "there is no hope" is clear not only from the words which immediately follow but also from other passages in Jeremiah. "But they hearkened not nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward" (7:24); "thou saidst, *I will not hear*: this hath been thy manner from thy youth that thou obeyedst not My voice" (22:21 and see 44:16,17). They declined to be affected by the heavy clouds of judgment over their heads. They refused to forsake their evil ways. They were determined to persist in their disobedience. They openly defied the Almighty. They were impervious to all expostulations and admonitions. Their hearts were fully set in them to drink their fill of iniquity. "For the people turneth not unto Him that smiteth them neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts" (Isa 9:13). "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; Thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock" (Jer 5:3).

"We will walk after our own devices." We are quite resolved to continue in sin, and no preaching can change us. We are fully determined to do so, no matter what it may cost us. Of old God sent a shortage of food on Israel, but it produced no reformation: "yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord." He smote them with blasting and mildew so that their gardens and vineyards were destroyed, but it moved them not: "yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord." He sent pestilence among them and slew their young men, but they continued impenitent: "yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord." He destroyed some of them by fire, but they persisted in their sins: "yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord" (Amos 4:6-10). And history has repeated itself! It is still doing so before our very eyes. The perversity of ancient Israel finds its counterpart in the contumacy of modern Christendom. God has given Britain "space to repent," alas, it has to be added "and she *repented not*" (Rev 2:21), nor is their the slightest indication she will yet do so. —AWP

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

26e. Profession tested: Matthew 7:24, 25

Verses 24-27 form the conclusion of our Lord's Address. Upon them Spurgeon said, "These were the closing words of our Saviour's most famous sermon upon the mount. Some preachers concentrate all their powers upon an effort to conclude with a fine thing called a peroration, which being interpreted, means a blaze of rhetorical fireworks, in the glory of which the speaker subsides. They certainly have not the example of Christ in this discourse to warrant them in the practice. Here is the Saviour's peroration, and yet it is as simple as any other part of the address. There is an evident absence of all artificial oratory. The whole of His hill-sermon was intensely earnest, and that earnestness was sustained to the end, so that the closing words are as glowing coals, or as sharp arrows of the bow. Our Lord closes not by displaying His own powers of elocution, but by simply and affectionately addressing a warning to those who, having heard His words, should remain satisfied with hearing, and should not go forth and put them into practice."

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock" (vv 24,25). Simple as that language is, yet many have misunderstood its meaning and missed its import. No two of the commentators give a uniform exegesis of these verses, and though there is more or less substantial agreement with the older and soundest expositors, yet even among them there is considerable difference of opinion. When we consult more recent writers thereon, especially those who may be broadly classed as belonging to the "Fun-

damentalist School,” while there is much more of a saying of the same thing yet we are personally convinced it is a saying of the *wrong* thing. A critical examination of the view they have taken obliges one to point out that they have read into this passage what is not there, that they have utterly failed to bring out what is there, and this because they have missed the scope of our passage through ignoring its context.

According to the Antinomian interpretation of this passage our Lord ought to have said, “Whosoever believeth the Gospel and trusts in My atoning blood, I will liken him unto a wise man who built his house upon the Rock; and every one who endeavours to heed My precepts and then trusts in his own good works to obtain for him acceptance with God, I will liken unto a foolish man who built his house upon the sand.” But in the verses before us Christ said nothing of the sort. And why? Because He was dealing with something more solemn and searching than what constitutes the ground of a sinner’s acceptance with God. It is perfectly true, blessedly true, that every sinner who exercises a saving faith in the Sacrifice of Christ is a wise man, and that he is eternally secure; as it is equally true that any one who relies upon his own obedience to the Divine commandments in order to obtain a passport into everlasting bliss is a fool, as he will prove in the day of testing. But we say again, Christ is not here speaking of either the object or ground of saving faith but of something far more probing and revealing, and we throw everything into the utmost confusion if we confound the two things.

Before we are ready to weigh the terms of our passage we must first ascertain and determine its scope, and that calls for a careful noting of its context. In the verses immediately preceding it is clearly the testing of profession which is in view, the making evident of the reality which lies behind all surface appearances, and in this closing section Christ continues to show what it is which distinguishes the genuine and living Christian from a nominal and lifeless one. In some passages the “house” or home is a figure of the place of affection and rest, but here it is viewed as a shelter and refuge from the storm. The stability and security of a house depends ultimately on the strength of its foundation. For if that be faulty, no matter how good the materials of which it is composed or how reliable the workmanship of those engaged in its construction, when a hurricane strikes it will fall. This obvious fact has been grasped by all the commentators, but as to what our Lord signified by the “rock” foundation there is wide difference of opinion.

Probably the passage which occurs most readily to the minds of many of our readers in this connection is Isaiah 28:16, “Thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a Stone, a tried Stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation,” and from Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:5-7 we know that the precious “Stone” and “Sure Foundation” is Christ Himself. Yet we make great mistake if we suppose that *every* NT passage containing the word “foundation” looks back to Isaiah 28:16 or refers to the same thing. Not so “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth [loveth, and therefore preserveth] them that are His” (2 Tim 2:19): as the contrast from the preceding verse denotes, the “foundation” here signifies the Divine decree or foreordination, which cannot be overthrown. “Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:20) refers to the ministerial foundation, the Truth proclaimed. Hebrews 6:1 speaks of “the foundation of repentance from dead works,” for one has not made a start in practical godliness until that has been laid. Thus there is a need for the teacher here who is qualified to distinguish between things that differ.

There is one other passage which it is important to consider in this connection, namely, “Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy: that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 6:17-19). Why is this passage so infrequently cited and still more infrequently expounded and enforced? For every time allusion is made to it, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1Co 3:11) is quoted twenty times. Is that handling the Word honestly? No, it is not, and the churches have suffered greatly because of such unfaithfulness in the pulpit. This passage, be it noted, is addressed to the minister of the Gospel, specifying one of the duties his office obligates him to perform, but has one preacher in a hundred, during the past fifty years, conscientiously discharged it? have not the vast majority toadied to their wealthy members and withheld from them that which they most needed!

But does this passage teach that we are required to perform deeds of charity for the purpose of acquiring “merit” before God and thereby purchase for ourselves His favourable regard? or, as one has expressed it “raise a cloud of gold-dust which will waft us to Heaven.” Certainly not: there is nothing here which fosters the fatal delusion of Papists. Nevertheless, there is important instruction which we cannot afford to

ignore. It is *Christians* that are “rich in this world” who are to be thus charged: “Be not high minded”—affecting yourselves to be superior to the poor of the flock; “nor trust in uncertain riches”—which may speedily disappear; “but in the living God”—who changeth not, and is your true Portion. “Who giveth us richly all things to enjoy”—but not to squander on over-indulgence. “That they do good” with what God has loaned to them, faithfully discharging their stewardship. “Laying up for themselves a good foundation” in their conscience, a reliable basis for their hope, a sure ground of assurance, thereby confirming their personal interest in Christ, for “good works” are the evidences of the genuineness of our faith.

“Laying up in store for themselves [not ‘before God’!] a good foundation against the time to come”: whether it be adversity that overtakes you through financial reverses, so that those you have aided will be the readier to assist you; or a bed of lingering illness, so that you may not have the additional anguish of a conscience accusing you of selfishness and callousness; or the hour of death itself, that you may have the comfort of knowing you have discharged your stewardship faithfully and that the poor call you blessed; or the Day to come, when “they that have done good” will come forth “unto the resurrection of life” (John 5:29) and their “good works” will be owned and rewarded by the Judge of all the earth. “That they may lay hold on eternal life” obtaining a firmer conscious grip on the same, for the “good works” of the Christian are so many testimonies of his portion in Heaven. Having our affections set upon Christ and our true riches in Him, let us act like wise merchants, not grasping at shadows and uncertainties, but suing for His glory and the good of our fellows what He has entrusted to us, thereby laying up for ourselves “treasures in Heaven” (Matt 6:20) and acquiring additional confirmation that we already possess the “earnest” of “eternal life.” The “house” of *such* an one is built upon a “rock”!

It will be seen from the last four paragraphs that the term “foundation” is found in widely different connections, that it is not always used to denote precisely the same thing, and therefore that its significance in a particular verse must be sought by ascertaining the scope and meaning of the passage in which that verse occurs; and that is no task for the “novice” but rather for the experienced expositor. What, then, is the *scope* (the dominating subject and design) of Matthew 7:24, 25? As already stated, it is the *testing of profession*, a furnishing proof of the reality or worthlessness of the same. Rightly did Andrew Fuller point out, “Our Lord is not discoursing on our being justified by faith, but on our being judged according to our works, which, though consistent with the other, is not the same thing, and must not be confounded with it. The character described is not the self-righteous rejector of the Gospel, but one who though he may hear it and profess to believe it, yet brings forth no corresponding fruit. It is not a passage suited to expose the errors of Romanists, but one which needs to be pressed upon Antinomians—they who hold ‘only believe, and all is well.’”

Our passage opens with the word “Therefore,” which indicates our Lord was drawing a conclusion from what He had just been saying. In the preceding verses He was certainly not describing work-mongers, those who trusted in their good deeds and religious performances to gain them acceptance with God. Rather is He there calling upon His hearers to enter in at the strait gate (vv 13,14), warning against false prophets (vv 15-20), denouncing an empty profession. In the verse immediately before (23), so far from presenting Himself as the Redeemer, tenderly wooing sinners, He is seen as the Judge, saying to the hypocrites “depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.” Thus to say the least, this would be a very strange point in His discourse at which to abruptly introduce the Gospel of the grace of God and announce that His own finished work is the only saving foundation for sinners to rest their souls upon: this would give no meaning whatever to the opening “therefore.” Moreover, in what at once follows, instead of speaking of our need of trusting in His atoning blood, Christ shows how indispensable it is that we render obedience to His precepts.

John Brown, the renowned Scottish expositor, brought out quite clearly the force of our Lord’s “Therefore” both in reference to what preceded and to what follows. “Surely, ‘if not every one who calls Christ Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he only who does the will of His Father which is in heaven’; if to all workers of iniquity, even although they shall have ‘prophesied and cast out devils, and done many wonderful works in the name of Christ,’ it shall at last be said by our Lord, declaring by His judgment the final state of men, ‘depart from Me: I never knew you’; then it certainly follows that he who hears and does our Lord’s sayings is a wise man, and that he who hears them and does them not is a fool. The one saves, the other loses, the salvation of the soul, the happiness of eternity.” As Matthew Henry also pointed out, “The scope of this passage teaches us that the only way to make sure work for our souls and eternity is to hear and do the sayings of the Lord Jesus.” They who think they are savingly trusting in the blood of Christ while disregarding His commands are fatally deceiving themselves.

In many respects Matthew 7:24-27 is closely analogous to 25:1-12. Both passages treat of professing Christians. In each case those professors are divided into two classes, called the "wise" and the "foolish." In each case these radically different characters had something in common: in the former, both are likened unto builders and each erect a house: in the latter, both are termed "virgins" and both go forth to meet the Bridegroom with lamps in their hands. In each case the latter class is found wanting when put to the proof and meet with irremediable disaster: in the former when the storm bursts the house of the fool falls, in the latter when the Bridegroom arrives the fool faces a closed door. In each case the difference between the two classes was nothing external, but that which lay *out of sight*—the faulty "foundation" of the former and the lack of oil "in their vessels" with the latter. We have compared these two passages together not only to note the interesting correspondence which exist between them, but chiefly because the latter throws light upon the former and helps to fix its interpretation.

Let us duly note what Christ does *not* here say of the one He terms wise: "he that heareth these sayings of Mine and understandeth them," nor even "he that heareth these sayings of Mine and *believeth in Me*" what He *did* say goes much further than that. There are multitudes who believe in Christ who do not put His precepts into practice. In the same way that there are millions in India who believe in Buddha, millions in China who believe in Confucius, millions in Africa who believe in Mahomet, so vast numbers in Christendom believe in Christ. And because they "believe in Christ" they suppose that all is well with them and that when they die they will go to Heaven. Nor are there many now left on earth who are likely to disillusion them. The great majority of the preachers in this apostate age are only adding to the number of the deceived, by telling them that all God requires of them is to believe the Gospel and receive Christ as their personal Saviour. They quote such passages as John 3:16 and Acts 16:31 which contain the word "believe," but are guiltily silent on the many verses which insist on repentance, forsaking of sins, denying of self, and which call to obedience.

How often, for example, we hear quotes "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" or "creation" (Gal 6:15), especially by those who (rightly) wish to show that neither the ceremonial ordinances of Judaism nor the baptism and Lord's supper of Christianity are of any worth in the justifying of sinners before God. So too, though not quite so frequently, we are reminded that "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love" (Gal 5:6), that is, out of gratitude to God for His unspeakable Gift and not from a legal motive which works only for what it may obtain. But how very rarely is this one ever mentioned: "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but *the keeping of the commandments of God*" (1Co 7:19). That which concerns our submission to the Divine authority, our walking in subjection to His will, is studiously kept in the background: such partiality is most reprehensible. It is only by placing these three verses side by side that we obtain a complete and balanced view. We are not vitally united to Christ unless we have been born again; we are not born again unless we possess a faith which "worketh by love"; and we have not this saving faith unless it is evidenced by a "keeping of God's commandments."

No wonder there is now so much dishonesty among those in the pew when there has been such dishonesty in the pulpit. The unsaved are frequently told "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom 10:13), but who is faithful enough to tell them that none ever did or could savingly "call upon" Him out of an *impenitent* heart; fewer still will remind them that Christ is "the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Heb 5:9). In like manner, when addressing those who profess to be Christians, how many preachers give great prominence to the comforting promises of God, but say little about His holy requirements. There is also a certain class of Calvinists who are fond of citing "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for His friends," but they fail to add "ye are My friends IF ye *do* whatsoever I command you" (John 15:13,14) which is the surest identifying mark of those for whom Christ died. There are thousands who glibly talk of their love for Christ, but how rarely are they reminded "and hereby we do know that we know Him, IF we *keep* His commandments. He that saith I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1Jo 2:3,4).

In the passage before us Christ continues to insist upon the imperative necessity of practical godliness. The regard or disregard which we pay to His precepts in this life He likens unto building our house on a sound or a worthless foundation, and the issue thereof in the Day of testing is compared to a tempest which puts to the proof our labours. Only those who have actually done that which He enjoined, who have rendered sincere obedience to His laws, will endure the test. He who has heard Christ's sayings and talked about repentance but has never repented, he who has admired the statutes issued by Christ but never ren-

dered personal submission to them, shall be put to utter confusion in the hour of crisis. For the last time in this sermon our Lord enforced what may be termed its text: "except your righteousness shall exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." It is not sufficient to eulogise the practical righteousness which He taught: it must be embodied and expressed in our personal character and conduct. Saving faith is a practical persuasion of the truth of Christ's teaching which is followed by a whole-hearted obedience to His authority. —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

8. Fifth Miracle

In creation we are surrounded with both that which is useful and that which is ornamental. The earth produces a wealth of lovely flowers as well as grain and vegetables for our diet. The Creator has graciously provided things which charm our eyes and ears as well as supply our bodies with food and raiment. The same feature marks God's Word. The Scriptures contain something more than doctrine and precept: there are wonderful types which display the wisdom of their Author and delight those who are able to track the merging of the shadow into the substance, and there are mysterious prophecies which demonstrate the foreknowledge of their Giver and minister pleasure to those granted the privilege of beholding their fulfillment. These types and prophecies form part of the internal evidence which the Bible furnishes of its Divine inspiration, for they give proof of a wisdom which immeasurably transcends that of the wisest of mortals. Nevertheless one has to turn unto the doctrinal and perceptive portions of Holy Writ in order to learn the way of salvation and the nature of that walk which is pleasing to God.

In our earlier writings we devoted considerable attention to the types and prophecies, but for the last decade we have concentrated chiefly upon the practical side of the Truth. Observation taught us that many of those who were keenly interested in a Bible reading on some part of the tabernacle or an attempt to explain some of the predictions of Daniel, appeared quite bored when we preached upon Christian duty or deportment: yet they certainly needed the latter for they were quite deficient therein. A glorious sunset is an exquisite sight, but it would supply no nourishment to one that was starving. The perfumes of a garden may delight the senses, but they would be a poor substitute for a good breakfast to a growing child. Only after the soul has fed upon the doctrine of Scripture and put into practice its precepts is it ready to enjoy the beauties of the types and explanations of the mysteries of prophecy.

This change of emphasis in our writings has lost us hundreds of readers, yet if we could re-live the past fifteen years we would follow the same course. The solemn days through which we are passing demand, as never before, that first things be put first. There are plenty of writers who cater to those who read for intellectual entertainment; our longing is to minister unto those who yearn for a closer walk with God. What would be thought of a farmer who in the spring wasted his time in the woods listening to the music of the feathered songsters, while his fields were allowed to remain unploughed and unsown? Would it not be equally wrong if we dwelt almost entirely on the typical significance of the miracles of Elisha, while ignoring the simpler and practical lessons they contain for our hearts and lives? Balance is needed here as everywhere, and if we devote more space than usual on this occasion to the spiritual meaning of the miracle before us (and similarly in the "Dagon" articles) it will not be because we have made or shall make a practice of so doing.

First, its *connection*. "Great service had Elisha done in the foregoing chapter for the three kings: to his prayers and prophesies they owed their lives and triumphs. One would have expected that the next chapter should have told us what honours and what dignities were conferred on Elisha for this: that he should have been immediately preferred at court, and made prime-minister of state; that Jehoshaphat should have taken him home with him and advanced him in the kingdom. No, the wise man delivered the army, but no man remembered the wise man (Eccl 9:15). Or, if he had preferment offered him, he declined it: he preferred the honour of doing good in the schools of the prophets, before that of being great in the courts of kings. God

magnified him and that sufficed him: magnified him indeed, for we have him here employed in working no less than five miracles” (Matthew Henry). He who has, by grace, the heart of a true servant of Christ, would not, if he could, exchange places with the monarch on his throne or the millionaire with all his luxuries.

Second, its *beneficiary*. “Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen” (2 Kings 4:1). The one for whom this miracle was wrought was a woman, “the weaker vessel” (1 Peter 3:7). She was a widow, a figure of desolation: “how doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! how is she become as a widow!” (Lam 1:1)—contrast the proud boast of corrupt Babylon: “I sit a queen and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow” (Rev 18:7). Not only was she bereft of her husband but she was left destitute: in debt and without the means of discharging it. A more pitiable and woeful object could scarcely be conceived. In her sad plight she betook herself to the servant of Jehovah and made known unto him her dire situation. Her husband may have died while Elisha was absent with the kings in their expedition against the Moabites, and thus he be unacquainted with her troubles.

Third, its *urgency*. The situation confronting this poor widow was indeed a drastic one. Her human provider and protector had been removed by the hand of death. She had been left in debt and had not the wherewithal to discharge it—a burden that would weigh heavily on a conscientious soul; and now she was in immediate danger of having her two sons seized and taken from her by the creditor to serve as bondmen to him. Observe that in the opening words of 2 Kings 4 it is *not* said “now there *came* a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha,” but “there *cried* a certain woman,” which indicates the pressure of her grief and the earnestness of her appeal unto the prophet. Sometimes God permits His people to be brought very low in their circumstances, nor is this always by way of chastisement because of their folly. We do not think that such was the case here. The Lord is pleased to bring some to the end of their own resources that His delivering hand may be the more plainly seen acting on their behalf.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the regenerate is that they are given honest hearts (Luke 8:15), and therefore is it their careful endeavour to “provide things honest in the sight of all men” and to “owe no man anything” (Rom 12:17; 13:8). They are careful to live within their income and not to order an article unless they can pay for it. It is because so many hypocrites under the cloak of a Christian profession have been so dishonest in financial matters and so unscrupulous in trade, that reproach has so often been brought upon the churches. Yet, in certain exceptional cases, even the most thrifty and upright may run into debt. It was so here. The deceased husband of this widow was a man who “did fear the Lord” (v 1), nevertheless he left his widow in such destitution that she was unable to meet the claims of her creditor. There has been considerable speculation by the commentators as to the cause of this unhappy situation, most of which this writer finds himself quite unable to approve. What then is his own explanation?

In seeking the answer to the above question three things need to be borne in mind. First, as we pointed out in our introduction to the life of Elijah series, the prophet was an abnormality, that is, there was no place for him, no need of him in the religious life of Israel during ordinary times—it was only in seasons of serious declension or apostasy that he appears on the scene. Thus, no stated maintenance was provided for *him*, as it was for the priests and levites under the law. Consequently the prophet was dependent upon the gifts of the pious or the productions of his own manual labours, and judging from the brief records of Scripture one gathers the impression that most of them enjoyed little more than the barest necessities of life. Second, for many years past Ahab and Jezebel had been in power, and not only were the pious persecuted but the prophets went in danger of their lives (1 Kings 18:4). Third, it seems likely to us that this particular prophet obtained his subsistence from the oil obtained from an olive grove, and that probably there had been a failure of the crop during the past year or two—note how readily the widow obtained from her “neighbours” not a few “*empty vessels*.”

“And Elisha said unto her, what shall I do for thee?” Possibly the prophet was himself momentarily non-plussed, conscious of his own helplessness. Possibly his question was designed to emphasise the gravity of the situation: it is beyond *my* power to extricate you. More likely it was to make her look above him: I too am only human. Or again it may have been to test her: are you willing to follow my instructions? Instead of waiting for her reply, the prophet at once proceeded to ask a second question: “Tell me, what hast thou in the house?” (v 2). Perhaps this was intended to press upon the widow the seriousness of her problem, for the prophet must have known that she possessed little or nothing, or why should she have sought unto him? Or, in the light of her answer, its force may have been an admonition not to despise small mer-

cies. Her “not anything save a pot of oil” reminds of Andrew’s “but what are these among so many” (John 6:9). Ah, do not we often reason similarly!

Fourth, its *test*. “Then he said, Go borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels, borrow not a few” (v 3). It was a test both of her faith and her obedience. To carnal reason it would appear that the prophet was only mocking her, for of what possible service could a lot of empty vessels be to her? But if her trust was in the Lord then she would be willing to submit herself unto and comply with His word through His servant. And are not His thoughts and ways ever the opposite of ours? Was it not so when He overthrew the Midianites? What a word was that unto Gideon: “The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me” (Judg 7:2). And in consequence, his army was reduced from over twenty-two thousand to a mere three hundred (vv 3-7); and when that little company went forth it was with trumpets and “empty pitchers” and lamps inside the pitchers in their hands (v 16)! Ah, my reader, we have to come before the Lord as “empty vessels”—emptied of our self-sufficiency—if we are to experience His wondering working power.

Fifth, its *requirement*. “And when thou art come in thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full” (v 4). This was to avoid ostentation. Her neighbours were not in the secret, nor should they be permitted to witness the Lord’s gracious dealings with her. It reminds us of Christ’s raising of the daughter of Jairus: when they arrived at the house it was filled with a skeptical and scoffing company, and the Saviour “put them all out” (Mark 5:40) ere He went in and performed the miracle. The same principle obtains to-day in connection with the operations of Divine grace: the world is totally ignorant of this mystery—God’s filling of empty vessels: “the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him” (John 14:17). Yes, she must shut the door “that in retirement she and her sons might the more leisurely ponder and adore the goodness of the Lord” (T. Scott).

Sixth, its *means*. This was the “pot of oil” which appeared to be so utterly inadequate to meet the demands of the widow’s creditor. It *was* so in itself, but under the blessing of God it proved amply sufficient. The “five barley loaves and the two small fishes” (John 6:9) seemed quite useless for feeding a vast multitude with, but in the hands of the Lord they furnished “as much as they would,” and even “when they were filled” there remained a surplus of twelve baskets full. Ah, it is the little things which God is pleased to use. A pebble from the brook slung by faith is sufficient to overthrow the Philistine giant. A “little cloud” was enough to produce “a great rain” (1 Kings 18:44,45). A “little maid” was used as a missionary in Syria (2 Kings 5:2). A “little child” was employed by Christ to teach His disciples humility (Matt 18:2). A “little strength” supplied by the Spirit enables us to “keep Christ’s Word and not deny His name” (Rev 3:8). O to be “little” in our own sight (1 Sam 15:17). It is blessed to see this widow did not despise the means, but promptly obeyed the prophet’s instructions, her faith laying hold of the clearly-implied promise in the “all those vessels” (v 4).

Seventh, its *significance*. In this miracle we have a most blessed, striking and remarkable typical picture of the grand truth of *redemption*, a subject which is we fear rather hazy in the minds even of many Christians. The Gospel is preached so superficially to-day, its varied glories are so lost in generalizations, that few have more than the vaguest idea of its component parts. Redemption is now commonly confused with atonement: the two are quite distinct, one being an effect of the other. The sacrifice which Christ offered unto Divine holiness and justice was “that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18)—a comprehensive expression covering the whole of our salvation both in the removal of all hindrances and in the bestowal of all requisites. In order to bring us to God it was necessary that all enmity between them should be removed—that is *reconciliation*; that the guilt of their transgression should be cancelled—that is *remission of sins*; that they should be delivered from all bondage—that is *redemption*; that they should be made, both experimentally and legally, *righteous*—that is regeneration and justification.

Redemption, then, is one of the grand effects or results of the Atonement, the satisfaction which Christ rendered unto the Law. God’s elect and debtors to the Law, for they have broken it; and they are prisoners to His justice, for they are “by nature the children of wrath even as others” (Eph 2:3). And our deliverance (“or salvation”) is not a mere manumission without price, that is, a simple discharge by an act of clemency, without an adequate compensation being made. No, while it is true our redemption is of grace and effected by sovereign power, yet it is so because a ransom is offered, a price paid, in every way equivalent to the discharge secured. In the words “I will *ransom* them from the power of the grace, I will *redeem* them from

death" (Hosea 13:14) we are taught that the latter is the consequence of the former. Ransom is the paying of the price required, redemption is the setting free of those ransomed, and this deliverance is by the exercise of Divine power. "Not accepting deliverance" (Heb 11:35): the Greek word "deliverance" here is commonly rendered "redemption"—they refused to accept it from the afflictions on the dishonourable terms (apostasy) demanded by their persecutors.

Redemption necessarily presupposes *previous possession*. It denotes the restoration of something which has been lost, and that, by the paying of a price. Hence we find Christ saying by the Spirit of prophecy "I *restored* that which I took not away" (Psa 69:4)! This was strikingly illustrated in the history of Israel, who on the farther shores of the Red Sea sang, "Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth Thy people which Thou hast redeemed" (Exo 15:13). First in the book of Genesis, we see the descendants of Abraham sojourning in the land of Canaan. Later, we see the chosen race in cruel servitude, in bondage to the Egyptians, groaning amid the brick-kilns, under the whip of the taskmasters. Then a ransom was provided in the blood of the pascal lamb following which, the Lord by His mighty hand brought them out of serfdom and brought them into the promised inheritance. That is a complete picture of redemption.

There are many who perceive that Christians were a people in bondage, lost to God, but recovered and restored to Him; yet who fail to perceive they belonged to the Lord *before* Christ freed them. The elect belonged to Christ long before He shed His blood to ransom them, for they were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4) and made over to Him as the Father's love-gift (John 17:9). But they too fell and died in Adam, and therefore did He come to seek and to save that which was lost. Christ "purchased the church of God" with His own blood (Acts 20:28) and therefore does the Father say to Him "by the blood of Thy covenant I have sent forth *Thy* prisoners out of the pit where is no water" (Zech 9:11)—He has a legal right to them. There is no unavailing redemption: all whom Christ purchased or ransomed shall be redeemed, that is, delivered from captivity, set free from sin. Judicially they are so now, experimentally too in part (John 8:36), but perfectly so only when glorified—hence the future aspect in Luke 21:28; Romans 8:23.

Now observe how all the leading features of redemption are typically brought out in 2 Kings 4.

1. The object of it is a widow. She had not always been thus. Formerly she had been married to one who "feared the Lord," but death had severed that happy bond and left her desolate and destitute—apt figure of God's elect, originally in union with Him, and then through the fall "alienated" from Him (Eph 4:18).

2. Her creditor was enforcing his demands, had actually come to seize her sons "to be bondmen." The Hebrew word rendered "creditor" in 2 Kings 4:1 signifies "one who exacteth" what is justly due to him, and is so translated in Job 11:6. It looks back to "And if thy brother that dwelleth with thee be waxen poor and be *sold* unto thee, thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bond-servant, but as a hired servant, as a sojourner, he shall be with thee and shall *serve* thee unto the year of jubilee" (Lev 25:39,40). Our Lord had reference to this practice in His parable of Matthew 18:23-25. Thus the "creditor" of 2 Kings 4:1 who showed no mercy to the poor widow is a figure of the stern and unrelenting Law.

3. As the widow was quite unable to pay her creditor, so we are utterly incompetent to satisfy the demands of the Law or effect our own redemption.

4. She, like us, was shut up to the mere favour of God: "being justified freely by His *grace* through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24) and that is exactly what we should expect to find in this miracle, for five is the number of grace: see Gen 43:34; 45:22; Exo 13:18 margin, 1Co 14:19, etc. Hence too the means used, the "oil" multiplied—figure of the grace of God (Psa 23:5; Isa 61:3) superabounding.

5. Yet it was a grace that wrought "through righteousness" (Rom 5:21), for it obtained the freedom of the widow's sons by meeting the full due of her creditor.

6. Both aspects of redemption are seen here: by price—"sell the oil and pay thy debt" (v 2); and by power—the miraculous supply of oil.

7. Nor was it a general and promiscuous redemption, but a definite and particular one: for a "widow"—special object of God's notice (Deut 24:19; Psa 68:5; James 1:27)—and not her neighbours. Christ purchased "the Church of God" (Acts 20:28) and not a mere abstraction of "freewillism." —AWP.

THE DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE

8d. Its Safeguards

7. *By enforcing the threatenings of Scripture.* The One with whom we have to do is ineffably holy and therefore does He hate sin wherever it is found. He will not ignore sin in His own children when it is unjudged and unconfessed any more than He will in those who are the children of the Devil. The pope and his underlings may traffic in their vile "indulgences" and "special dispensations," but the Lord God never lowers His standard, and even those in Christ are not exempted from bitter consequences if they pursue a course of folly. But God is also merciful and faithful, and therefore He threatens before He punishes and warns before He smites. In His Word He has described those ways which lead to disaster and destruction, that we may shun them, yet those who deliberately follow them may know for certain that they shall receive the due reward of their defiance. It is therefore incumbent upon the minister of the Gospel to press the Divine threatenings, as it is the part of wisdom for his hearers or readers to take the same to heart.

"If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt 6:15). "And that servant which knew his Lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes" (Luke 12:47—spoken to Peter: v. 41). "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (John 5:14). "If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered, and men gather them and cast into the fire and they are burned" (John 15:6—spoken to the eleven apostles). "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom 8:13). "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall not the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal 6:7,8). Have such passages as these been given due place in the preachings and writings of the orthodox during the past fifty years? No indeed: *why?*

There are three particular passages which claim a fuller notice from us in this connection, passages which are among the most solemn and frightful to be found in all the Word of God, yet which are nevertheless addressed immediately unto the people of God. Before citing the same we would preface our remarks upon them with this general observation: they have not received the attention they ought in the practical ministrations of God's servants. The minister of the Gospel has only discharged half his duty when he cleans these verses of the false glosses which his opponents have placed upon them. It is quite true that Arminians have made an altogether unwarrantable and wrong use of them, but probably God suffered His enemies to thereby bring them into prominent notice because His friends ignored them. The Christian teacher must not only show there is no conflict between these passages and such verses as John 10:28 and Philippians 1:6, but he must also bring out their positive meaning and the solemn bearing which they have upon Christians themselves.

"For it is impossible—for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away—to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs, meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God. But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing whose end is to be burned" (Heb 6:4-8). Those words are addressed to "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (3:1), and their connection is as follows. In 5:11-14 the apostle had reproved the Hebrews for being slow in their apprehension of the Truth and in walking suitably thereto, and after this exhortation of 6:1-3 he warns them of the awful danger of continuing in a slothful state—"For it is impossible."

But, it may be objected, Surely it is not the intention of our Heavenly Father to terrorize His own dear children. No, certainly not; yet He would have them suitably affected thereby. Though such threatenings

are not designed to work in Christians a fear of damnation, yet they should beget in them a holy care and diligence of avoiding the evils denounced. There is no more incongruity between a Christian's being comforted by the Divine promises and alarmed by the Divine threatenings, than there is between his living a life of joyful confidence in God and also one of humble dependence upon Him. We must distinguish between things that differ: there is a fear of caution as well as of distrust, a fear that produces carefulness and watchfulness as well as one which fills with anxiety. There is a vast difference between a thing that is meant to weaken the security of the flesh and the confidence that faith has in Christ. Assurance of perseverance is quite consistent with and ought ever to be accompanied by "fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12,13).

In his opening remarks on Hebrews 6:4-6 John Owen said, It "is a needful and wholesome commination (denunciation) duly to be considered by *all* professors of the Gospel." And in the course of his masterly exposition pointed out, "For not to proceed in the way of the Gospel and obedience thereto is an untoward entrance into a total relinquishment of the one and the other. That they therefore may be acquainted with the danger hereof, and be stirred up to avoid that danger, the apostle gives them an account of those who, after a profession of the Gospel, beginning at a non-proficiency under it, do end in apostasy from it. And we may see that the severest comminations are not only useful in the preaching of the Gospel, but exceeding necessary towards persons that are observed to be slothful in their profession." Scripture nowhere teaches that the saint is so secure that he needs not to be wary of himself, nor unmindful of the defection of those who for a time seemed to run well.

Another of the Puritans said on this passage, "Certainly all of us should stand in fear of this heavy judgment of being given up to perish by our apostasy, to an obstinate heart, never to reconcile ourselves by repentance, *even the children of God*; for he proposeth it to them...The apostle saith, It is impossible they should be saved, because it is impossible they should repent. This is a fearful state, and yet, as fearful as it is, it is not unusual: it is a thing we see often in some that have made a savoury profession of the name of God, and afterwards have been blasted. O, then, you that have begun and have had a taste of the ways of God, and to walk closely with Him, you should lay this to heart! Therefore this is propounded to *believers*, that they should keep at a very great distance from such a judgment, lest we grow to such an impenitent state as to be given up to a reprobate mind and vile affections" (Thomas Manton). The best preventative is a conscience kept tender of sin, which mourns over and confesses to God our transgressions, and seeks grace to mortify our lusts.

"For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith He was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:26-31). It is outside our present design to give an exposition of these verses (which we did when going through that Epistle), as we shall not now expose the Arminian errors thereon (which we hope to very shortly) rather do we now direct attention unto them as another example of the fearful threatenings which are directly addressed to Christians, and which it is madness and not wisdom to scoff at.

The scope of the above passage is easily grasped: Hebrews 10:23 gives an exhortation, vv. 24, 25 announce the means of continuing in that profession while vv. 26-31 declare what will befall those who relinquish the Truth. In his comments J. Owen points out, "The apostle puts himself among them ("if we sin" etc.), as is his manner in comminations: both to show that there is no respect of persons in this matter, but that those who had equally sinned shall be equally punished; and to take off all appearances of severity towards them, seeing he speaks nothing of this nature but on such suppositions as wherein if he were himself concerned he pronounceth it against himself also. The word 'willingly' signifies, of choice—without surprisal, compulsion or fear...If a voluntary relinquishment of the profession of the Gospel and the duties of it be the highest sin, and be attended with the height of wrath and punishment, we ought earnestly to watch against everything that inclineth or disposeth us thereto."

J. Owen concluded his remarks on these verses by saying, "This therefore is a passage of Holy Writ which is much to be considered, especially in these days wherein we live, wherein men are apt to grow cold and careless in the profession, and to decline gradually from what they had attained unto. To be useful in

such a season it was first written, and it belongs unto us no less than unto them to whom it was first originally sent. And we live in days wherein the security and contempt of God, the despite of the Lord Christ and His Spirit are come to the full, so as to justify the truth that we have insisted on." In the pressing of this passage on the attention of all professing Christians was deemed so necessary in the balmy days of the Puritans, how much more so in the dark times in which our lot is cast! How woefully remiss, then, are those preachers who not only fail to devote a whole sermon to these verses, but who never so much as quote them from one year's end to another, except it be to refute the Arminians in such a manner that empty professors are made to believe there is nothing for them to fear.

"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb: The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Peter 2:20-22). At the close of his remarks on this passage Matthew Henry says, "If the Scriptures give such an account of Christianity on the one hand and of sin on the other as we have in these verses, we certainly ought highly to approve of the former and persevere therein, because it is a 'way of righteousness' and a 'holy commandment,' and to loathe and keep the greatest distance from the latter because it is set forth as offensive and abominable." Far better never to make a profession, than make a fair one and then sully and repudiate it.

"He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be cut off, and that without remedy" (Prov 29:1). The solemn threatenings of Scripture are so many discoveries to the Church in particular and to the world in general of the severity of God against sin and that He adjudges them worthy of eternal destruction who persist therein. If professing Christians turn a deaf ear to exhortations, admonitions and warnings, if they steel their hearts against entreaties and threatenings, and determine to follow a course of self-will and self-pleasing, they place themselves beyond the hope of mercy. It is therefore the imperative duty of the servant of Christ to faithfully warn God's people of the fearful danger of backsliding and of what awaits them if they remain in that state: to definitely point out the connection which God has established between sin and punishment, between apostasy and damnation, so that a holy fear may be instilled to preserve them from making shipwreck of the faith, and to prevent carnal professors from indulging the vain hope of once in grace always in grace.

8. *By holding up the rewards.* Many preachers have failed to do so, allowing the fear of man to withhold from God's children a portion of their necessary bread. Because certain enemies of the Truth have wrested this subject, they deemed it wisest to be silent thereon. Because Papists have grievously perverted the teaching of Scripture upon "rewards," insidiously bringing in their lie of creature-merits at this point, not a few Protestants have been chary of preaching thereon, lest they be charged with leaning toward Romanism. Rather should this very abuse move them to be the more diligent and zealous in presenting their right and true meaning and use. Threatenings and rewards: does not the one naturally suggest the other? The former to act as deterrents, the latter as stimulants: deterrents against evil doing, stimulants or incentives unto the discharge of duty. But if the one has been shelved in the pulpit, the other has received scant attention even in orthodox quarters. We can but briefly touch upon the subject here, but hope to devote a separate article to it in the next issue.

In Scripture "eternal life" is presented both as a "gift" and as a "reward"—the reward of perseverance. To some it may appear that such terms and concepts are mutually opposed. Yet is not prayer *both* a privilege and a duty? Is not the natural man startled when he finds that God bids His people to "rejoice with trembling"—what a seeming paradox! The apparent difficulty is removed when it is seen that the "rewards" which God has promised His people are not those of justice but of bounty; that they are not a *proportioned* remuneration or return for the duties which we perform or the services we have rendered, but the end to which our obedience is suited. Thus the rewards proposed unto us by God are not calculated to work in His people a legal spirit but are designed to support our hearts under the self-denials to which we are called, to cheer us amid the sufferings we encounter for Christ's sake, and to stir us to acts of obedience meet for what is promised. Certainly Moses was inspired by no mercenary spirit when "he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb 11:26).

That eternal life and glory *is* set forth in God's Word as the reward and end of perseverance which await all faithful Christians is clear from Hebrews 10:35, to cite no other passages now: "Cast not away

therefore your confidence which hath great recompense of reward.” On those words Matthew Henry said, “He exhorts them not to cast away their confidence, that is, their holy courage and boldness, but to hold fast the profession for which they had suffered so much before, and borne those sufferings so well. Second, he encourages them to this by assuring them that the reward of their holy confidence is very great: it carries a present reward in it, in holy peace and joy and much of God’s presence and power visited upon them; and it shall have a great recompense of reward hereafter.” While the Christian sincerely endeavours to walk obediently and mix faith with God’s promises the Spirit comforts and witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God; but when he becomes careless of duty, and neglects the means of grace, He not only withholds His witness but suffers the threatenings of Scripture to so lay hold of him that Psalm 38:2, 3 becomes his experience.

9. *By insisting on steadfastness.* “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering” (Heb 10:23). Press forward along the path of holiness, no matter what obstacles and opposition you meet with. Your very safety depends upon it, for if you deny the faith either by words or actions, you are “worse than an infidel” who never professed it. The very fact that we are here bidden to “hold fast” our Christian profession implies that it is no easy task assigned us, that there are difficulties to be overcome which call for the putting forth of our utmost strength and endeavours in the defence and furtherance of it. “Without wavering” means, with unvarying and unflinching constancy. Sin is ever seeking to vanquish the Christian; the world is ever endeavouring to draw him back into its seductive embraces; the Devil, like a roaring lion, is ever waiting to devour him. Therefore the call to him is “be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord”—the duties He has assigned (1Co 15:58).

The need for pressing such exhortations as the above appears from the solemn warning addressed to those whom the apostle calls “beloved” in 2 Peter 3:17: “Beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked fall from your own steadfastness.” Upon this Matthew Henry says, “We are in great danger of being seduced and turned away from the Truth. Many who have the Scriptures and read them do not understand what they read, and too many of those who have a right understanding of the sense and meaning of the Word are not established in the belief of the Truth, and all these are liable to fall into error. Few attain to the knowledge and acknowledgement of doctrinal Christianity; and fewer find so as to keep in the way of practical godliness which is the narrow way which only leadeth unto life. There must be a great deal of self-denial and suspicion of ourselves, and submitting to the authority of Christ Jesus our great Prophet, before we can heartily receive all the truths of the Gospel, and therefore we are in great danger of rejecting the Truth.” Ministers of Christ, then, need to insist much upon the imperativeness of steadfastness and constancy.

10. *By withholding from backsliders* the comfort of the truth of eternal security. After all that has been said under the previous heads there is little need for us to enlarge upon this point. Any preacher who encourages the slothful and the undutiful is doing great harm to souls. To tell those who have deserted the paths of righteousness that because they once believed in Christ all will come out well with them in the end, is to put a premium on their carnality. To assure those who have forsaken the means of grace and gone back again into the world that because they formerly made a credible profession God will recover and restore them, is to say what Scripture nowhere warrants. A griping purgative and not rich and savoury viands is what is needed by one whose system is out of order. The Divine threatenings and not the promises need to be pressed upon those who are following the desires and devices of their own hearts. Only by heeding the ten things mentioned in these articles is the precious truth of the eternal security of the saints safeguarded from profanation. —AWP

DAGON DESTROYED

We resume at the point where we left off: "And she said, The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken" (1 Sam 4:22). Such was the dying lament of the daughter-in-law of Eli, the high priest of Israel. The sacred chest, the lid of which was "the mercy-seat" that constituted the throne of Jehovah in the midst of His people and where the Shekinah glory abode, had been removed from its appointed place in the holy of holies and conducted to the field of battle, in the hope that it would overthrow the enemies of the Hebrews. But their presumptuous expectation had not been realized. So far from it, Israel had been utterly routed, the sons of the high priest slain, and the ark of the covenant captured by the Philistines. Before expiring, the daughter-in-law of Eli named the son to which she had just given birth "Ichabod," saying "the glory is departed from Israel." The name of her son memorialized the fearful catastrophe which had overtaken the favoured nation, and described the spiritual desolation which had fallen upon it.

That which is described in 1 Samuel 4 is something more than an historical event which happened in the remote past: it illustrated and adumbrated certain basic and unchanging principles in the governmental dealings of God, which have been made manifest again and again in the course of history. Subsequently the ark of the covenant was restored to Israel and when Solomon erected the temple and the ark was set in its appointed place we are told that "the cloud [the Shekinah] filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for *the glory* of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 8:10,11). But history repeated itself: the Lord was again despised, those who bore His name trampled upon His law, conformed to the ways of the heathen, worshipped false gods, and refused to heed the expostulations of His prophets. Carnality and idolatry became rampant, and though God bore long with the waywardness of his people, giving many warnings and solemn threatenings before He smote them in His wrath, the time eventually came when His awful vengeance fell.

Nearly four hundred years after Solomon the Lord delivered Israel into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, many being carried away to Babylon: yet even that calamity produced no national repentance. Among the captives was Ezekiel and if we turn to his prophecies we obtain light on the spiritual situation as it then existed, particularly in connection with the departure of the Shekinah—the visible and awe-inspiring emblem of Jehovah's presence in the midst of Israel. In chapter 8 we find the prophet brought in vision "to Jerusalem" and he tells us "Behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there" (v 4). In 9:9 we find Jehovah complaining "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness." Then in 10:4 we read "the glory of the Lord went up from the cherubim and stood over the threshold of the house," and in 10:18 "the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house." Finally, in 11:23 we are told, "The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the cherubim and stood upon the mount which is upon the east side of the city." Slowly and gradually as though reluctant to leave, the Shekinah glory had departed and once more "Ichabod" described their sad state.

There is no intimation that the Shekinah ever returned unto Israel during the remainder of the OT period. Another temple was built in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, and though God owned it as His house yet nothing is said of "the glory of the Lord filling it." But at the beginning of the NT era something yet more wonderful and blessed took place. As John declares in his Gospel, "The Word was made [or "became"] flesh and dwelt ["tabernacled"] among us, and we beheld *His glory*—the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father—full of grace and truth" (1:14). Once again Israel was put upon trial: their long-promised Messiah appeared in their midst, making unmistakable demonstration of His divine credentials. He preached to them the Gospel, went about doing good, healed their sick. But they had no heart for Him. He bade them repent, but they refused. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. They despised and rejected Him. Then it was He said unto them "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a

hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is *left* unto you *desolate*" (Matt 23:37,38). Once again "Ichabod" was written over Israel.

Has the above no meaning and message for us? Is the history of Christendom without anything approaching a parallel? A literal duplication, not but something strictly analogous, yes. The outstanding characteristic of this dispensation and the climacteric gift of God unto His people is the presence of the Holy Spirit in their midst. That brings before us a many-sided theme, but we must confine ourselves unto that which is germane to our present inquiry. The Spirit of God indwells the Church corporately and the saint individually. He sustains a special relation to the servants of Christ, enduing them with power and making their labours fruitful. Normally, He is therefore in the midst of "Christendom," that is, the whole body of Christian profession, for even the unregenerate are made "partakers" of His presence and blessings while in outward fellowship with the saints (Heb 6:4), as they are bidden to "hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev 3:22) and hence they are guilty of doing "despite unto the Spirit of grace" (Heb 10:29) when they refuse to hear Him and apostatize from their profession.

It is to be noted that one of our statements in the above paragraph is qualified: under *normal* conditions the Spirit of God is in the midst of Christendom generally and in the local churches (which have always contained a mixture of believers and unbelievers) particularly. But because He is the *Holy* Spirit He may be "grieved" (Eph 4:30) and "quenched" (1Th 5:19). He is "grieved" by the individual Christian when his conversation is unbecoming, and then He withholds His comforts. He is "quenched" or put out by the corporate body when His ministrations are "despised" (1Th 5:20), that is, when unbelievers are allowed to predominate in the local assembly, or if it becomes carnal and worldly, or if false doctrine be tolerated, or if a Scriptural discipline be not maintained. Any impartial reader of ecclesiastical history is aware that at various periods the Spirit was "quenched" and His power and blessing withdrawn from Christendom as a whole. Only those who are determined to call bitter sweet and darkness light, or who apply a wrong standard of measurement, will take exception to that assertion.

The Holy Spirit was certainly "quenched" at the beginning of the fourth century, when Constantine adopted Christianity as the state religion, when the simplicity of spiritual worship was superceded by an imposing and elaborate ritual, when those who professed to be "strangers and pilgrims" in this scene (1 Peter 2:11) sought after worldly prestige and emoluments and when vast multitudes were compelled to be "baptized" at the point of the sword. The insignificant minority who had eyes to see were painfully conscious that God had written "Ichabod" over Christendom, that the Holy Spirit, grieved and quenched, had withdrawn, no longer working in their midst. True, God still maintained unto Himself a "remnant"—raising up an isolated witness for Himself here and there, and little companies of His people meeting in secret for prayer and the ministry of the Word; but the collective system, the corporate body, was indeed a House now left unto them "desolate," as was evident from the "dark ages" which followed, when Rome completely dominated things.

It is not our purpose now to review the whole past nineteen centuries and trace the revivals and declensions that have followed each other: rather would we come much closer to our own times and observe the present application of what has been before us above. One has only to read the writings of C. H. Spurgeon—perhaps God's most valuable gift unto His people since the days of the Puritans—from 1880-1890 to discover the terrible departure from the truth and practical godliness which had taken place even then. Plainly and pointedly did that faithful minister denounce the "Downgrade Movement" in the churches, and when the leaders refused to right things, withdrew his "tabernacle" from the "Baptist Union." During 1890-1910, which falls within the memory of this writer, the decline accelerated rapidly: there was scarcely a theological seminary in Germany, Britain or the USA, which was not a hotbed of heresy. Ministers vied with each other in preaching "higher criticism," the "evolutionary hypothesis" and the so-called "new theology," and only here and there was a feeble voice raised in outcry.

In thousands of instances "churches" became little better than social clubs and places of entertainment. Well do we remember, some forty-odd years ago, the innovation and popularization of the "Pleasant Sunday afternoon" services, when worldly vocalists and instrumentalists tickled the ears of the audiences with semi-sacred and then downright secular items of music. And the so-called "Christian Brotherhoods" to whom the pastor gave a talk on "Christian Socialism" or the local member of parliament was invited to air his political views before them. And the multiplication of "bazaars" opened by the "mayoress," "socials," "whist drives," charades and plays to attract and "hold the young people." Even the pretence of requiring creditable evidence of regeneration before one was received into church-fellowship was dropped, and the

maintenance of Scripture discipline ceased. Such was the awful sowing: now we are reaping the horrible harvest. How could it be otherwise, then, that the Holy Spirit should be grieved and quenched by such a travesty—conducted in the name of Christ!

Today all who have eyes to see cannot fail to perceive that “Ichabod” has once more been written over a degenerate Christendom, though only those with honest hearts will acknowledge it. The glory of God—the token and evidence of His presence—has “departed.” The Spirit of God has withdrawn His unction and blessing, and their House is left unto them “desolate.” The temple remained standing in Jerusalem for forty years *after* Christ pronounced the awful sentence of Matthew 23:28 before Titus destroyed it in AD 70: the priesthood continued to function and its services were perpetuated, but God no longer owned it. Thus it is with Christendom: the body still exists, but it is lifeless; the “form of godliness” has not yet entirely disappeared, but its power has. Even the smaller groups who came out from the apostate mass, though some of them have preserved “the landmarks of the fathers,” yet they are so pharisaical that the Spirit of God is quenched there too. Pride is as hateful to God as worldliness and false doctrine, and those who boast “the temple of the Lord are these” (Jer 7:4), “the Testimony of God is with *us*,” “all others have departed from the Truth except *our* party”; are too lacking in spiritual discernment to perceive their own sad condition. Lookers-on generally see most!

Except for a few details there is little original in the above, the ground having been frequently gone over. But we have never heard or read anything along the line of what follows, namely, that which happened unto the ark *after* it was captured by the Philistines, and its present bearing upon and application unto our own times. Others have recognized that the Holy Spirit has departed from Christendom—not absolutely and entirely so, but from the corporate body and in withdrawing the manifestations of His presence. Personally we have no doubt that what is recorded in 1 Samuel 5, equally with the preceding chapter, illustrates and adumbrates fundamental principles in the ways of God with that people who are called by His name. Yea, we cannot get away from the conviction that our own generation has witnessed and is witnessing a solemn repetition of what took place in the house of Dagon. The striking incidents narrated in 1 Samuel 5 supply a description of literal historical facts, yet which, we believe, possess an allegorical signification. As to how little or how far we have succeeded in interpreting the same in this and the following article (D.V.) we leave to the judgment of our readers.

“And the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Eben-ezer unto Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it before Dagon” (1 Sam 5:1,2). Elated over such a capture, they placed it in their temple in honour of Dagon, the god whom they worshipped (Judg 16:23). But “the triumphing of the wicked is short and the joy of the hypocrite for a moment” (Job 20:5). And so it proved here, for the next thing we are told is, “And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen on his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold, only the stump of Dagon was left to him” (vv 4,5).

What would constitute the modern form or equivalent of “Dagon”? In seeking the answer to that question we must be governed by the information which Scripture supplies about him, or it, and all the accompanying details. First, let us consider more definitely what the ark stands for in this connection, and because it possesses a manifold significance we must follow a process of elimination. Let it be duly noted at this point that never once in 1 Samuel 5 or 6 is “the glory of the Lord” mentioned: it is utterly unthinkable that the Shekinah, emblem of the Holy Spirit, should enter a heathen shrine. The ark was the basis of the mercy-seat, the throne of God in Israel’s midst, and a blessed type of the person and work of Christ; but in none of these respects do we think it should here be contemplated. Rather it is as “the ark of *testimony*” (Exo 25:16) we regard it. It was repeatedly designated thus because of the “testimony” (Exo 25:16,21) deposited therein, namely, the two tables of stone on which were inscribed the ten commandments (1 Kings 8:4).

Thus, in this Christian era we regard *the Truth of God* as the antitype of the “ark of testimony.” And the sacred ark had fallen into the hands of the uncircumcised! Does it strike the ears of our readers as an incongruous statement to speak of God’s holy and eternal Truth being delivered unto His enemies? Surely it should not, when the Lord Himself makes use of the expression “Truth is fallen in the street” (Isa 59:14). Perhaps it may not appear so strange and startling if we next consider *who* it was that had captured the ark.

It was neither the Ammonites, the Moabites, or the Midianites; but the *Philistines*. And who were they? Their origin and genealogy is given in Genesis 10. They were the descendants of Ham (v 6), and Ham is, as his name denotes, the “black one” or sun-burnt. He is a symbol and picture of the man who has turned away from God—the Light. He portrays those who have received the Light, but hated and rejected it. But though the Truth enlightens them not, yet it must have some effect, namely to darken them; and the more light received and refused, the darker they become.

Ham begat “Mizraim” (Gen 10:6), who gave his name to the country of Egypt—the house of bondage to God’s people (cf. Isa 31:1). Mizraim begat “Casluhim” (Gen 10:14), which signifies “folly”—that which issues from turning away from Wisdom: see Romans 1:22, 23, where we have described the descent of the religious man of the earth, getting further and further away from God. From Casluhim came the Philistines, which means the “migrators” or “wanderers,” so named because they left Egypt and settled in Canaan, “Palestine” deriving its name from them—they dwelt in its southwest part, on the sea coast. The Philistine is never seen outside the land of Canaan. Although he was no true “pilgrim” or “sojourner” as were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Heb 11:9,13), yet he claimed a home in the domain of faith. Thus we must not look for his modern counterpart in heathendom as such, nor in the openly-defiant and profane world, but rather inside Christendom itself: they are children of the flesh, yet with pretensions to the blessings of faith.

Everything recorded of the Philistines in Scripture helps to identify their successors. In Genesis 26:14,15 we find them making trouble for Isaac and his herdmen, by stopping up the wells which his father had digged—figure of depriving God’s people of the Water of Life. One of their women infatuated Samson the Nazarite, figure of one consecrated to God, and brought about his ruin (Judg 14). In that same chapter we find him propounding a riddle to thirty of her companions, but after pondering it for seven days they were unable to declare its meaning—no Philistine is let into the secret of how (contrary to nature) a devourer can yield meat: they know nothing of how God comes in and makes everything serve His purpose, bringing blessing to His people out of their strongest foe. Their guile, treachery and cruelty are seen in the treatment which they meted out to Samson. Their haughty demeanour and contempt of those who dare to oppose them appeared in Goliath’s attitude and language unto David. The final reference made to them in Holy Writ is found in Jehovah’s solemn announcement “I will cut off the pride of the Philistines” (Zech 9:6).

The Pharisees were the Philistines of our Lord’s day. Firmly entrenched in Immanuel’s land they hotly contested every attempt made to eject them. Plainly stamped upon them were the features of Ham. Though they held the lead in the religious realm, yet were they in gross darkness. For when the Light of the world appeared in their midst, the “true,” bright Light shining before their eyes, they asked Him for a “sign” (Matt 12:38). What proof was that of their blindness, for it was like asking for a candle at noonday! They were the ones figured by the “elder son” in Luke 15:28, etc., —the real “Wanderer,” never at home with God. And wherever phariseism has been found during the last nineteen centuries there was the moral embodiment of the Philistine: chiefly, of course, in Romanism, but that abominable mother has many children. Many theological professors and doctors of divinity, prating of their superior scholarship and riding roughly over any who opposed them, bore the stamp of the Philistine. (Part of the above we have culled from a work, now out of print, by F. C. Jennings on Judges.)

The limited space here at our disposal precludes us from now taking up other collateral considerations, so in the closing of this article let us bring together the two points already considered and notice a striking omission. In view of the great importance of the ark, one had naturally supposed that the loss of it would have made the deepest possible impression on Israel, that they had made the most desperate efforts to recover it from the Philistines; or that they had unitedly humbled themselves before the Lord and with fastings and prayers besought Him to intervene and remove the grievous dishonour cast upon His name. But apart from the grief of Eli and his daughter-in-law, there is no hint of any perturbation in the Nation. They appear to have been stolidly indifferent. And has not the same grievous lack of zeal and concern for God’s glory characterized Christendom? When British and American professors echoed the infidelity of the German neologians, when almost every cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith was denied by the very men who had taken solemn ordination vows to defend it, was not their wicked perversion of the Divine Testimony met, generally, with callous apathy! How none of the churches followed Spurgeon’s example when he withdrew from the corrupt system. And though here and there an individual protested and walked out, the majority complacently tolerated or approved. —AWP

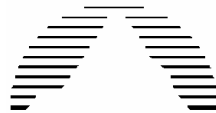
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow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

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